

FIA summons Gandapur

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has issued second call-up notice to PTI leader and ex-federal minister Ali Amin Gandapur and summoned him again on March 28 for allegedly threatening the state and government institutions through provocative statements on social media. Previously, he had been summoned through notice on March 24 but he did not appear.

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One death from Coronavirus

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Institute of Health (NIH) on Sunday confirmed that one death was reported in Sindh from COVID-19 during the last 24 hours. As per the data shared by the National Institute of Health, 106 new Coronavirus cases were reported during the last 24 hours across the country. The case positivity ratio was 2.52 per cent, while 22 patients were in critical condition.

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PM visits free Atta distribution points

MULTAN (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday undertook visits to various free wheat flour (Atta) distribution points in Multan and other districts of south Punjab and ordered officials to extend maximum assistance to the elderly and differently-abled people at the centres.

Elderly, disabled persons and women should get free Atta bags without any trouble, the prime minister said during his visit to the free Atta centre set up at the District Sports Ground in Multan.

Shahbaz asked the officials to lift the Atta bags for elderly and differently-abled persons who cannot lift the 10-kg bag and help them reach their bicycle or motorcycle. At this, the officials informed the prime minister that they have been already deputed to extend whatever help the elderly people, women and disabled persons needed. The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction over the process and lauded the Multan administration for making the best arrangements at Atta distribution points.

Shahbaz Sharif said the people should not face difficulties during the month of Ramazan ul Mubarak.

The prime minister also talked to the poor assembled at the district sports ground including the differently-abled persons and asked them if they were facing difficulties in getting free flour bags and the level of facilities at the Atta distribution centres. Shaehbaz Sharif issued orders to the local administration to take immediate measures to resolve complaints of the people on the spot.

The prime minister also went to the counter set up exclusively for differently-abled persons and talked to them for some time. The differently-abled persons thanked the prime minister for extending free flour facility to the impoverished segments of society. Shehbaz witnessed the process of distribution of free flour bags at the centre and emphasized that officials should supervise the operation personally and extend maximum assistance to differently-abled persons, elderly people particularly women so that they can get free bags of wheat flour without any trouble.

Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman, Commissioner Multan Amir Khatak, Regional Police Officer Suhail Ahmad, and Deputy

Commissioner Omar Jahangir were present on the occasion.

He directed the Chief Secretary that no person coming for free flour should leave empty-handed.

The Commissioner and DC informed the prime minister that 75 counters have been set up at Multan centre which they described as the biggest centre in south Punjab.

They said that 20000 Atta bags of 10 kilograms would be distributed among the poor and over 6500 bags had already been distributed by mid-day, today. They said that sheds were set up for the people and adequate arrangements for drinking water were in place. The officials also briefed the prime minister on Ramazan Package and arrangements made for its implementation. Earlier, the prime minister had also visited wheat flour centres at Bahawalpur where he reviewed arrangements for free Atta distribution and witnessed the process. The prime minister while appreciating the arrangements made at flour distribution points in Multan and Bahawalpur said that similar good arrangements should be made in other districts of the Punjab province.



MULTAN: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits free flour distribution center at Sports Ground as part of Prime Minister Ramazan Relief Package for deserving families.

PTI's politics all about creating chaos, unrest in country: Maryam

LAHORE (APP): Senior Vice President and Chief Organiser Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Maryam Nawaz on Sunday said that the politics of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan was all about protecting personal agenda by creating chaos and unrest in the country as he had nothing to do with the people's problems.

Addressing the office bearers of PML-N's lawyers wing here, she said that the decision of PTI to dissolve assemblies in the Punjab and KP was also aimed at creating anarchy and turmoil in the country as this cabal was not concerned about resolving public issues.

She said that the PML-N was never afraid of going into elections rather it was ever ready and would win the elections whenever held. However, she said that her party wanted level playing field as nobody was above the law.

She said Panama papers case was to target the elected government of Nawaz Sharif as nothing was proved against Nawaz Sharif and then he was disqualified for just having an iqama. Nawaz Sharif gave the narrative of sanctity of the vote in the country, she added. Maryam Nawaz said that PTI chief blatantly violated the law and the constitution but no action was initiated against him.

She said the PML-N believed in serving the masses and its performance in the past was the evidence. Whereas, the previous PTI government did nothing for the welfare of

the masses and it was responsible for current inflation in the country.

She said PTI Chief Imran Khan was hiding himself in Zaman Park and avoiding to appear in the courts to face cases against him. Maryam said the PML-N always showed respect for the courts and its leadership presented themselves for accountability. The PML-N leadership faced fabricated cases during the previous PTI tenure however all of them presented themselves for accountability but nothing was proved against anyone.

Multiple cases were registered against the PTI chief but he was not appearing before the courts which showed his non-serious attitude towards the institutions. PTI chief was in fact escaping from the courts including Toshakhana, Tyrian White and foreign funding cases, as he had nothing to prove his innocence. She said that the PTI was the only political party which being a ruling party, violated the rules regarding Toshakhana as the precious gifts were sold out after taking abroad.

The PML-N was the most popular party and was fully aware of the problems being faced by the masses including the price hike however it would not leave the people on their destiny but would stand with them and resolve their issues.

She said there was even no comparison between the PML-N and the PTI when it came to delivering the masses as the PML-N left the government in 2018 which was prosperous and had growth based econ-

omy. On the other hand the four year rule of the PTI brought poverty, corruption and lawlessness which portray the real picture of the parties' performance.

She underlined the need of a sincere leadership which can take the country forward as the people of the country were paying the price of immature and non serious political decisions taken by the PTI. It was very unfortunate that the PTI was creating chaos in the name of the politics, she added. Maryam Nawaz said that the previous PTI government was full of corrupt practices and poor policies.

She said that rule of law and a justice based system was vital to take the country forward. Maryam said that Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and she herself had faced the courts in cases against them but they never made excuses but presented for accountability in respect of the courts and rule of law in the country.

Whenever, PTI chief appeared before the court, he went there in the form of a mob.

The lawyers fraternity played vital role during lawyers movement and for strengthening the institutions and rule of law. The lawyers wing of the PML-N had an significant role in party's strengthening she said adding that the party would get maximum participation from the lawyers wing for bringing betterment in the party's policy. She also lauded the role of Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah for activating the lawyers wing in the party.

Imran thanks people of Lahore for not letting him down

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan has thanked Lahorites for making Minar-e-Pakistan rally a success.

In his tweet, Imran Khan wrote: "Despite cabal of crooks locking down Lahore (see map) and arresting 2000 of our workers, people of Lahore came in huge numbers to make our 6th Minar-i-Pakistan jalsa a great success. I want to especially thank my Lahorites for not letting me down yet again. Proud of you." A large number of party supporters attended the PTI rally despite the Punjab government's sealed roads leading to Minar-e-Pakistan by placing containers and erecting barricades to stop them from reaching the place.

However, caretaker Punjab Information Minister Amir Mir denied that people were being restricted from going to the rally through barriers. On Saturday night, Imran Khan gave an 'economic roadmap' for the country's prosperity in his address at a 'historic' jalsa at Lahore's Minar-e-Pakistan.

Iran-Saudi deal a step initiated by Pakistan, concluded by China: Former Prime Minister of Pakistan while terming the recent

agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic ties an important development has warned against the role of Zionist regime, which is the root cause of instability in the region. Imran Khan during an exclusive interview with IRNA on Sunday said the China brokered deal will have a significant impact on the region.

Congratulating Islamic Republic of Iran on the happy occasion of Nowruz, he said that being Prime Minister of Pakistan he paid an official visit to Iran in October 2019 with a one point agenda to de-escalate tensions in the region.

He added that the deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia is actually a step initiated by Pakistan and amicably concluded by China.

Imran Khan whose government was removed by a no-confidence motion in April 2022 warned against the role of spoilers in the region adding that Zionist regime has always tried to isolate Iran. Former Pakistani PM praised the role of late founder of the Islamic Revolution Imam Khomeini for reviving the cause of Palestine through Al-Quds day adding that the role of Islamic world is unjustified towards Palestine and Kashmir.

Imran's decision to appear in Islamabad court today

LAHORE (NNI): Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan will appear in Islamabad court tomorrow (Monday).

According to the details, an important meeting was held in Zaman Park under the chairmanship of Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan.

In the meeting yesterday, the issue of Islamabad court appearance was discussed. Chairman PTI con-

sulted the party's senior leadership and legal team.

It was decided in the meeting that Imran Khan will leave for Islamabad tomorrow morning. After the meeting, Fawad Chaudhary left for Islamabad along with the legal team. The central leadership of the party will also reach Islamabad. PTI leader Asad Umar said that Imran Khan will appear in Islamabad court tomorrow.

PTI to attend parliament's joint session today

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has decided to attend a joint session of parliament, which was earlier adjourned till March 27 (Monday). Sources privy to the development stated that PTI senators will participate in tomorrow's joint sitting of parliament.

Opposition leader in Senate Dr Saleem Shehbaz has summoned a meeting of PTI parliamentarians in this connection. The session will be held at 2 pm tomorrow at parliament house, say sources.

The meeting will formulate a joint strategy for joint sitting of parliament.

Earlier, addressing a press conference, PTI Secretary-General Asad Umar had said that the party's senator will raise their voice against the 'unconstitutional move' of the Election Commission.

"As per the Constitution, a caretaker government will not remain legal following the expiration of its deadline - 90 days," Asad Umar noted.

He also condemned the police against PTI, saying that the houses of PTI leaders and workers were being raided while many members were currently under arrest. It is pertinent to mention here that President Dr Arif Alvi has summoned session of the National Assembly on Monday at 12:00 noon, whereas the joint session of parliament will also resume on the same day at 3:00 pm.

PM terms President's letter as partisan in nature, anti govt, PTI's PR

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday termed the contents of the letter written by President Dr Arif Alvi as of partisan in nature, one-sided and based upon anti-government views' which were openly espoused by the latter notwithstanding the constitutional oath/office of the president.

In response to the president's letter of March 24 containing five pages and seven points, the prime minister said that he was constrained to express his disappointment at the blatant partisan nature of the letter, "which in parts reads like a Press Release of the Opposition political party i.e. the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). "Mr. President, the Constitution does not vest any powers in or assigns any functions to the President whereby the President can seek explanation from the Government or the Prime Minister. The only reason I am responding to your letter is because I want to bring your partisan attitude and actions on record and to set the record of our Government straight," the contents of the letter shared by PM Office Media Wing quoted the prime minister as saying. The prime minister stressed that he was fully aware of his duties and the duties of the federal government under the constitution and the government was fully committed to preserve, protect and defend the constitution and ensure that the fundamental rights guaranteed to the citizens of Pakistan were not violated.

"However, our government is also determined to ensure that no one is allowed to violate the law, create unrest and attempts to cause irreparable harm to the state of Pakistan. I

want to further assure you that our government will thwart any efforts to undermine the constitutionally elected government," he added.

Further responding to reference made in the president's letter of Article 46 of the Constitution and Rule 15 (5) of the Rules of Business, 1973 regarding holding of meaningful consultations between the president and prime minister, he said, the objection was out of place.

Under clause (1) of the Article 48, the president, in exercise of his functions, must act on and in accordance with the advice of the cabinet or the prime minister, he added.

The prime minister noted "In very limited instances, the President acts in his discretion under the Constitution, Article 46 and Rule 15 (5) (b) supra are what they ordain. That, is keep the President informed. Nothing more and nothing less. These provisions or for that matter nothing else in the Constitution requires the Prime Minister to consult the President on the exercise of executive authority by the Federal Government." Regarding the president's reference to holding of elections, the prime minister maintained that the ECP had announced October 8 as the new date for polls in Punjab after taking into account the ground realities.

All the federal and provincial government authorities furnished the relevant information to the ECP, he said, adding being the constitutional body, charged with the duty to organize and conduct elections, it was ultimately, the ECP's decision to assess circumstances for organizing and conducting free and fair elections as required under clause (3) of Article 218.

The prime minister pointed out that the president did not object to the use of language and rather aggressive attitude of the former federal ministers who actively attempted to undermine the authority and credibility of ECP. The prime minister further opined that at the behest of the PTI, the president gave dates for the general elections on the provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and his decision of election date for KPK assembly was set aside by the Supreme Court.

He said that the president did not raise any concerns on malafide dissolution of the provincial assemblies of the two provinces, that too at the behest of and to satisfy the ego of PTI's chairman.

"The two provincial assemblies have been dissolved not for any constitutional or legal objective but to blackmail the governments in center and the other two provinces with sole objective of forcing them to dissolve the National and the other two provincial assemblies," he added.

The prime minister cited that the constitutional distortion also completely escaped the president's attention regarding effects of conducting elections to two provincial assemblies prior to the general elections of the National Assembly inasmuch, as organizing and conducting free and fair elections under clause (3) of Article 218 might not be possible with the elected provincial government in these provinces.

The prime minister expressed that it was quite saddening given the role of the head of the state that constitution assigned to the president.

In the letter shared by PM Office Media Wing, the prime minister fur-

ther addressing the president, said that it was a matter of record that previously, he (the president) had acted in a similar patrician manner on several occasions in violation of his oath.

These occasions included i.e. letter for dissolution of the National Assembly on April 3, 2022 on the illegal instructions of the former prime minister (Imran Khan) which was declared as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court on April 7 last year and upon his elections as the prime minister, the president failed to discharge his constitutional duty in terms of clause (5) of Article 91.

"Despite the foregoing and several other instances, where you actively worked towards undermining a constitutionally elected government. I have made all-out efforts to maintain good working relationship with you. However, the contents of your letter, its tone and language have compelled me to respond to it," the prime minister further added.

The prime minister, while responding to the points raised by the president regarding alleged fundamental and human rights violations as highlighted by media, said that the reference was quite clear as it referred to the politicians and workers belonging to a political party to which the president also belonged to.

The prime minister categorically said that substantive and procedural due process guaranteed under the Constitution under Articles 4 and 10A was being afforded to all.

"All the actions taken by the law enforcement agencies are strictly in accordance with law to maintain law and order and establish the writ of the state," he said, adding that in all instances, aggrieved persons had

approached the appropriate legal fora.

The prime minister further observed that regrettably due to party allegiance, the president failed to note sheer violation of laws, contumacious disregard of courts orders, attacking the law enforcement agencies, damaging public property, attempts to create chaos, civil and political unrest and 'in short to bring the country to the brink of economic default and civil war' by the PTI.

He said what had really tarnished the image of Pakistan in the international community and was casting negative repercussions on the future of democracy and state of human rights in Pakistan was the complete disregard of the laws and the constitution by the PTI.

Moreover, the president, on any occasion, had not uttered even a single word regarding the conduct of Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi, chairman PTI, on his actions in response to lawfully issued court orders for his appearance in criminal proceedings, he added. The prime minister said "May I also add, never in our history have we ever witnessed such aggressive, rather militant, attitude of political order in complete defiance of court orders." The prime minister to another point, maintained that his government ensured complete freedom of speech and expression as enshrined in the Constitution. He regretted that the president never raised his voice or shared his concerns in the manner as he had in his letter, in the past when PTI was in power. The prime minister referred to the annual world report issued by Human Rights Watch covering 2021 when the PTI's government was in office, which said "the Pakistan gov-

ernment intensified its efforts to control the media and curtail dissent. Authorities harassed and at times detained journalists and other members of civil society for criticizing government officials and policies. Violent attacks on members of the media also continue." The prime minister also referred to AL Jazeera report of last year on the annual World Report 2022 issued by HRW with specific reference to the chapter on Pakistan.

The previous government kept the National Commission for Human Rights dysfunctional for the most part of its tenure, besides deliberately obstructing the appointment of its members and chairperson because the NCHR had issued a damning report on state of human rights.

The prime minister added that there were several reports of the international human rights organizations which reflected poorly on the track record of PTI's previous government, which unfortunately escaped his (president's) attention.

The prime minister reminded the president that he did not raise any concerns when the previous government carried out a witch hunt against the opposition. He said a fabricated and false narcotics case entailing death penalty was made against Rana Sanaullah Khan, then an MNA. By framing false cases, male and female members of the parliament of other political parties were subjected to the worst kind of political victimization, he said, adding "Even a female member of the family of former prime minister was not spared, solely to politically eliminate them." The prime minister said that NAB was used to tame the political opposition and dissent.



46,446 Corona patients discharged after recovery

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 46,446 Coronavirus patients had been discharged after getting treatment from the district's health facilities, out of which 42,789 were Rawalpindi residents and 3,659 were from other districts. According to the data shared by the District Health Authority, 47,815 patients have tested positive since the pandemic, out of which 44,156 belong to Rawalpindi and 3,659 from the outside district.

The report further updated that 26 patients were quarantined at home while 7,006,011 people, including 44,790 health workers, had jabbed themselves against the lethal Coronavirus.

Meanwhile, District Health Officer for Infectious Diseases, Dr Waqar Ahmed told APP that Corona patients have increased in the last ten days. He added that around five to six patients were reported regularly in the last two weeks, while the number reached zero earlier. The health officer advised the residents to wear face masks, avoid crowded places and follow safety measures issued by the government.

CTO urges motorists to display patience especially Iftar

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief Traffic Officer CTO Taimoor Khan on Sunday urged road users to show patience and avoid rash driving during Ramzan ul Mubarrak, especially before 'Iftar'.

In a statement issued here, he said everyone wants to reach their destination on time but this race ultimately led to fatal accidents. He further said that most of the accidents during Ramzan reported before 'Iftar' were due to the impatient attitude of drivers. Therefore, the CTO appealed to the citizens, especially the motorists to show patience and never lose their temper while commuting just before 'Iftar'.

City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi has also constituted a special squad to prevent one wheeling during the holy month of Ramzan ul Mubarrak. CTP has formed special squads of 70 personnel to crack down against one-wheeling across the city. While, special pickets have also been established on important highways where strict action will be taken against the perpetrators of one-wheeling without discrimination.

DC visits free flour points, inspects arrangements

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner Lahore Rafia Haider visited various free flour distribution points in the provincial capital and monitored the process and arrangements on Sunday. She visited 21 centers, out of 42 points in the city and issued orders for redressing grievances of people. She appreciated the staff after finding the public satisfied with the facility. Rafia Haider said around 39,359 flour bags were distributed in Lahore on Sunday till 2 pm and a total of 508,200 bags were distributed in the city from start of the facility.

'Coming week will be turning point in Pakistan's history'

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Secretary-General Asad Umar on Sunday praised party's workers and supporters for showing up at the rally's venue Minar-e-Pakistan despite 'all the obstacles', saying that the coming week will be turning point in Pakistan's history.

Addressing a press conference in Lahore, the former planning minister said that the people of Lahore came out despite fear, arrests and containers placed across the city. Asad Umar also lambasted the incumbent government for mishandling the country's economy, saying that the nation was suffering after the incumbent rulers were imposed on them. "People are losing their lives while queuing up to get flour," he added.

The PTI leader noted that Pakistan was created in the month of Ramazan and its 'journey to prosperity' will also begin in the same month.

Taking over the presser, PTI senior vice-president Fawad Chaudhry said that

there is no way in Pakistan except implementing the Constitution while commenting on the ongoing political crisis in the country. Fawad Chaudhry claimed that over 2,000 people were arrested in the ongoing crackdown against PTI workers. "People are being picked and rendered missing from Lahore. Azhar Mashwani went missing," he added.

He pointed out the Punjab government's 'steps to curtail PTI's power show', saying that the entire city was blocked with containers. "The entry and exit routes of Lahore were closed," he added.

He warned that the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) led government will have Pakistan added to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list again. Moreover, Fawad said that all eyes were now on the Supreme Court (SC). He added that the government is now doing politics based on fear. "We are asking you to do your own politics and let us do ours too," he urged.

PTI chief will not be given captaincy again: Saad

LAHORE (PPI): Senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Khawaja Saad Rafiq has flayed Imran Khan for attempting to enslave Pakistan for his personal power and warned the PTI chief that he will not be given captaincy again.

Reacting to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf rally at the Minar-e-Pakistan of Lahore on Sunday night in a series of tweets, Saad wrote "Imran wants to chain Pakistanis to eternal slavery."

He tweeted that "fascist Imran also makes alliances with devils for power. "In 2018, Pakistan would have become the emerging economy of the world if the [PTI] government had not been imposed

by in violation of the constitution, democracy and people's aspirations," Saad added. The PML-N leader addressed Imran that "your four-year rule has shaken the economic foundations of Pakistan and threatened the national integrity. He said that the incompetent Imran government burdened Pakistanis with a record foreign debt. He claimed that once the blue eye man of the establishment, "is now being used by the anti-Pakistan powers as a pawn." Saad alleged that secret foreign funding of PTI was being used against the national interests. "It is being used to spread hatred in the nation, misguiding people and propaganda against the country."

Ruler leading country to civil war: Sheikh Rashid

RAWALPINDI (PPI): Pakistan Awami Muslim League chief and former interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said Sunday that our fight is not against the military establishment, but against those who looted the country's wealth.

The former minister took to twitter and said that the incumbent rulers were afraid of Imran Khan's popularity and giving lame excuses. Even the British did not ban a rally in 1940.

Agents of present rulers not only placed containers but also sealed all the roads. Despite this, people reached the Minar-e-Pakistan after traveling miles, he added.

Rashid said that Saudi Arabia stopped delivery of oil on deferred payment just after eight months. The UAE is also keeping them at arm's

length. A serious economic crisis is knocking at the door and the rulers are thinking that they will fix everything. They are leading the country to civil war, he continued.

He said that whether the country would be governed under the constitution or by the crooks, the Supreme Court will decide when it will take up petition.

After the IMF, Geneva Donor Conference has stopped assisting the rulers. People are dying attempting to get free flour, Rashid maintained.

Those who are unaware of Kashmir's freedom struggle have banned the Gilgit-Baltistan police from leaving the province. The rulers issued threat alerts to disrupt the Minar-e-Pakistan rally, shut down the internet and arrested supporters.

MQM-P informs Centre, PBS regarding reservations over census

KARACHI (NNI): Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has informed the federal government and the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) regarding its reservations on the census.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) Rabita Committee held an emergency session at Bahadurabad headquarters under the chair of the convenor Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui today.

The Rabita Committee held discussions on the political situation, LG by-polls and census.

The political expressed reservations about census once again. The MQM-P leaders said that census staffers failed to reach several areas, whereas, several families residing in the same building were counted as a unit in some areas.

They said that census is a red line for MQM-P and they will force the govern-

ment to rectify the census process.

Sources said that the political party also apprised Centre and the chief census commissioner regarding its reservations.

The majority of Rabita Committee members recommended to take part in LG by-polls after the increase of 53 union councils (UCs).

The committee said that MQM-P's stance regarding the delimitations was proved true.

Earlier, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan decided against attending all parties conference (APC), summoned by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on March 18 to discuss reservations over digital census. MQM-P did not attend the APC – summoned to discuss reservations over digital census – due to its 'power show', scheduled for March 18 at Karachi's Bagh-e-Jinnah.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Marriyum Aurangzeb addressing a press conference at Model Town.

Refocusing on CPEC to augur well for economy: Altaf Shakoor

KARACHI (NNI): After a lull in vital CPEC project during the previous regime, now refocusing on this vital initiative is a welcome development which will augur well for economy, said Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor here Sunday.

He said that the CPEC was put on the back burner by the previous government but the sitting government has now put a big momentum in it which will prove beneficial for the national economy.

He said that the federal cabinet has approved the commencement of the second, and most important, phase of the CPEC project for industrial development of Pakistan. It has granted its approval for signing the draft Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC)

to promote industrial cooperation with China, within the framework of the CPEC. He said that the CPEC is the most prominent project of China's Belt and Road Initiative, consisting of various economic and infrastructure projects throughout Pakistan. It is a \$62 billion project, which includes a 3,000-kilometer network of railways, oil and gas pipelines connecting both countries, as well as new renewable energy projects.

Altaf Shakoor said that to provide firsthand experience of the successful industrial models in China, the Chinese stakeholders shall facilitate the field visits of the concerned teams from Pakistan, including the Chinese SEZs. He suggested that the industry leaders should be included in these

visits so that their valuable input could be utilized. He said in Pakistan the policies are mostly based on the input from bureaucracy; however, the input of the industry is more important particularly when making decisions about the industrial development. Altaf Shakoor said that vital national projects like CPEC should be kept above political considerations so that their continuity should be ensured even in case of the change of political governments.

He said previous government wasted crucial four years of the CPEC which is loss to the nation and country. He said the business to business cooperation phase of the CPEC should be spurred for fast track socioeconomic uplift of society.

Police to deploy additional force for smooth traffic flow during Ramzan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (Traffic) has decided to deploy additional police personnel around the main markets and shopping plazas in the federal capital to ensure convenience for the citizens and keep flow of traffic normal during the holy month of Ramadan.

Following the directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Akbar Nasir Khan, Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Syed Mustafa Tanveer chaired a special meeting at traffic police headquarters to look into parking and traffic-related issues outside main markets and shopping centers during Ramzan.

The meeting was also attended by all Zonal DSPs and it reviewed all traffic-related arrangements for the convenience of citizens during Ramzan.

It was decided to make the traffic congestion unit more effective and functional and special tasks were given to Zonal DSPs in this regard. It was directed to improve traffic flow and provide all possible travel facilities to the citizens.

It was decided that additional police personnel would be deployed around shopping malls, markets, restaurants and business outlets. A comprehensive strategy was finalized

to keep the flow of normal so that commuters do not face problems.

The meeting decided to constitute special squads for strict action against public service vehicles and one-wheelers. On this occasion, the Chief Traffic Officer that shopping activities are at peak at markets and shopping mall after Iftar timings and utmost efforts should be made to facilitate citizens.

Chief Traffic Officer said there is a great reward to serving the citizens with honesty, hard work and dedication especially during Ramadan and all efforts should be made to maintain smooth traffic flow in the city.

Nowruz an opportunity to create regional, cultural synergies & unity: Imanipour

ISLAMABAD (APP): The head of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications (ICCO),

Hojjat-ul-Islam wal-Muslimeen Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour on Sunday said Nowruz in addition to its cultural value is an opportunity to develop the cultural relations of his beloved country Islamic Republic of Iran with its neighbours and also to develop regional synergies and unity through cultural affinity.

Hojjat-ul-Islam wal-Muslimeen Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour, in his message, felicitated the Iranians and others nations on the arrival of the ancient Nowruz and the beginning of the Iranian new year 1402, especially Iranians living abroad, statesmen and citizens of the cultural and religious sphere of Nowruz.

The Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications issues Imanipour's message here.

Mohammad Mahdi Imanipour said the spiritual and civilized view of Nowruz could become a point of the deep connection between the nations of the region. "Looking at Nowruz as an ancient ritual and tradition is not the whole story. Nowruz originated from a kind of original civilization and has the power to create a cultural-civilizational union in different countries," he added.

In the region of Central Asia, Caucasus and West Asia, Nowruz could become more than a "common tradition" but rather a "common cultural center" to reach a "unified cultural system", he emphasised.

He underlined that this cultural system was not limited to a specific time (the end of winter and the beginning of spring) and its

extension included all the days of the year.

This cultural-civilized capacity should be considered and promoted by the countries that celebrate Nowruz for utilising it as a tool to unite and enhance cultural and people-to-people bilateral relationships, he added.

He also quoted a Persian saying, "The breath of the Saba wind will blow The old world will be young again." Mahdi Imanipour elaborated that Nowruz was the crystallization of new life in the body of nature and a new opportunity for people to reflect on their life and circumstances and seek help from God to reach the best. "Nowruz is an opportunity for renewal and interpretation of the human need to evolve in a holy path full of signs of the power of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)," he said.

This transformation and delivery was at the same a divine tradition that Nowruz could be considered as a turning point, he said, adding, "The harmony of the nations of Nowruz brings their hearts and minds closer to each other in the glorious and beautiful moments of the New Year beginning. The breath of Saba gives a sense of renewal to the Persian-speaking nations and even the non-Persian-speaking nations who consider Nowruz as the ancient heritage of their ancestors."

On the other hand, he said in the religious teachings and life of the elders of Islam, Nowruz was considered as an example of modernisation, beauty and transition to a new era in human life.

"This exalting look at the category of New Year and Nowruz delivery shows that the guardians of the religion also have a look at

it beyond a ceremony or tradition and consider it a turning point in the promotion of human values.

What now makes the necessity of observing the ancient Nowruz celebration more evident is the use of this common opportunity for the optimal coexistence, synergy and convergence of nations and the development, stabilization and evolution of their cooperation around this common civilization view," he suggested.

Nowruz, he said guaranteed the unity of the nations and governments of the region and had a special place among the nations of the region and also guaranteed the creation of an exemplary and continuous alliance in the way of interaction between the nations and governments of the region. The renewal hidden in the ancient Nowruz feast

could be considered as a tool to promote a certain lifestyle based on "effective transformation" in the individual, social and international relations of the nations, he added.

"We believe that the regional and extra-regional capacities of the ancient Nowruz Eid have not yet been fully realized, and this issue doubles the need for the relevant institutions to play a role in the countries that organize this beautiful tradition. In this framework, the 'Islamic Culture and Communication Organization' as the guardian of the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, considers it necessary to identify and strengthen the current capacities in the Nowruz tradition as a tool for the civilizational and religious solidarity of the countries," he said.



KARACHI: People are waiting to break their fast during holy month of Ramazan at Numaish Chowrangi.



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Promote culture, tourism: Advisor directs for preparation of strategy

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to KP Caretaker Chief Minister on Tourism and Culture, Zafar Mahmood has said that the provincial government is taking measures for the preservation of the cultural and historic assets and directed for preparation of a comprehensive strategy for their promotion at divisional and district level.

He expressed these views during his visit to Nishtar Hall, the other day, said an official handout issued here on Sunday. During the visit, the Advisor reviewed the auditorium and security of the facility. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the new generation of the province should be aware of the culture, traditions, historic buildings and places. He further directed the officers

of the department to create awareness among the people regarding spring season tourism and holding of cultural fairs and other recreational activities to attract maximum number of tourists to the province. The advisor said that poets, writers and artists are special persons of the society and they would be facilitated to promote their art and skill.

IK considers himself holy, above law: PPP leader

PESHAWAR (APP): Acting provincial president PPP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Minister of State Mohammad Ali Shah Bacha has said that Chairman PTI Imran Khan considers himself as holy and above the law.

In a comment over the speech of Imran Khan, which he delivered the other day, the PPP leader said that it was nothing more than fraud and lying. He said that Imran considers himself as holy and above the law.

Mohammad Ali Shah Bacha said that the PTI government has taken the national economy to the verge of destruction and now he is misquoting facts to mislead the people and has become the champion of spreading anarchy and confrontation in the country.

He said that the real face of Imran Khan had been unveiled and now the people want to make him accountable for fake narratives and u-turns. He said that the nation has already rejected the culture of

hatred introduced by PTI in national politics.

The Minister of State further said that the nation is fully aware of the politics of anarchy, accusations, hatred and vision of divide. Therefore, after the contempt of constitution, law and judiciary giving lectures on morality, independence and rule of law, he should stop giving lectures on the subject and stop his dual standard immediately as the nation is bearing the result of his incompetence.

Beautification of economic zone: UoP, KP-EZDMC join hand

PESHAWAR (APP): Chairperson of Art & Design Department, University of Peshawar (UoP), Dr. Zile Huma held a meeting with Zone Manager, Peshawar Economic Zone, the other day, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

During the meeting, she promised that Art & Design Department will support Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development & Management Company

(KP-EZDMC) in promoting and enhancing the beautification of Peshawar Economic Zone. They agreed to initiate their work from Road No.1 by installation of signboards on visible spots in the economic zone. The team of PEZ and Art & Design Department showed their willingness to work together with their mutual interest and they will support KPEZDMC-PEZ to

continue the beautification in the Zone.

The Art & Design Department will be in close liaison with the Management of PEZ for the said purpose.

This beautification will not only make PEZ a model zone, rather will also definitely attract other entrepreneurs to invest in Peshawar Economic Zone and will play their role in industrialization in the province.

Butchers held for profiteering



PESHAWAR (APP): The district administration here on Sunday conducted raids in different areas of the provincial metropolis and arrested 20 butchers involved in selling beef at excessive rates.

Taking notice of the complaints lodged by people regarding selling of beef at an excessive price during holy month of Ramadan, the Deputy Commissioner Shah Fahad directed for taking stern action against profiteers.

Following the directives of DC, the raiding team led by Assistant Commissioner Syed Zainab Naqvi inspected various markets in Board Bazaar, Tehkal, University Road and

Hayatabad Phase-III. A total of 20 butchers were found guilty of violating government approved prices and sent behind the bar after registering the cases against them. The police contingent was also accompanied by the team of district administration to avoid any untoward happening.

Hayatabad Phase-III.

The police contingent was also accompanied by the team of district administration to avoid any untoward happening.

BRT going to launch new DR-11

PESHAWAR (APP): Bus Rapid Service (BRT) Peshawar is going to launch a new route DR-11 today (Monday).

The service will be operated from Mall of Hayatabad to Phase-6 Terminal via Phase-1, said a spokesperson of the TransPeshawar, operator of the BRT Service on Sunday.

The first bus of the route will depart from Mall of Hayatabad at 6:15 A.M and last one at 7:00 P.M. Similarly first bus from the Phase 6 Terminal will also depart at 6:15 A.M while last bus will leave the terminal at 7:30 P.M.

The new route will be comprised of Phase-6 Terminal, Sher Shah Market, Government College, Sunday Bazaar, Zarghoni Masjid, Lalazar, Phase 1 Shama, Khyber Park, Hayatabad Police Station, Qurtaba University, Phase-3, Bab-e-Peshawar and Mall of Hayatabad.

The bus of the route DR-11 will take stop at Platform No.3 of the Mall of Hayatabad.

City Police arrest PO in murder case

PESHAWAR (APP): Capital City Police arrested a proclaimed offender (PO) wanted in connection with murder and attempted murder case on Sunday.

On a tip regarding the presence of the PO, the Station House Officer (SHO) Phandu, Aqib Khan conducted a raid and arrested the PO Ijaz son of Maulana Saakin, resident of Ghareebabad.

The arrested accused had murdered a person, Hazrat Omar over a monetary dispute in June 2022. After committing the crime, the accused was on the run and hiding somewhere and declared proclaimed offender.

Further investigation from the accused was in progress.

Imran Khan responsible for lawlessness

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Information Secretary, Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Amjad Khan Afridi said on Sunday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan's recent speech was nothing but a deception and full of lies.

He said the country was facing economic crisis due to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s failed policies.

He said Imran Khan was confusing the people by distorting facts, and warned that the nation will hold him accountable for false statements.

In a statement, he further added that the nation has rejected the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s political culture of hatred, as the country is facing crises and problems due to their failed policies.

Amjad Khan Afridi urged Imran Khan to stop the double standards, as the nation is suffering the consequences of his shortcomings.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to Caretaker Chief Minister on Tourism and Culture Zafar Mahmood visiting Nishtar Hall.

Security beefed-up at mosques during Tarawih, says SSP

PESHAWAR (APP): Security beefed up in a around the mosques during Tarawih besides deploying SDPOs. The SSP Operations disclosed that special additional police mobile teams have been formed to increase police patrolling across the city.

Giving details about the security plan, he said with the deployment of additional police force, the Ababil Squad, City Patrol Force, Additional Special Riders Squads and Local Police are also present at sensitive locations all the time.

He said the Policemen deployed on various points are on high alert in order to maintain the law and order situation. Special blockades and snap checking are being carried out by identifying hot spots in all divisions, he told.

"We will not let anyone disturb the peaceful environment and that is why through a proper plan, the Policemen have been deployed in and around the city for vigilance in order to avoid any untoward incident," he added.

Sikh community continues goodwill gesture of serving food to fasting Muslims

PESHAWAR (APP): The Sikh community in Peshawar has continued its goodwill gesture of serving food among fasting Muslims during the holy month of Ramzan with the objective of promoting love, fraternity, respect and honor among people of different faiths.

Every year Sikh community living in different parts of the country including Peshawar, arrange Iftari (serving of food for breaking fast) and food distribution among fasting Muslims with the aim of reflecting the sentiments of reverence they had for holy month of Ramzan.

As the fasting month of Ramzan begins, Sikh residents in Peshawar come out for arranging Iftar dinners, announcing special discounts on their shops for fasting Muslims besides helping the poor fasting faithful by providing them edible goods at their doorsteps.

For ordinary citizens gathering of turban wearing Sikhs around long plastic mats spread to serve food for fasting Muslims at places like Bolton Block of Lady Reading Hospital of Peshawar becomes very strange and incomprehensible, leaving them in a state of bafflement.

Many faithfuls are found sharing their feeling of bewilderment over seeing Sikh youth standing in front of their doors for the distribution of food items to break fast.

"This year within four days of Ramzan, we have distributed food items among 100 deserving Muslim families for providing them ease in fulfillment of their religious obligation", informs Jatinder Singh, Chairman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter of National Peace Council for Interfaith Harmony.

We have not started holding of Iftari for which looking for volunteers and will start as arrangements are made, Jatinder told APP. Each of the ration pack consists of essential items including cooking oil, rice, pulses, chick pea, beans, sugar and tea, he added.

The price of ration has almost doubled this year from Rs. 4000 to Rs. 7500 because of inflation in the country. He said donations are coming from people from diversified faiths and soon the second phase of distribution of food rations will be made.

We used to make the arrangement for serving of big Iftari for fasting Muslims but corona pandemic affected the practice. Last year only on Friday iftaries were arranged in different areas of the city due to the shortage of volunteer, Jatinder added.

Apart from arranging Iftari, we are also focusing on provision of edible goods to fasting Muslims at their doorsteps, Jatinder apprised. Being a dweller of city since generations, we know who is in need of financial support in our locality so we extend them help. The objective behind this practice by Sikhs is to promote love, fraternity, respect and honor among people of different faiths, remarked Jatinder Singh, adding that we were living in this country from generations and wanted to convey the message of mutual coexistence among its citizens.

Jatinder said our Muslims neighbours and friends also mark respect to holy occasions of Sikhs by extending goods wishes. Similarly both Muslims and Sikhs attend occasions of happiness and bereavement from both sides to maintain the bond of unity, neighbourhood and humanity.

The price of spices increased from Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 per kg, a shopkeeper told APP during a visit. He disclosed that the price of spices in the city has reached Rs. 600 per kg and the prices of oil and ghee also increased.

He said the price of ghee and oil increased by Rs. 62 per kg while the other vegetables and fruits were also out of purchasing power. Garlic is being sold at Rs. 360 and ginseng at Rs 620 per kg while Peas 200, Arvi 180, Zucchini 170, green and capsicum 150 rupees and tomato 120 per kg are being sold.

The rates of fruits also increased like Malta 440 per dozen, Cano 400 per dozen while Banana Rs. 300 per dozen, Pomegranate Rs. 400, Irani Apple Rs. 340 per kg, Guava Kohati Rs. 350 and Strawberry Rs. 280 per kg.

The skyrocketing price hike was also witnessed in beef, which was Rs 700 per kg before Ramadan now sold at Rs 800 and Rs. 1000 per kg while the rates of mutton was increased from Rs 1400 to 1600 per kg, thereby increasing to 1800 per kg. "The rates issued by the district administration do not suit us," a Butcher in the local market said.

Swarm of beggars invades city markets, food outlets in Ramazan

PESHAWAR (APP): With the start of the holy month of Ramazan, the beggars of nearby districts have thronged the Peshawar's markets to secure maximum alms and charities by adopting irritating techniques that were annoying the Aftar shoppers.

Influx of unchecked professional and unprofessional beggars were seen in bazaars, food outlets, hotels, restaurants and shopping centers till late night by adopting different techniques in a bid to collect maximum alms and charity from people during Ramazan.

In spite of begging has been declared illegal under the country's laws, the beggars' influx including male, female, children and persons with disabilities were being witnessed in traffic crossing points, mosques' gates and frequented public places in the city and cantonment areas mostly before Aftar.

The unchecked trained beggars were pestering shoppers in the markets or running after them or behind their cars to collect maximum alms in the name of Zakat, Sadqa and Khairat.

Sundas Bibi, a lecturer in Peshawar college told APP on Sunday that it was risky to down the window panes of vehicles especially at the traffic signals as beggars of all ages start knocking them consistently in a bid to enforce Rozadars to give something in charity. She said it was heart-breaking to see young girls and boys' beggars carrying wipers in hands often start

cleaning cars windows on traffic signals without permission in order to get money. She said some beggars roaming with exposed wounds keep on holding and touching customers when they come out of their vehicles, which could expose them to contagious diseases and viral ailments including coronavirus, TB, flu and chest related infections.

Sundas said some beggars were emotionally blackmailing people by carrying medical prescriptions and disability certificates.

She urged the district administration to launch a crackdown against these migrated beggars because they had polluted the peaceful environment of the city.

Qaisar Khan, a retired Govt employee and resident of Wapda Town Nowshera said that begging has been emerged as a major social evil in recent years to the nuisance of Peshawarties and created a lot of problems for Rozadars during shopping

for Aftar.

Besides bazaars and shopping arcades, he said Aftar shoppers were facing great inconvenience at food restaurants, markets, mosques' gates and public places due to swarms of beggars these days in Peshawar.

Alms' seekers can also be seen in city markets asking for charity in the name of construction of mosques while many beggars were resorting to lame-duck excuses like seeking treatment for their ailing family or lost jobs.

He said some beggars come with white caps and medical prescription to give an impression that they were selling it, but actually they beg for money without an intention of selling anything.

"I was busy in Aftar shopping along with his family at Qissa Khwani where a teenage beggar with black colour in hand rushed towards me, asking for money or otherwise his clothes would be made dirty."

"In order to save my clothes, I immediately offered him Rs50, which was refused. On several requests, the beggar accepted Rs100 and started running towards other shoppers by using the same technique that was intolerable in a civilized society" he recalled.

He said drugs addicts beggars in the city markets have irked Peshawarties due to their coughing and poor clothes.

He demanded the KP government to take instantaneous action against swarms of beggars and drugs addicts in the city so that people could take a sigh of relief and do Aftar shopping with an ease.

Former Additional Advocate General KP, Esa Khan told APP on Sunday that beggary has been declared illegal under West Pakistan Loitering Ordinance 1958.

Unfortunately, he said this law had not been fully implemented, which resulted in an increase of beggars especially during Ramazan.

He said central and provincial laws such as Control of Narcotics Substance Act 1997, West Pakistan Vagrancy Ordinance 1959, Pakistan Employment of Children Act 1991, KP Child Protection and Welfare Act (KPCPWA) 2010 and KP Orphanage Supervision and Control Act 1976 had been promulgated to check drug addiction and streets begging.

Similarly, KPCPWA was enacted in 2010 to protect rights of women and children, but it has not been fully implemented on ground, resulting in swarms of beggars in Peshawar.

Esa Khan said the role of Child Welfare Commission (CWC) was important to provide protection to child beggars in KP.

He urged the KP Govt to impose a ban on child beggars on the pattern of Sindh province and direct the social welfare department to pick child beggars from markets, roads, traffic signals, streets and rehabilitate them at their welfare centres.

Underscoring the need for launching special schemes for rehabilitation of beggars, Esa Khan urged people to donate alms and charity to their known poor deserving people and reputable charity organizations having clean service record so that their alms could be used for a noble cause.

Social Welfare department's spokesman told APP on Sunday that about 12 detoxification and rehabilitation centres have been setup for assistance and treatment of drugs addicts beggars.

These centres were established in 12 districts including Swabi, Peshawar, DI Khan, Karak, Kohat, Malakand, Mardan, Charsadda, Swat, Nowsehra and Dir Lower.

The free drugs Peshawar program' has been launched to clear city of drugs addicts and professionals beggars and make them useful members of society. Under the campaign, he said drug addicts beggars

including women were being shifted to rehabilitation centers while chronic addicts with health complexities to Islamabad for treatment.

Directives to concerned authorities were issued to hold meetings with welfare organizations, industrialists and concerned departments to impart vocational training to all rehabilitated drug addicts.

The addicts beggars were provided free night stay and meals at shelters homes and Darul Kafalas during recovery phases.

Under BISP Program, he said that financial assistance was being provided to over 8.9 million poor people of the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa besides Rs2000 for each girl and Rs1500 for each boy to alleviate poverty and counter illiteracy.

The spokesman said that beggary was a social problem occurred due to socio-economic imbalances and collective efforts was required to eradicate this scourge in the country.



In brief

Free flour distributed

KOHAT (APP): District administration on Sunday distributed free flour among Benazir Income Support Program beneficiaries belonging to Tehsil Lachi. On the direction of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Azmatullah Wazir under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner Lachi Madam Khaula Tariq, Benazir Income Support Program beneficiaries belonging to Tehsil Lachi were given free flour at Assistant Commissioner Office Lachi. Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir has asked the public that the free flour program is only for Benazir Income Support Program beneficiaries, so cooperate with the administration to facilitate the process of supplying flour to the deserving people.

4 people hurt in road mishap

KHANEWAL (APP): At least four persons including two women sustained injuries as bus overturned near Peerwal. According to Rescue officials, a passenger bus was going to Makhdoom Pur from Khanewal when it suddenly turned turtle near Peerwal due to over speeding. As a result, four people namely Farzana, Sajida, Khalil and Mudassar sustained injuries. Upon receiving the information, Rescue team rushed to the spot and shifted two injured to district headquarters hospital and provided first aid to two minor injured.

3 youngsters killed

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): Three youngsters died in a road accident on Sunday when a speedy car ran over them in Bahawalnagar. As per a private news channel, the accident took place owing to the negligence of the driver who lost control of his car, which claimed three lives. Rescue official said, the car driver, however, managed to flee away from the scene. Police handed over the bodies to the heirs and started an investigation into the accident.

Rs968,000 fine imposed

NAROWAL (APP): Price Control Magistrates imposed a total fine of Rs 968,000 on shopkeepers for overcharging, hoarding, and got cases registered against five shopkeepers during the last fortnight. Under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Narowal Muhammad Ashraf, Price Magistrates checked prices at different shops during the last 25 days and found 203 shopkeepers in profiteering and hoardings. Of whom, cases were registered against 5 shopkeepers and 60 shopkeepers were arrested. DC Narowal Muhammad Ashraf directed the price control magistrates to ensure the availability of food items at fixed rates to people in the holy month of Ramzan.

Police action continues

SARGODHA (APP): Police arrested 17 people involved in kite flying, selling and manufacturing during last week and recovered 272 kites, 289 strings and other paraphernalia from their possession. DPO M. Faisal Kamran directed the police officers and officials to ensure the implementation on kite flying Act in their respective areas and take indiscriminate action against the kite flyers, sellers and manufacturers, says a news release issued here on Sunday. The DPO said that drone technology should also be used to capture kite flyers in narrow streets and thickly populated areas of the city.

ADC inspects markets, hospital

DIR LOWER (APP): On the instructions of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Dir Lower Iftikhar Ahmad, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) on Sunday paid a surprise visit to different markets and hospitals and inspected various points and also checked the free flour distribution process.

Besides checking the distribution, he also met with the people and discussed matters regarding distribution at various sites in Timargarah.

On the demand of the public, he instructed the concerned quartets to increase the number of counters to ensure due facilities to the general public.

He directed the administration to ensure the distribution of flour in a transparent and orderly manner and to increase the number of counters for the facilities. In light of public complaints, the Additional Deputy Commissioner inspected various butcher shops and fined several

butchers for overselling and non-compliance with the official price list.

Besides this, the Additional Deputy Commissioner also visited DHQ Hospital and reviewed the treatment facilities for the patients. He also checked the availability of medicines and the presence of doctors on duty in the emergency and general wards.

Flour Free flour distribution on Sunday as well, says official

The official of district administration Dir Lower on the instruction given by the Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa started free flour distribution on Sunday as well.

He said the district administration has already informed the general public regarding the free distribution of flour under the Prime Minister Free Flour Distribution Schemes. The official urged upon the general public to get the free flour in peace and order as free flour will be provided only once, three bags of ten

kg each.

The provincial government is continuing to provide free flour to the people of Dir Lower under the scheme of free flour for poor and needy people.

He said free flour will be given to only one head of the family under the online system.

"If the male of the family has received the bags, then the woman of the same family will get a message that you have taken such bags so try to get the male to receive the flour bags. He said free flour will be provided only once, three bags of 10 kg each, so do not rush to visit the point again and again.

To get free flour, bring your original ID card with you to the flour dealers selected by the district administration in your village council, Dir Lower. It will be available to the public every day throughout Ramadan, including Sundays, so get free flour with ease and order, the official informed.

Earthquake; NHA reopens damage road for traffic

CHITRAL (APP): In recent days due to the severe earthquake, there were landslides and huge stones falling from the mountains on various roads of Chitral, the National Highway Authority (NHA) officials cleared the road for traffic here on Sunday.

Due to the earthquake, the mountains often cracked and separated from each other and after that, when it rained, more debris by the rainwater washed over these roads, due to which these roads were either blocked or traffic

was disrupted due to this debris.

Heavy Machineries of the National Highway Authority immediately moved into action and removed heavy stones, boulders and debris from these roads and opened them for traffic. NHA Assistant Director Aamir Zeb himself is supervising the cleaning work of these roads.

Talking to APP, Aamir Zeb said that they are trying their level best to provide all possible facilities to the public as per the instructions of the NHA officials.

The people of the area are also very happy about the re-opening of these roads.

Ijaz Ahmed, a resident of Dineen, said that the road was closed due to the earthquake, now the NHA officials have reopened it and we are very happy to solve our problems.

Ever since the main highway of Peshawar-Chitral has been handed over to NHA, any debris, whenever, falls on the road, the NHA staff immediately clears it and opens it for traffic so that people do not face any difficulties.

16000 acres standing wheat crop damage

MULTAN (APP): Secretary Agriculture South Punjab, Saqib Ali Ateel, said that wheat crop has been cultivated in 6,71,000 acres area and about 16,000 acres of standing crops partially affected due to recent rains and hailstorm in Layyah district.

He expressed these views during a visit to different areas of Layyah to assess the effects of recent rains, wind and hailstorms on various crops and vegetables including wheat.

He directed the field formations to complete the survey of losses to crops due to rains and submit the report as early as possible.

He further said that the wheat crop has now entered the important stage of endurance and directed the field formations to remain present in the field for the

guidance of farmers.

The Secretary said that the sowing of other Kharif crops including cotton and mango orchards have entered the most important phase across South Punjab adding that field formations need to work harder and diligently.

He said that next generation could be saved from the damage of climate change by planting maximum trees adding that the growers have to suffer a lot and their hard work used to waste due to climate change.

The Punjab government was providing financial protection to the registered farmers under the insurance scheme.

Secretary Agriculture further said that serious steps were being taken to increase cotton cultivation

and production and special insurance policy for the cotton crop has been launched regarding it this year to ensure profit to the farmers.

He ordered the field formations to convince the farmers to increase cultivation of cotton crop and made them aware about its importance so that the cultivation of cotton could be completed on maximum area.

Meanwhile, Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Saqib Ali Ateel presided over a briefing meeting to review the performance of all departments of Agriculture department and inspected the bio lab.

Directors Agriculture Maher Abid Hussain, Dr. Muhammad Zakaria, Ghulam Abbas and other officers attended the meeting.

Two alleged robbers killed in shootout

FAISALABAD (APP): Two alleged robbers were killed in an encounter with police, in the limits of Garh police station.

Police said on Sunday that they had received a call through Rescue-15 about the robbery incidents near Chak No.458-GB and rushed to the spot. The police encircled the criminals and asked them to surrender but they opened indiscriminate fire at the police party.

The police also returned

fire in self-defense and during the shootout, both the outlaws received bullet injuries and fell down on the ground.

The outlaws were being shifted to a hospital when they succumbed to their injuries on the way.

One of the outlaws identified as Lal aka Lalo, resident of Chah Malangowala Tehsil

Tandlianwala Faisalabad was wanted by police in seven dacoity, robbery, narcotics and other cases, whereas, the identifi-

cation of other criminal has not yet been ascertained.

The police recovered a stolen motorcycle, two illicit pistols and other valuables from the site of encounter. Further investigation was underway.

City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi appreciated the performance of raiding team and announced commendation certificates for those officials who took part in the encounter, spokesman added.

Robbers gang busted, looted items recovered

WAH CANTT (APP): The Taxila Police on Sunday busted a robbers' gang and arrested their three members besides recovery of looted booty as well as arms from their possession.

A police officer Taxila circle ASP Zaniab Ayub informed that acting on a tip-off, a police party led by Station House Officer Samad Ilyas busted a robbers gang named "Sheem gang" and arrested their three members including

the ring leader identified as Sheem Gull and other members known as Afsar and Ibrahim. She said that motorcycle, arms and ammunition and looted booty were also recovered from their possession.

Responding to a question, she said that during preliminary interrogation, the accused confessed to robberies, snatching and street crimes in various parts of the twin cities of Taxila and Wah.

She further said that Taxila Police during a crackdown against the drugs peddler mafia arrested two drug peddlers and recovered over two-kilogram chargs from their possession. She added that during the crackdown has recovered 1.31 kilogram of chargs from Ameer Hamza while 1.45-kilogram of chargs was recovered from Meer Suroosh. Separate cases were registered against the accused and further investigations were underway.



SARGODHA: Additional Deputy Commissioner Sargodha Arshad Ahmed Wattoo distributing free flour bags among deserving people at Choongi No. 9.

Minor quake hits Jhal Magsi of Balochistan

QUETTA (INP): A magnitude 4.3 earthquake struck Balochistan's Jhal Magsi district, said officials.

According to details, the epicenter of the earthquake was 20 kilometers south-west of Jhal Magsi. The tremors were felt in various areas of the district and caused panic among the residents.

Many people rushed out of their homes and gathered in open spaces to ensure their safety. Fortunately, no casualties or damage to property have been reported yet. The Jhal Magsi district is a sparsely populated region with a predominantly rural population.

Balochistan, which is located in a highly seismically active region, experiences frequent earthquakes. In 2013, a powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 hit the Awaran district, killing over 800 people and leaving thousands homeless.

Last week, a severe earthquake shook several regions in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the capital Islamabad, resulting in at least nine fatalities and over 160 individuals being injured.

Two dacoits gunned down

FAISALABAD (INP): Two dacoits were killed in an encounter with police within the jurisdiction of Garh Police Station Faisalabad on Sunday.

According to details, two dacoits had snatched a motorcycle from a citizen near Chak-458. The victim called police and informed them about the incident. When a police party reached the spot, the culprits opened fire at them.

The police traded fire with the dacoits and consequently, both of dacoits were arrested in wounded condition.

The police took the wounded bandits into custody and shifted them to the hospital for medical assistance where they succumbed to their injuries.

Moreover, the stolen motorcycle, two 30 bore pistols were recovered from their possession.

It was learnt that both expired dacoits, Lal alias Lalo and his accomplice, were wanted by police in a number of cases.

City Police Officer Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi applauded the police team for fighting the robbers bravely.

MEPCO gives deadline

MULTAN (APP): Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO) has given one week deadline to federal and provincial departments for payment of Rs 2451 million monthly bills, dues and arrears.

Director Commercial MEPCO Asad Hamad directed the operational and circle officials to work hard to achieve the monthly recovery and line loss targets and to continue the recovery campaign even during public holidays to collect dues/arrears from defaulters in all sub-divisions.

He asked the officials to contact the heads of federal and provincial government Institutions/departments for non-payment of monthly electricity bills and previous dues.

‘Efforts to be made for resolving issues’

D.I.KHAN (APP): The Commissioner Dera Division Nisar Ahmed Khan has said that all out efforts were being made to meet the expectations of the masses and resolve their problems at their doorstep.

He expressed these views while addressing as a chief guest in a ceremony held for distribution of rations among the poor people and widows here at

Sappal House.

The commissioner said the administration face difficulties in providing relief to people as the problems were much more than resources however the decisions would be taken by keeping in mind the principles of justice.

He said the philanthropists were also cooperating with the government in welfare of people.

He appreciated the contributions of Haji Allah Bakhsh Sappal in welfare work, saying, there could not be more blessed and virtuous moments than providing food to the deserving people.

The commissioner said he would take all possible measures to ensure the provision of all possible relief and services to the people of the division.

Minister, DC visit free flour points in Wazirabad

SIALKOT (APP): Car-

etaker Provincial Minister for Higher & School Education Punjab Mansoor Qadir accompanied by Deputy Commissioner Gujranwala Fayyaz Ahmad Mohal visited the free flour points at Bhutta Palace and Royal Marriage Hall in Wazirabad.

They reviewed the registration process and free flour delivery process. Mansoor Qadir checked separate counters set up for women, men and senior citizens at the both centers.

The Minister and Deputy Commissioner inquired the women, men and senior citizens about the problems in the registration process. The Minister directed the officials concerned to

take immediate steps for resolving issues on the spot at centers.

He said the provision of free flour in a dignified manner to citizens was the top priority of government.

He also checked the weight and quality of flour at the centre in Bhutta Palace.

He directed the District Food Controller (DFC) to seal Murtaza Flour Mills and Maitla Mills along with supplying substandard flour at Bhutta Palace.

On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Fayyaz Ahmad Mohal briefed the Caretaker Provincial Minister about the arrangements in the flour distribution points. Mansoor Qadir

expressed satisfaction over the measures taken regarding the arrangements at the centres.

He directed the officers and staff that those who were coming to get free flour should be well guided if they were not eligible.

He said that the process of registration under Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) had been made faster and easier. The registration process would be completed in two days instead of three months.

Assistant Commissioner Wazirabad Muhammad Saleem, Assistant Director Colleges Zahid Farooq, DFC Muhammad Sajid and others were present on the occasion.

DC visits Deaf & Defective School

ATTOCK (APP): Deputy Commissioner Attock, Rao Atif Raza on Sunday visited the Deaf and Defective School People's Colony and Slow Learner School Darul Islam Colony.

The chief executive officer Education Malik Mohsin Abbas, CEO Health Dr Asad Ismail, DEO Education and Special Education Focal Person Salma Khatoun were also present on this occasion.

The deputy commissioner made a detailed visit to the children's learning

skills, audiology lab, sports lab and classrooms in the school.

He asked the school administration about the number of children in the school, problems faced by the children, attendance of teachers, school records, school funds, school upgradation and took a detailed briefing regarding curricular and co-curricular activities.

Rao Atif Raza gave special instructions to the CEO Health to set up a separate counter in the hospital for the examination of special

children. DC assured immediate resolution of the up-gradation of schools, lack of staff and other issues.

He said on this occasion that unfortunately, like the rest of the world, there is not so much awareness of education and training for special people in our country, in this regard, all possible cooperation will be done and the local community will be brought together to provide education and training for special people.

Sasta Bazaar set up for provision of relief to people

QUETTA (APP): On the special directive of Deputy Commissioner Naseerabad, Engineer Ayesha Zehri, Sasta Bazaar was organized in the premises of the AC office to provide relief to the people in the holy month of Ramazan.

Assistant Commissioner Dera Murad Jamali Sardarza Asadullah Sumalini along with Tehsildar Mujibur Rahman Satakzai and

Vice Chairman Municipal Committee Shah Muhammad inspected the Sasta Bazaar. Stalls of various food items were set up by various entrepreneurs including Anjuman Tajran, Utility Stores and Market Committee in Sasta Bazaar.

On behalf of Chairman Market Committee Nasirabad Mir Asif Jan Lahri, under the supervision of Deputy Director Market

Committee Ubaidullah Pindarani, a fruit and vegetable stall was set up where people bought with a 50 per cent discount.

A huge rush of people was seen at the stall set up under the leadership of Utility Stores Stall Area Manager Muhammad Hayat Bugti, where special subsidies were given on flour, cooking oil and ghee among other goods.

Commissioner for removal of illegal parking

MULTAN (APP): Commissioner Multan Division Engineer Amir Khattak directed officers concerned to remove all illegal parking stands set up outside the free flour distribution points charging fee from citizens.

Taking action on the reports of illegal parking stands outside flour distri-

bution points, the commissioner directed officers concerned to launch a comprehensive crackdown against illegal parking stands involved in charging fee from citizens.

As per directives of the commissioner, the AC City Seemal Mushtaq along with police launched a crack-

down against illegal parking stands and arrested various outlaws running parking stands illegally. The officer also get registered FIRs against them. Commissioner said in a statement issued here on Sunday that no one would be allowed to loot citizens by running illegal parking stands.



Amid recent slowdown in global trade, ‘green goods’ are the winning ticket: UNCTAD

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Global trade slowed down in the second half of 2022, but demand for environmentally friendly goods stayed strong, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). UNCTAD's latest Global Trade Update said that trade in "green goods", which use fewer resources and pollute less, grew by four per cent in the second half of the year, reaching a record \$1.9 trillion in 2022.

"This is good news for the planet, as these goods are key to protecting the environment and fighting climate change," said UNCTAD economist Alessandro Nicita, one of the report's authors.

Green goods that performed especially well in 2022 included electric and hybrid vehicles, non-plastic packaging and wind turbines.

The findings come days after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned in its flagship report that greenhouse gas emissions needed to go down now, and be cut by almost half by 2030, if the goal of keeping temperatures from rising more than 1.5

degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels is to be achieved.

Overall, global trade was worth a record \$32 trillion in 2022, but deteriorating economic conditions contributed to a downward trend in the second half of the year.

According to UNCTAD, the outlook for trade remains "uncertain"; the UN body cited geopolitical tensions, high commodity prices and record levels of public debt combined with high interest rates, as reasons for concern. UNCTAD's forecast says global trade is set to stagnate in the first half of 2023.

In the second half of the year, however, "positive factors" including a weaker US dollar – the main currency used in trade - stabilized shipping costs and fewer supply chain disruptions, could give trade a boost.

Despite global economic uncertainties, UNCTAD said that growth in green goods is here to stay, fueled by momentum on climate action. UNCTAD's latest Technology and Innovation Report released last week characterized this moment as the "beginning of a green technological revolution".

The report predicted that the

market for electric cars, solar and wind energy, green hydrogen and other more environmentally friendly technologies would quadruple in value by 2030 to reach \$2.1 trillion.

UNCTAD said it believes that international trade patterns will more and more closely reflect the green economic transition that's underway.

UNCTAD also warned that developed countries were seizing most of the economic opportunities related to green technologies, while developing countries were falling behind.

"Missing this green technological wave because of insufficient policy attention or a lack of investment targeted at building skills and capacities would have long-lasting negative consequences," the UN body's Technology and Innovation report maintained.

Among its recommendations, the UNCTAD report urged the international community to support emerging green industries in developing economies through global trade rules and technology transfers – so that developing countries could "catch up economically, while helping to protect the planet".

Fresh clashes rock France as protests shift to water dispute

SAINTESOLINE (AFP/APP): French police again clashed with protesters Saturday as campaigners in the southwest sought to stop the construction of giant water storage facilities, the latest flashpoint as social tensions erupt nationwide.

The violent scenes at Sainte-Soline came after days of unrest over President Emmanuel Macron's pensions reform, which forced the cancellation of a visit by King Charles III of the UK.

The protest movement against the pension reform has turned into the biggest domestic crisis of Macron's second mandate, with police and protesters clashing daily in Paris and other cities over the past week.

At Sainte-Soline, several protesters and members of security forces were injured in Saturday's confrontations at the banned protest. Campaigners there are trying to stop the construction of giant water "basins" to irrigate crops, which they say will distort access to water amid drought conditions.

A long procession of activists set off late morning for the site, numbering at least 6,000 people according to local authorities -- around 30,000 according to the organisers.

"While the country is rising up to defend pensions, we will simultaneously stand up to defend water," said the organisers.

Tornado kills at least 25 in Mississippi

JACKSON, United States (AFP/APP): Search efforts were underway Saturday after at least 25 people were killed by devastating tornadoes that ripped across the southern US state of Mississippi, tearing off roofs, smashing cars and flattening entire neighborhoods.

The powerful storm system, accompanied by thunderstorms and driving rain, cut a path of more than 100 miles (60 kilometers) across Mississippi late Friday, slamming several towns along the way.

The state's emergency management agency put the death toll at 25 people, and said dozens more were injured. Four people reported missing "have been found," it added.

Tens of thousands of people in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee remained without power.

In Rolling Fork, home to fewer than 2,000 people, an entire row of houses and buildings was demolished, leaving only scattered debris. Cars were overturned, fences were ripped up and trees uprooted, television footage showed.

Chinese-built hydropower plant to tackle power deficit

CHIKANKATA (Xinhua/APP): Zambia President Hakainde Hichilema officially commissioned a Chinese-built hydropower plant, following the switching on of the plant's fifth generator on Friday. The five generators at the Kafue Gorge Lower Hydropower Station, constructed by the Chinese firm Sinohydro Corporation Limited, added a total of 750 megawatts to the country's national grid.

Noting that China and Zambia completed the power station in "an ingenious way,"

Hichilema said the project showed the friendly relationship between the two countries, and his government is committed to further growing the relationship with China.

Hichilema added that the completion of the project was not only good for the country's energy sector but for the economy as a whole as energy is critical to drive an economy. Chinese Ambassador to Zambia Du Xiaohui said that the project was an important symbol of China-Africa friendship and cooperation. China, he said, will continue to contribute to the all-weather, all-dimensional, and high-quality cooperation with Zambia.

UN agency says over 9.5m livestock died across drought-affected HOA countries

ABABA (Xinhua/APP): At least 9.5 million livestock have died across the drought-affected Horn of Africa (HOA) countries of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has disclosed.

"Over 9.5 million livestock have died since the drought started, eroding the primary source of livelihood, income, and nutrition for pastoralist communities," the WFP said in a report issued Friday.

The WFP said that the drought due to five failed rainy seasons has had a devastating impact on the region's livestock, a crucial source of food and income for many communities. Figures from the agency show that an estimated 4 million livestock in Ethiopia, 3 million in Somalia, and 2.5 in Kenya

have died.

The WFP said the drought-induced catastrophe is further worsened as much of the Horn of Africa region is enduring abnormally high food prices because of macroeconomic difficulties exacerbated by domestic cereal shortages and global food and fuel supply shocks.

The United Nations had previously warned that drought-induced livestock deaths are consequently affecting children's development as they have less access to milk, eventually negatively affecting their nutrition.

According to figures from the WFP, an estimated 5.1 million children are acutely malnourished across the drought-affected regions of the three countries.

The WFP further said the drought is also affecting

access to education as families have been forced to move in search of livelihoods.

It said an estimated 3.6 million school-going children in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia face the risk of dropping out of school and girls are the most affected.

Noting the humanitarian needs are projected to increase should there be another poor rain season, the WFP said a multifaceted response, including both short-term relief efforts and longer-term solutions such as sustainable water management and climate adaptation measures, are required.

The WFP said it urgently requires 2.4 billion U.S. dollars in 2023 to meet the lifesaving relief food needs of 8.8 million drought-affected people across the region.

Tunisia coastguard recovers 29 bodies after migrant vessels capsized

TUNIS (AFP/APP): Tunisia's coastguard said Sunday the bodies of 29 migrants from sub-Saharan African countries had been recovered after three vessels capsized.

It also "rescued 11 illegal migrants of various African nationalities after their boats sank" off the central eastern coast, it said in a statement, citing three separate sinkings.

In one incident, a Tunisian fishing trawler recovered 19 bodies 58 kilometres (36 miles) off the coast after their boat capsized. A coastguard patrol off the coastal city of Mahdiya also recovered eight bodies and "rescued" 11 other migrants after their boat sank as it headed towards Italy.

Fishing trawlers in Sfax meanwhile recovered two other bodies.

A string of shipwrecks have left dozens of migrants dead and others missing since President Kais Saied made an incendiary speech last month, accusing sub-Saharan Africans of representing a demographic threat and causing a crime wave in Tunisia.

Black migrants in the country have faced a spike in violence and hundreds have been living in the streets for weeks in increasingly desperate conditions.

People fleeing poverty and violence in Sudan's Darfur region, West Africa and other parts of the continent have for years used Tunisia as a springboard for often perilous attempts to reach safety and better lives in Europe.

The Italian island of Lampedusa is just 150 kilometres (90 miles) off the

Tunisian coast, but Rome has pressured Tunisian authorities to rein in the flow of people, and has helped beef up the coastguard, which rights groups accuse of violence.

Italy's hard-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni warned Friday that Tunisia's "serious financial problems" risked sparking a "migratory wave" towards Europe.

She also confirmed plans for a mission to the North African country involving the Italian and French foreign ministers.

Meloni echoed comments earlier in the week by Josep Borrell, the European Union's foreign policy chief, who warned Tunisia risks economic collapse that could trigger a new flow of migrants to Europe -- fears Italy has since dismissed.

Cash scarcity affecting displaced persons observing Ramadan in northeast Nigeria

MAIDUGURI (AA/APP): The shortage of naira notes the currency of Nigeria is affecting access to food and other items for displaced people observing Ramadan in the northeast of the West African country, many affected people told Anadolu.

Adam Saleh, who lives in Madinatu camp for internally displaced people in northeastern Maiduguri, said his family of five began Ramadan worrying about what they could eat.

"As a Muslim, I consider everything a providence of God, but this year we were so afraid before the beginning of the fasting month," he said.

Saleh said his fears were due to a lack of

money to buy grain and other essentials to prepare local delicacies before the holy month.

The government's economic policies, which introduced new naira notes in December 2022, led to a shortage of cash in circulation and exacerbated tensions.

Saleh said he has no bank account and has abandoned his firewood business because customers stopped buying due to the cash shortage.

His neighbor Habib Modu, 47, recounted a similar experience. He said it was the first time in 10 years that he spent the holy month without sufficient food.

"This is the first time since 2015 that we are

experiencing this. Alhamdulillah. We continue with Ramadan," he said.

Some also said they rely on donations from generous people to observe fast. "Some gave us food, but we also need money to buy some essentials," said Hajara Muhammad, who has seven children.

An official, who was not authorized to speak about camp management, said there were more than 20,000 displaced people in three camps in the region.

According to a report from the UN, nearly 3 million people were forced to seek refuge in IDP camps in safer areas after fleeing their homes following terrorist attacks in the volatile northeast region.

More than half of the displaced population has returned to their homes and been resettled in communities by the Borno state government.

Nigerians also complain about the high cost of food and basic necessities.

Tajudeen Idowu, a bus driver in the commercial metropolis of Lagos, said he is spending twice as much this year as in previous years to prepare for Ramadan.

"The cost of living and food prices are high. Last year, I spent 60,000 naira notes (\$80) to buy food and other things for my family. This year, with 40,000 naira notes (\$200), I could not buy all the things I used to buy before Ramadan started," he said.

“Like a war zone”: volunteers travel miles to tornado-hit Mississippi

Rolling Fork (AFP/APP): Outside, houses are torn open and trees lie with their roots in the air. Inside, stretchers are lined up in front of tables overflowing with food.

In Rolling Fork, Mississippi, where a tornado caused chaos and death, volunteers are pouring in from surrounding towns to help.

The American Red Cross moved into a National Guard building less than 24 hours after the tornado struck Friday night, killing at least 25 people in the community of 2,000.

An ambulance is parked at the entrance of a room being used as an infirmary and, through the back door, boxes full of cereal bars and baby diapers keep arriving.

"We're trying to give people a place to stay overnight with food and medical support so they can

just have a place to lay their heads, because they've lost everything," said John Brown, a Red Cross official for Alabama and Mississippi.

The city is "like a war zone," he said. "It looks like a bomb went off."

Whether or not residents choose to stay in the town center, they will at least have access to information and food and regain some strength, Brown said.

Anna Krisuta, 43, and her 16-year-old son Alvaro Llecha sit in the shelter, one on a stretcher, the other on a chair, electric blue energy drinks in front of them.

Their house is "in pieces," Anna Krisuta says, putting on a brave smile.

Both pull out their cell phones to show the extent of the damage, captured on video.

The pair are not sure whether they will spend the night at the center. Maybe

they'd prefer to sleep in the car, Alvaro said, giving his mother a hesitant look.

The teenager said he survived only by hiding in the bathroom, which he considered was the safest room in their house.

"I thought I was going to die," he said, recounting the strong wind "rushing in through the bottom of the door." Lauren Hoda travelled 70 miles (110 kilometers) from Vicksburg to Rolling Fork to volunteer.

She described the mixture of sadness, grief and anger she feels at the "injustice" inflicted on the residents.

"When I woke up this morning, I wanted to cry for the people of this town because I don't think they had much time before (the tornado) came. There were people eating in restaurants, families in bed," said the 28-year-old, who also experienced Hurricane

Katrina in 2005.

She spent her Saturday night at Rolling Fork bringing donations from collection points: water, food, canned goods, diapers, wipes, medicine, deodorant, and toothpaste.

Jon Gebhardt, an assistant professor of military science at the University of Mississippi, travelled three hours to Rolling Fork, arriving in the middle of the night to help set up the center. "I cried quite a bit today," he said. "But this morning, when I woke up and saw the generosity and ability of this community to come together at such a difficult time, (I felt) lucky to be in Mississippi."

He said he was confident in the resilience of the Mississippi Delta.

"Will this community rebuild for the better and become a better version of itself in the next few years? Yes, I think so."

Turkmenistan stages parliamentary elections

ASHGABAT (AFP/APP): Parliamentary polls were underway on Sunday in Turkmenistan, a gas-rich nation ruled by one family for nearly two decades that does not tolerate political dissent or a free press.

The vote is the first under the Central Asian nation's new president, who took power following a hereditary succession in March 2022, and comes after the abolition of the legislature's upper house and the creation of a supreme body. Polling stations opened at 7:00 am (0200 GMT) and will close at 7:00 pm (1400 GMT), according to an AFP correspondent in the capital Ashgabat. Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic, is one of the world's most repressive, secretive states and little is known about how the regime makes day-to-day decisions.

No election has been judged free or fair by Western poll observers.

President Serdar Berdimukhamedov reassured voters, saying: "These elections will take place according to democratic principles, in line with local legislation and international law."

But with no opposition taking part in the vote, voter enthusiasm appeared limited. "I don't know the platform of the candidates," admitted retired 65-year-old Agamurad Biachimov before the ballot.

"Unfortunately I've not seen posters anywhere urging people to vote," he told AFP in Ashgabat.

It is difficult to find information about any policies, just the biographies of the 258 candidates listed in the "Turkmenistan Neutral", the successor newspaper to the old com-

munist party daily in Soviet times. Achir Ovezov, who works at Ashgabat's market, said he would not be voting. "I have to work day and night to feed my family and I don't know the candidates," he said.

But his absence is unlikely to stop the official turnout nearing 90 per cent.

Former dentist and health minister Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov came to power in 2006, succeeding the country's founding president Saparmurat Niyazov after his death.

Berdymukhamedov, who established a strong cult of personality during his tenure, handed the reins over to his son Serdar last year after a token snap election, but kept his position as chair of the upper house of parliament.

"I watched the inauguration of the president, a lot of people were expecting

major reforms from the new president," said entrepreneur Maksat Redjenov.

"We expected new factories to be built, the country to open up, the arrival of tourists, that state control would ease," he told AFP.

In January, Berdimukhamedov senior, aged 65, proposed abolishing the upper house -- created at his request in 2021 - and set up after a unanimous vote "a supreme representative body of people's power", the Halk Maslahaty or "People's Council". Also called Arkadag or "Protector", he was named head of the new body and observers say he remains the real power.

The new council's remit covers the main directions of Turkmenistan's domestic and foreign policy, overshadowing the unicameral national assembly and its 125 members.

Lebanese squabble over clock change

BEIRUTE (APP): Wracked by a crippling economic meltdown and political deadlock, Lebanon on Sunday added a seemingly odd question to its growing list of woes: "What time is it?" A last-minute decision to delay daylight savings by a month has left the small country divided between two time zones after the move was met with opposition from the influential Maronite Church. Lebanon's caretaker government announced Thursday its decision to delay rolling clocks forward until April 20, instead of the last week of March as is usually the case in the country and many others in the northern hemisphere.

Institutions including the church, as well as some schools and media outlets instead insisted on turning their clocks forward at midnight (2200 GMT on Saturday). While the government has not explained the move, a video shared widely on social media may provide an explanation. It shows a discussion between caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati and parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who asks the premier to delay the clock change until the end of Ramadan, in an apparent attempt to cater to Muslims who fast daily until sunset during the holy month.

Kenya police chief bans new opposition protests Monday

NAIROBI (AFP/APP): Kenya's police chief announced Sunday a ban on fresh opposition demonstrations called for Monday after protests last week degenerated into riots.

"We will not allow violent demonstrations," Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome told reporters. "The demonstrations they plan tomorrow (Monday) are illegal and will not be allowed."

Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga has urged people to take to the streets on Monday and Thursday for further protests against the surging cost of living in Kenya.

Last Monday's demonstrations -- which were also not authorised by police -- descended into violence, with riot police firing tear gas and water cannon at people hurling rocks and setting tyres ablaze. A university student was killed by police fire while 31 officers were injured in running battles in Nairobi and opposition strongholds in western Kenya. More than 200 people

were arrested, including several senior opposition politicians, while Odinga's own convoy was hit with tear gas and water cannon.

"You all saw what happened last week and we won't allow that to happen again where hooligans come to town to loot and destroy people's property and businesses," Koome said.

It was the first major political violence since President William Ruto took office six months ago after beating Odinga in an election his rival claims was "stolen".

Many Kenyans are struggling to put food on the table, battling high prices for basic goods as well as a plunging local currency and a record drought that has left millions hungry.

Ruto, who is leaving the country on Sunday for a trip to Europe, has called on the opposition leader to halt the protest action.

"I am telling Raila Odinga that if he has a problem with me, he should face me and stop terrorising the country," he said Thursday.

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Subsidy Schemes and Economic Frailty

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the government was taking all possible measures including the provision of free flour to the needy to reduce the difficulties of poor people in the holy month of Ramazan. The premier ordered NADRA, BISP, and other government departments to broaden BISP's database by including all eligible people and ensuring the provision of free flour to all needy. The Prime Minister also directed the authorities to immediately open counters of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and BISP at the flour distribution points to facilitate the public.

The holy month of Ramazan began amid heightened inflation, while hoarders and illegal profiteers have unleashed unrestricted unimaginable price hikes rendering essential items and commodities out of the reach of the poor people. Recently, the coalition government has announced the provision of free-of-cost wheat flour in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Federal Capital Territory to provide some relief to the poor during the Ramazan. Long queues of poor and needy at sales centers, multiple incidents of mismanagement, and clashes had been reported in different cities, while over half a dozen deaths also occurred during the distribution of free flour over the past few days. The government machinery including District level management, revenue department ACs, and DCs are at work, while the Provincial Chiefs and the Prime Minister rushed to the free Atta sale points in the field to oversee the ground situation, make a photographic record of flour supply to authenticate their public service and highlight their role in the fight against the poverty. Interestingly, neither the federal government nor provincial administrations in Sindh, Balochistan, GB, and Azad Kashmir initiated such magnificent endeavor to provide relief to the poor during the holy month, whether the people living in those regions are wealthier and not entitled to this privilege or no imminent polls are scheduled there.

Realistically, the recurrent waves of inflation pushed over 45 percent population into multidimensional poverty, while a significant portion of the country's population had left with no choice except to reduce their daily meal, to short cut their necessities in terms of clothes, healthcare, children's education to satisfy their urgent expenses. According to the World Bank report, 2 million Pakistanis get below the poverty line on an annual basis while these figures have touched 18 million in the current year. Meanwhile, unrestricted price hikes, reduced business and industrial activities, massive unemployment, and poor governance continuously added to the problem of poverty. The coalition government has struck a unique situation as the rulers confront a wide range of economic and administrative issues along with aggressive opposition, negative public approval, and the IMF's refusal for the revival of EFF program. A majority of friendly nations are annoyed with Islamabad's frequent requests for financial support and categorically advised Pakistani rulers to stand up on their own feet.

Unfortunately, after seven and a half decades of independence from colonial rule, our nation witnessed an acute depletion in all sectors ranging from agriculture, technology, trade and tourism, industry, education, power generation, and others. Every nook and corner of the national life exclusively portrays the chaos, incompetence, and selfishness of the leaders and caretakers. As the national economy has practically collapsed, the country's leadership is still pursuing surgery politics, and cosmetic measures to cure an everlasting ailment. Previously, the incumbent rulers demanded a sacrifice from the masses and then ruined all gains through the reckless implementation of Dar's dogma. Realistically, one bag of free flour will bring no change in public lives, the government must provide targeted relief in a dignified manner permanently to all poor segments of society. Meanwhile, a long-term and comprehensive strategy is essential to end persistent economic frailty once and for all.

Arab world needs to get to grips with its water problem

Hafed Al-Ghwel

ly running out.

This week, the global community observed World Water Day, which coincided with a midterm review of the UN's Water Action Decade. The occasion served to raise awareness of, and draw attention to, the water scarcity issues the world is facing, and to promote the security and sustainability of the planet's freshwater resources.

After all, safeguarding our dwindling water supplies underpins many of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the success of which is under serious threat given concerns about the adequate availability of, and access to, clean water, and the effects of diminished and unsafe water supplies on, for example, health and food security.

Occasions such as this provide opportunities for leaders, governments, businesses, and communities to reflect on what progress has been made on the issue, and to determine whether the planet needs urgent interventions to speed up the progress on efforts to ensure universal access to clean, safe drinking water and proper sanitation. For the Arab world in particular, however, time is quick-

The Middle East and North Africa region contains 11 of the 17 most water-stressed countries on the planet. This affects nine out of 10 children in a region that has the world's highest fertility rates.

About 60 percent of the region's water needs are met by imports, a figure that will continue to rise as the population increases. In the next decade, for instance, the average per capita share of Nile waters will decrease by a quarter in a region where agriculture accounts for 80 percent of water use, and nearly half of potable water is unaccounted for or "lost" as a result of leakages, which diminish the overall quality of life.

It has been projected that by 2050, hundreds of millions of people across the Arab world will suffer absolute water scarcity; some in North Africa are already feeling the effects of this which is the most water scarce sub-region, with only 1.4 percent of the world's renewable freshwater reserves.

Throw in the myriad crises that converge in a perennially fragile part of the world, along with threats to water from cli-

mate change and plastic pollution, and intense water scarcity quickly transforms into a geopolitical issue which, if poorly handled, will trigger or prolong conflicts, endanger food security, and spark massive displacements.

In a region marked by conflict, sectarian tensions, uprisings, transnational crime and terror, concerns about droughts and dry riverbeds might seem relatively insignificant. Yet, for many centuries, access to abundant water resources has played a key role in safeguarding human security in the region.

The scarcity of water is primarily a result of the natural aridity resulting from a warm desert climate plus limited surface water and groundwater supplies, which make it very challenging, but not impossible, to meet local water needs.

Unfortunately, climate change is exacerbating the region's vulnerability, potentially making its water insecurity a threat multiplier that will intensify the dysfunction in a fragile water cycle, and undermine sustainable development and progress in efforts to address issues such as

health, hunger, equality, jobs, education, industry, natural disasters, and peace.

Without serious intervention, unprecedented cooperation and concerted efforts to confront this worsening crisis, poverty-stricken, conflict-ravaged countries will be the hardest-hit by unmitigated water scarcity and its devastating effects on the region's development, economic competitiveness, long-term stability, food and energy security, and habitability.

No one will be spared. Even though countries in the Middle East and North Africa region are not the biggest polluters, the irony is that they stand to suffer the most from runaway climate change.

Some experts predict the next major conflict in this region will be about water; which is not such a far-fetched idea given that civil wars have already been sparked by tensions over scarce resources. Sudan, Eritrea and Syria have experienced outright conflicts or flare-ups in violence either driven by resource scarcity, or intensified by it. Such wars are likely to increase in fre-

quency and scale, creating migratory waves that will add to the pressure on dwindling resources in the places that take in refugees, exporting instability to previously "safe" and habitable zones.

Worse yet, all of the major water sources in the region cross borders. If we couple this with political landscapes fraught with tensions, and the fact that water is not only a finite resource but also a major commodity, it could easily trigger conflicts between countries.

In Turkiye, the construction and filling of the Ilisu Dam on the Tigris not only exacerbated tensions between the Turkish government and the Kurdish minority in Mardin province, it also raised concerns in downstream Iraq. Southern governors, in particular, saw their share of Tigris water drop by more than 50 percent, adding the problem of water shortages to a combination of low rainfall and depleted soils that have halted the cultivation of rice, corn, sesame and cotton.

These stresses have dovetailed with other fragilities in Iraq that have sparked waves of protests

over a three-year period, signaling the kind of future in store for the Euphrates-Tigris River basin, which is shared by Turkiye, Syria, Iraq and Iran, and portending yet another source of regional strain.

A similar scenario is playing out across the Red Sea. Near century-old tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia remain high over the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which Cairo believes will shrink its share of Nile waters. The two countries have failed to make headway in direct and brokered talks; to Egypt, any disruption to the flow of the Nile constitutes an existential crisis, given the river's strategic importance to a country in which 96 percent of the total land area is desert.

Fortunately, the issue of water scarcity in the region is not yet a hopeless situation. There are still a number of great opportunities to address the growing scale of water insecurity issues - for example by promoting equitable, resilient trans-boundary water relations, while countries individually work to reduce their dependence on dwindling

(Continued Page-7)

Xi and Putin's letters to the world: A diplomatic epistolary

Dr. Diana Galeeva

In literature, the term "epistolary novel" refers to a work of fiction written in the form of letters or other documents. On the eve of the recent meeting between the leaders of China and Russia in Moscow, the heads of both states wrote articles for newspapers in each other's countries.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's piece was published in Jenmin Jibao (People's Daily), and Chinese President Xi Jinping's in the Rossiyskaya Gazeta (Russian Gazette).

I believe we can apply the epistolary concept to analyzing the discourses by the leaders of the two states in these articles, which can be seen as letters to the peoples of both nations as well as to the world. I will focus on "diplomatic epistolary" to explain why Xi was in Moscow and what rationale this reveals in Russian-Chinese relations.

Of his expectations for the meeting with Xi in Russia, Putin noted that they had already met about 40 times and that Russia associated "great expectations" with the visit of the Chinese leader.

"This is also a great opportunity for me to see a good old friend with whom we have the warmest relationship," he wrote.

According to Putin, relations between the two countries "have reached the highest level in their entire history and continue to grow stronger."

More specifically, in terms of bilateral relations, by the end of 2022, trade between the two countries had doubled, he said, and reached \$185 billion, which is a new record. Russia now expects it to pass the \$200 billion mark not in 2024 — as previously predicted — but this year, while the share of settlements in

The Russian president also highlighted the US declarations of Russia as an "immediate threat" and China as a "strategic competitor."

Putin expressed gratitude to China for its "bal-

the common Eurasian space into a network of 'exclusive clubs' and military blocs" but added that "no one will be able to achieve this."

Xi wrote that his visit to Russia was "aimed at strengthening friendship,

Regarding Western activities in the Asia-Pacific region, he said NATO was trying to "give its activities a global scope."

He expressed his belief that "some forces are persistently striving to split the common Eurasian space into a network of 'exclusive clubs' and military blocs" but added that "no one will be able to achieve this." Xi wrote that his visit to Russia was "aimed at strengthening friendship, cooperation, and peace" and noted that during his meetings with the Russian leader they "set the tone for the sustainable development of bilateral relations." He said that Russia and China both adhere to the concept of "eternal friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation" and relations between the countries are based on the principles of "non-alignment, non-confrontation, and non-direction against third parties." The bilateral relationship serves as "a standard of interstate relations of a new type," according to Xi, and "multipolarity, economic globalization and the democratization of international relations" is an "irreversible trend."

have increased. In 2022, two bridge crossings between Russia and China were built in border regions across the Amur River.

On geopolitics, Putin said that Russia, China and their allies stand for "the formation of a world order based on international law" and not on certain "rules" that serve the needs of the "golden billion." He considers the Chinese "Global Security Initiative" to be consistent with Russian approaches.

anced line in connection with the events taking place in Ukraine, for understanding their background and real reasons." He welcomed the willingness of Beijing to play a "constructive role in resolving the crisis."

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cooperation, and peace" and noted that during his meetings with the Russian leader they "set the tone for the sustainable development of bilateral relations."

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announced plan for resolving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine "reflects to the maximum the unity of the world community's views on overcoming the Ukraine crisis," the Chinese leader said.

These letters are illustrative, firstly, of the close ties between the two leaders, who consider themselves "good old friends" with the "warmest relationship." On the issue of bilateral relations, the "unlimited" partnership that was declared in

a joint statement on Feb. 4, 2022, will continue, as China described these relations as being at a "historic high." This is not a formal alliance but surely represents a close strategic partnership — geopolitically, economically, militarily, and politically.

Secondly, after emerging as the most "sensational" mediator in the Middle East, brokering the recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Beijing might be heading toward another diplomatic victory by potentially brokering peace between Russia and Ukraine, after suggesting a 12-point plan to end the conflict.

During the Munich Security Conference, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed concerns when he met his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. "The secretary was quite blunt in warning about the implications and consequences of China providing material support to Russia or assisting Russia with systematic sanctions evasion," officials said.

Wang nonetheless stated that China would be introducing a "peace plan" for Ukraine and Russia, in addition to maintaining relations with Europe.

Overall, these letters to the world reveal a clear message that peace negotiations will probably take place under Beijing's aegis in the short term, and relations between Russia and China will be maintained at their "highest" levels in the medium term.

According to the philosopher Confucius: "Politics should be beautiful." To what extent this partnership between China and Russia will turn out to be "beautiful," and to what extent the messages from the two leaders form a "diplomatic epistolary," remains to be seen.

Saudi Arabia and Greece share many commonalities

Alexis Konstantopoulos

Each year, March 25 marks the insurrection of the Greek people against the Ottoman Empire and the rebirth of an ancient and great nation-state, the cradle of European civilization. Today, we celebrate the 202nd anniversary of that day in Riyadh with our Saudi partners and friends.

Our countries share much in common. Both modern Saudi Arabia and Greece have origins in ancient and distinguished civilizations, and both are committed to peace, stability, security, and development in the region. Because of this, Greece attaches considerable importance to the strategic relationship it has forged with the Kingdom.

Thanks to the successful visits of our prime minister to Riyadh in October 2021

and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Athens in July 2022, the last two years have been extremely fruitful in the promotion of our bilateral ties. Our leaders set up a Strategic Partnership Council that will allow for annual summits, while seven different sub-committees will be working throughout the year to explore further opportunities in government and business.

During the last year, over 20 government-to-government and business-to-business agreements and memoranda of understanding have been signed between Greece and Saudi Arabia. They have built a framework of cooperation in fields such as renewable energy, infrastructure and connectivity, culture,

sports, science, healthcare, shipping, and many other sectors. Greek and Saudi businesses are increasing their synergies in mutually beneficial projects while exploring additional opportunities since our economies have many complementarities.

Another very promising development was the formal setting up of our Greek-Saudi Business Council last October in Athens with the participation of many prominent businesspeople, such as its two chairpersons, Lubna Al-Olayan from Saudi Arabia and Achilleas Konstantakopoulos from Greece. This council, backed by our relevant chambers of commerce, will guide our private sec-

tors to explore and better seize the many opportunities across a variety of business fields.

Saudi Arabia has embarked on a significant reform program through Vision 2030, which is changing the face of the country at an impressive speed. Greece, with its expertise, is eager to participate and support Saudi Arabia in its future course. In a nutshell, Greek enterprises in the fields of construction, consultancy, logistics, design, engineering, project management and others, are very interested in being part of Vision 2030. At the same time, there are significant opportunities for investment from Saudi Arabia to Greece in the fields of

infrastructure, tourism, energy, renewable energy sources, information and communication technologies, health, and logistics.

For example, in the field of energy, Greece could easily become a hub for transporting energy from the Gulf toward Europe, as well as a bridge between the Arab world and the European continent. An extra support mechanism in this direction is EU funding, part of the Greek National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which allows for significant investments in the fields of innovation and green energy. These are expected to exceed 44 billion (\$47 billion) by 2030 through 21 actions financed by the aforementioned funding. As far as the hydrogen energy sector is concerned,

there are also many opportunities for cooperation. Hydrogen is going to be an important part of our country's energy mix and a key to the decarbonization of our economy.

Greece is also an ideal investment destination, as it offers access to all markets in the EU, the wider Mediterranean area, the Middle East and North Africa. The Greek government has also created the necessary legislative framework for attracting strategic foreign investments by very recently voting on an array of lucrative incentives.

We will continue to work closely together in all fields and support each other as strategic partners. As we celebrate Greek Independence Day, we know that our Saudi friends are celebrating with us.

As our wells run dry, it is time to give up on bottled water

As the world marked yet another International Day of Water on March 22, a report by the UN warned that even today, more than 2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and castigated the two main culprits responsible for this.

Firstly, it accused governments of not investing in projects to ensure that clean water reaches every household. Secondly, it blamed the activities of the bottled water industry, which has experienced multifold growth primarily as a result of the failure of governments to meet demand.

The report presents some astounding facts about this industry, which it describes as an impediment to the world achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal of providing clean drinking water to everyone on the planet by 2030.

The UN said that the industry, which almost doubled in size between 2013 and 2020, is set to double again, and be worth \$500 billion, in the next seven years. While some of the major consumers of bottled water make a conscious choice to drink it, a large majority do so because they have no other option and are obliged to buy water to survive. Thus the growth in the industry is a direct reflection of the failure of the governments to provide safe water for their citizens.

The math is clear: It would take about \$114 billion a year between now and 2030 to ensure safe water is available to everyone. The investment required is the equivalent of about 42 percent of the money spent on bottled water, globally.

It does not take a genius to see that consumers of bottled water pay a much higher price for each liter they consume than what it would cost to use tap water. This adversely affects a vast majority of consumers who are already poor and struggling to eke out a living.

Therefore governments are effectively forcing the poor and disenfranchised to spend more on one of the most essential resources for survival, all because those governments have failed to make the necessary investments.

But it is not only consumers that are harmed by the success of the bottled water industry; nature is the other major victim of the unregulated growth. There are several issues to consider. The first is the perception that bottled water is safer, cleaner and healthier than tap water. The UN report accused the beverage industry of promoting this

perception, even though it is not true in many, if not most, cases.

The quality of bottled water depends on many factors, such as the source and the treatment processes used, such as chlorination, ultraviolet disinfection, ozonation or reverse osmosis. It also depends on storage conditions, which are

Ranvir S. Nayar

Another irony is that this misplaced public perception of the quality of bottled water has come about despite the fact that the bottled water industry faces far fewer checks and tests than municipal water supplies are subject to. It is a farcical situation that while municipal water supplies, which are managed by governments in most places, are subject to thorough testing, as they should be, the bottled water industry gets away with practically no tests at all, and certainly none that are adequate given the diverse nature and size of the industry. Indeed, if the industry was subject to the same rigorous standards as municipal water supplies, it is certain that it would be a much smaller and considerably more expensive and exclusive industry. The greatest need now is for such a requirement to be introduced, even if it disrupts the industry — or even kills it. The other big issue, about which there is little information in the public domain, is the severe impact of the industry on natural water resources. This has become an increasingly relevant and strategic issue given the effects of global warming and extreme changes to our climate, which are resulting in prolonged droughts during which large rivers and lakes are drying up in many parts of the world, most notably the US and Europe. Yet while citizens in many countries face the growing possibility, or actuality, of having to ration the water they consume, the bottled water industry has been siphoning water from natural basins without any limits.

affected by duration, light exposure, ambient temperature and whether the water is packaged in glass or plastic bottles.

Bottled water can contain inorganic pollutants, such as heavy metals, and organic pollutants, such as pesticides, as well as traces of microplastics, which have spread all over the world in part as a result of the widespread use of plastic for bottling water and the subsequent dumping of empty bottles.

microplastics in the soil, water and air.

The report criticizes the bottled water industry by pointing out that the mineral composition of the water can vary significantly not only between brands, but within the same brand in different countries, and even between different bottles of the same batch. This effectively puts paid to the claims of bottled water being inherently safer or healthier.

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There is little doubt that investing in piping safe water to all homes would be a much more sustainable, economical and practical solution. It is time for governments to wake up to this fact and begin investing in it.

There is still enough time to ensure piped water reaches everyone by the deadline set for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, provided we begin to act on it now. Will we?

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In the US, for example, Nestle Waters extracts 3 million liters a day from Florida Springs. In France, Danone extracts up to 10 million liters a day from Evian-les-Bains in the French Alps. In China, the Hangzhou Wahaha Group extracts up to 12 million liters each day from Changbai Mountains springs.

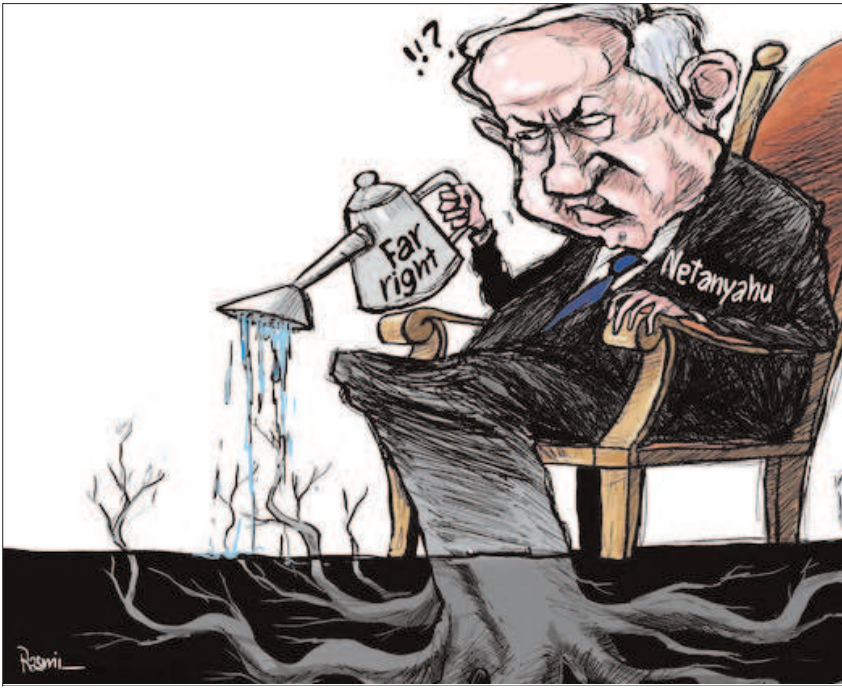
There is little data on the total global volume of water being removed and under what conditions, economic or environmental.

It is crucial that national governments, or at least multilateral agencies such as UN Water, collect and analyze data on how much water is being removed by the bottled water industry, from which sources they are taking it, and what the environmental effects of this are, locally, regionally and globally.

In the past, when droughts were less frequent, it might not have mattered so much. But now, as the world faces the certainty of a dearth of water, it is crucial that this industry be subjected to much more scrutiny of the all-round effects it is having on society, both economic and environmental.

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The tragic irony of a month of war and peace

Tariq A. Al Maena

The month of March this year heralds a new Ramadan, a month of fasting and prayers for more than 1.9 billion Muslims the world over. And yet it also celebrates the sordid 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

It was also a month that Ayesha, a young and fragile Iraqi girl was looking forward to her seventh birthday. Those aspirations were quickly snuffed out by a bomb that killed her.

It was those first images we witnessed that truly reflected the operation that then US President George W. Bush dubbed as 'Operation Freedom'. Yes, Ayesha was free from further tyranny, and countless other innocent souls followed her path toward freedom from the display of shock and awe that fol-

lowed.

Many world leaders were appealing for restraint against this very forthcoming disaster. People with conscience spoke against the war.

There were less catastrophic options on hand. Those dead today were living souls then; men, women, and innocent children, and with no inkling of the weapons of mass destruction already set in motion to be unleashed on them. And yet the chorus of Bush and Tony Blair, the British PM at the time, insisted on doing what they said was right.

In their pursuit of the senseless destruction of living human beings, they expedited the urgency and phoney necessity of this atrocity. They sold it to a willing public as an obligation to combat the dangers of the weapons of mass destruction about to be unleashed on them. The US media eagerly lapped it up.

When markets and hospitals were bombed, and lives had brutally ended, Rumsfeld smirked that these were casualties of 'war'. Not an expression of concern, but one of conceit. And other members of the administration scurried about, in a pathetic attempt to explain the ethics of this campaign to the rest of the disbelieving and disturbed world.

Hague-based rights body "unaccountable" and "out-right dangerous" to the United States and said any probe of US service members would be "an utterly unfounded, unjustifiable investigation. If the court comes after us, we will not sit quietly," he warned.

Just a couple of decades ago, Ayesha was sapped of her short life and the last of her blood on that plot of dirt has dried a long time ago.

Today is no end in sight that justified the means, morally or otherwise.

When the slaughter of the Iraqi people began, the media sanitised the fare presented to their viewers. The carnage caused by cluster bombs dropped by B-52s on civilians, killing, maiming, or injuring scores of helpless people was blissfully withheld.

Instead, to justify the invasion, the media shifted its focus to events of faults and abuse by the Iraqis. Or short personalised segments about the brave men and women carrying out this task. And those within

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Arab world needs to get to grips with its water problem

(Continued from Page-6)

precious groundwater supplies.

In addition, policies can be implemented and interventions mounted to ensure uninterrupted access to potable water for all in society, alongside efforts to adapt or mitigate the water-related effects of climate change.

A failure to build on the momentum of the intensifying global climate fight would risk plunging the most water-scarce region in the world into chaos.

For now, the biggest challenge remains restoring

the equilibrium between what is available and what the region consumes by protecting the natural replenishment of the water sources that underpin food and energy security, industrialization, competitiveness, regional integration, and improvements to the quality of life.

It can only be hoped that the first UN Water Conference in 50 years, which took place in New York this week, will deliver a much-needed wake-up call that can drive collective action among governments, regional blocs and global development organi-

zations.

Water should also be a top item on the agenda during the UN Climate Change Conference, COP28, in Dubai this year, turning it from a source of apprehension into a vehicle for cooperation that can transcend conflict, reduce regional tensions, overcome shared challenges, and promote common interests.

Integrated water development and management must be top global priorities if we are to achieve sustainable water, food and energy security while ensuring green and inclusive growth for all.

Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.

What does Netanyahu hope to achieve with his European tour?

Benjamin Netanyahu has always felt more comfortable spending time outside of Israel than in it. This might sound odd for someone who has built his entire career on a rather extreme nationalist version of Zionism.

He spent a considerable part of his formative years in the US, at a time when Israel's politics, society and economy were dominated by the left in all its shades. Being born into a family with deep roots in the intellectual right, a position that during his youth was rather ostracized and marginalized in Israel, his place of refuge was mainly America.

At one point he even changed his surname to Nitai, suggesting that he was making it easier for Americans to pronounce. Some suggested he was not comfortable with his Israeli identity and contemplating settling elsewhere.

Throughout his political career, it has been hard to tell exactly what he stands for. The gap between his rhetoric and his policies is impossible to explain. Has it all been power for the sake of power, led by opportunism, or have there been some ideological foundations underpinned by a value system to support a leader who is mainly a pragmatist?

In his heyday, his intelligence and charisma, combined with media skills and a manipulative nature, propelled him to become the most powerful politician Israel had seen for a very long time. However, what we have witnessed since he returned to the prime minister's office in December

last year is a pale version of that man.

Deep down he must know that his sixth government is a cynical aberration, even for someone whose cynicism and political buccaneering have played a major part in his becoming the longest serving prime minister in the country's history.

His actions and body language tell of someone who understands that he has run out of ideas and people to fool. He must also have realized by now that, beyond a relatively small number of supporters among the "Bibist" cult of loyalists, he has lost all credibility. The hundreds of thousands of people across the country, and abroad, who are protesting against his current administration's actions are a constant reminder of this.

In search of some refuge from the insanity of this situation, Netanyahu has become a frequent flier, heading off on weekends abroad. However, these escapist trips could hardly be described as offering any respite from his troubles.

What might be hurting him most about these many visits abroad since forming his latest administration, is the cold shoulder — frozen, even — with which he is being met.

Inspired by former US President Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Netanyahu, who has always fashioned himself as a statesman of the first order and as having Churchillian qualities, has been greeted by lukewarm receptions from his hosts

Yossi Mekelberg

and heated protests in the streets. He might once have been propped up by his self-aggrandizing pose, but nowadays hardly anyone in the world he visits even remotely falls for this.

And if his government continues its program of so-called judicial reforms, which are bound to destroy the very fabric of his country's democracy, he might find himself not only under siege by protesters at home, but also a pariah in all the capitals in which he and, not least, his wife have long been used to enjoying luxurious weekends.

In fact, one of the big mysteries during the short time that Netanyahu's current coalition has been in power is why he insists on traveling abroad at all. It only fuels more anger at home, while overseas he receives lectures in democracy from world leaders wherever he goes.

Like any Israeli leader, the kudos that come from a visit to the White House are his dream, but Washington is currently in no hurry to invite an Israeli prime minister who is undermining one of the major pillars of the bond between the two countries: Their shared liberal-democratic values.

In a year during which Israel is celebrating the 75th anniversary of its independence, there might, under normal circumstances, have been little doubt that a celebratory meeting between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu would take place. However, neither officials in Washington nor

America's Jewish community care to be associated with someone who is taking the Jewish state to a very dark place at this stage in its short history.

Instead, the White House, in a public rebuttal to the Israeli government, has expressed its support for President Isaac Herzog's continuing efforts to seek a solution to the constitutional crisis that is consistent with democratic principles.

Common sense would seem to dictate that while his government is following a path that involves legislating for the most radical constitutional changes, which will eliminate both elements of the expression "liberal democracy," and while masses of people are protesting in the streets, the Israeli prime minister should limit his time abroad and concentrate on resolving this domestic crisis before it escalates any further.

Instead, almost every weekend, accompanied on most occasions by his wife, Sarah, and a sizable entourage, Netanyahu packs his suitcase and heads for yet another world capital. In the very short time this government has been in office, he has already been to Paris, Rome, Berlin and, most recently, London.

These excursions make use of specially chartered aircraft, and many pilots are said to have refused to fly them in protest against the judicial coup. Netanyahu is spending entire weekends in luxurious hotels, although his official meetings are usually very short.



Kazakhstan ready to strengthen long-term economic partnership with Pakistan: Kazak Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Minister for National Economy, Republic of Kazakhstan A. Kuanytyrov has said that Kazakhstan was willing to strengthen lasting and long-term economic and trade relations with Pakistan. He said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan are engaged in mutual discussions for long-term economic partnership, which would pave the way for economic and trade cooperation between the two countries in the future.

The Kazakh Minister said this while briefing to the international media in Astana, Kazakhstan.

He said, Pakistan has engines of growth like Karachi, Lahore and Faisal-

abad with which businessmen of Kazakhstan can get benefits from business connections, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

A. Kuanytyrov said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan could play an important role in regional Economic and trade Integration, for which negotiations were going on in both countries. He said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan had opportunities for economic and trade cooperation in many sectors including textile, agriculture and energy.

A. Kuanytyrov said that the volume of mutual trade between Pakistan and Kazakhstan was much less than its potential, which needed to be further

increased.

He said that regional trade was very important without which the dream of economic prosperity in the region would not be realized. He said that the concept of a middle corridor was very important for regional connectivity from which all regional economies could get benefits.

The minister said that Kazakhstan is currently in trade balance and "we are striving for sustainable development for which we are working on stable economic policies." He said that they were following the policy of developing their country's current geopolitical position for geo-economic benefits.

He said that revenue collection, food security and Small and Medium Enterprises were the pillars of our economic policies.

He said that currently, 45 percent women were working in the SME sector, adding that the government was trying for the maximum Foreign Direct Investment in Kazakhstan and there was already investment in Kazakhstan from European Union and Pacific countries.

He said that the Middle Corridor concept was very important in the economic policy of Kazakhstan and along with this, we were following the Trans Caspian policy which would pave the way for economic

integration between the countries of the region.

The minister said that Kazakhstan had recently completed constitutional and political reforms and within ten months the process of reforms and elections was completed.

He said that after these constitutional reforms in Kazakhstan, the atmosphere for economic and investment would be smooth, from which a new face of Kazakhstan would be seen.

Free and fair elections in Kazakhstan will start a new democratic era in the country and it will have a positive impact on investment and economic inclusion in the country, he added.



ISLAMABAD: People purchasing vegetable during holy fasting month of Ramadan at sasta bazar in Federal Capital.

Instability, delay in IMF program aggravating economic crisis: PIAF

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has observed that the delay in the resumption of the IMF loan program and political instability exacerbated the country's vulnerability through the depletion of foreign exchange reserves, as the resulting rupee depreciation amplified inflationary pressures by magnifying the effect of global price increase.

PIAF Chairman Faheem ur Rehman Saigol asked the government to formulate long-term and consistent policies for high industrial growth and sizeable improvement in exports, which is the actual remedy of Pakistan's prosperity.

The PIAF Chief said that trade and industry need low cost energy to bring down their cost of production, keeping their goods competitive in the international market. He said that the government would have to reduce the price of electricity along with the cut in the prices of petroleum products to bring down the cost of doing business and to promote industrial activities. He said that the business activities were already in decline and in this situation the government should take serious steps to cut the cost of doing business, as continued hike in oil rates would further enhance the

cost of production, making transport more expensive.

Faheem Saigol said that the economy of Pakistan, particularly the SMEs are striving to deal with the present economic crunch and need to get support. Instead of providing subsidies or waivers, it is unjust to overburden the industries with hike in cost of production. He observed that the burden of the surge in oil price in the international market is immediately transferred to masses by the government but the process of reduction in the prices is always very slow, he noted.

He said that a concerted approach is required to encourage increased localization of the manufacturing base, along with the lowering of energy intensity of the economy by ensuring energy efficiency and conservation. Moreover, amid the growing issues related to climate change and inadequate food security situation, there is an urgent need to formulate a well-thought-out strategy to meet these challenges, he said.

He said that the experience from FY22 brought to the fore once again the need to address the country's structural weaknesses, such as a narrow base of foreign exchange earnings and meager inflows of foreign investment.

He stressed that priority should be given to producing new varieties of seeds

that are suitable to varying weather conditions and to devise a framework that emphasizes water management strategies to increase agricultural productivity.

Unless attention is paid to all factors that hamper industrial and exports growth, the country might not be able to achieve the desired results, he warned.

He said that businesses had been bearing the brunt of very high interest rate, issues of the Federal Board of Revenue and high energy prices.

He said that the economy was already in a stabilization phase when widespread flooding hit a large part of the country at the start of the current fiscal year. He added that the flooding was likely to impinge on the country's real economic activity through various channels, fearing that losses in agriculture emerging from the damages to crops and livestock were likely to transmit to the rest of the economy through various backward and forward linkages.

The large-scale destruction of infrastructure in the affected provinces might also undermine the country's growth prospects during the year.

He said that the SBP avoided providing any range for the growth rate of the current financial year apparently due to the worsening economic situation.

Pak business delegation made week-long visit to Ethiopia

ISLAMABAD (APP): A 70-member delegation of businessmen and investors from Pakistan made a week-long visit to Ethiopia to review the business and investment opportunities in the Ethiopian markets.

The business delegation, led by Ibrahim Khalid Tawab, Honorary Counsel General of Ethiopia in Karachi, visited Ethiopia from 5 to 10 March to explore potential business opportunities and establish relationships with Ethiopian counterparts.

The delegation included industrialists from different sectors of the industry. During the visit, they had the opportunity to meet with several high-ranking government officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Head of Investment Commission and Minister of State for Diplomatic

Affairs.

These meetings allowed the delegation to learn more about the business environment in Ethiopia and explore potential collaborations between businesses in Pakistan and Ethiopia.

The delegation also had business-to-business and business-to-government meetings to explore potential collaborations and partnerships.

Meanwhile, Honorary Counsel General of Ethiopia said that Ethiopia was a large market in the African region with a population of 120 million, thus the total market of Pakistan and Africa was 350 million.

He said that Ethiopia was the hub of business and trade in the African region and there were great opportunities for mutual trade between the two countries in the future.

He said that both Africa

is an untapped market and Ethiopia can be a gateway for Pakistan in Africa, which can be beneficial for our textile and pharmaceutical sector.

He said that there were great opportunities for Pakistani businessmen in cement and fertilizer in Ethiopia, besides great interest in Pakistani businessmen in this regard.

Ibrahim Tawab said that various sectors including textile, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, agriculture and food sector, packaging and paper industry and other major sectors participated in the delegation with us. He said that this was a large and high-powered delegation in the history of mutual trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Ethiopia, which will play its role in promoting the mutual trade relations between Ethiopia and

Pakistan.

Ibrahim Khalid said that the delegation met with the Chief of Ethiopian Airlines, who announced that Ethiopian Airlines will be flying to Karachi very soon.

He said that this announcement is expected to improve connectivity and provide new opportunities for trade and travel between the two countries.

The delegation also met with the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority to promote Pakistani pharmaceutical products in Ethiopia, exploring potential collaborations in the healthcare industry, which is a growing sector in Ethiopia.

Moreover, the delegation visited industrial parks in Ethiopia, providing an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the country's manufacturing capabilities and potential investment opportunities, he added.

SBP removes all cash margin requirements on imports

KARACHI (PPI): State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has withdrawn all cash margin requirements on imports to benefit importers, according to a report on Sunday.

The central bank had previously imposed requirements under six circulars from 2017 to 2022 to fulfil another condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reach a staff-level agreement.

In a Banking Policy and Regulations Department circular dated March 24, the SBP said it was withdrawing the "existing Cash Margin Requirement on import of items with effect from March 31, 2023".

The announcement comes as the central bank's foreign exchange reserves increased by \$280 million to \$4.6 billion during the week ending on March 17 on the back of inflows from China.

Pakistan is required to reach a staff-level agreement with the global lender to secure a \$1.2 billion tranche and unlock further inflows from other international creditors.

Large number of supporters attend Shaukat Khanum Iftar dinner



F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust (SKMT) organised a fundraising iftar dinner in the city on Saturday, March 25, 2023 as part of its ongoing Zakat campaign. Dr Faisal Sultan, Dr Aasim Yusuf, other members of SKMT management and a large number of donors and supporters attended the event where Rs. 20 crores were collected.

On this occasion, Dr Faisal Sultan, Chief Executive Officer of SKMCH&RC, gave an overview of the ongoing projects of the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust, "Over the

past twenty-eight years, the support of generous donors has meant that we have been able to treat more patients than the year before. He said showing compassion to strangers, all the patients our donors may never meet but whose lives they save, reflects one of the best attributes of humans. Last year, we were able to provide financially supported treatment worth Rs. 11 billion to deserving cancer patients. At SKMCH&RC, we have always taken all possible steps to ensure that the utilisation of Zakat complies with Islamic injunctions regarding utilisation for Zakat-eligible patients. Zakat funds are used for

the medical treatment of deserving patients, and are completely exhausted on providing direct patient care within the same year they are collected. SKMCH&RC has also received Shariah compliance certification confirming that its Zakat processes are in line with Islamic principles."

In a video message, Imran Khan, Founder and Chairman BoG of SKMT said that cancer treatment is very expensive and the majority of our people cannot afford it. For more than 28 years, SKMCH&RC has been collecting Zakat and providing financially supported treatment to over 75% of all patients. He said that for a population of over 220 million, we need more cancer hospitals and for this reason, the second SKMCH&RC was constructed in Peshawar in 2015 and the third and largest SKMCH&RC is expected to open in Karachi in 2023. He added, "As a nation, we united in the cause of trying to eradicate the scourge of cancer from our country, and we made equitable access to quality cancer care a reality in Pakistan. For the year 2023, we have a budget of Rs. 39 billion and as in past years, we hope to collect a major portion of this through your Zakat and donations. Ramzan is the month of giving and in this month, I would like to urge everyone to open their hearts and donate generously to support our mission of providing equitable access to quality healthcare to thousands of cancer patients from around the country and beyond."

Businessmen warn SBP of further jump in key policy rate amid record markup

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) on Sunday warned the Central Bank of any further jump in the key policy rate in the upcoming Monetary Policy next month, as the economic crisis continued to deepen due to wrong economic policies amidst record highest markup rate in the region.

FPCCI former President and Businessmen Panel (BMP) chairman, Mian Anjum Nisar said that already unprecedented inflation and high mark-up rate have drastically reduced private sector borrowings during the first quarter of the current fiscal year. He said that the central bank raised its key interest rate by 300 basis points, exceeding investor expectations, as the cash-strapped country attempts

to encourage the International Monetary Fund to release critical funding. The key rate of the State Bank of Pakistan now stands at 20%, its highest level since October 1996.

Now there are reports that the SBP would raise the interest rate by another 2 percent at the upcoming meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to unlock the stalled IMF loan program.

The Businessmen Panel (BMP) chief suggested the Central Bank to adopt an accommodative monetary policy stance, asking the finance minister to fulfill his commitment of reining in inflation besides cutting interest rate and strengthening the undervalued local currency against dollar.

Demanding competitive interest rate at regional countries' level, he said that the SBP's stance of keeping monetary policy rate at 17% was already high com-

pared to the markup rate of China, India and Bangladesh. Yet, the central bank jacked up the key policy rate by another 300 basis points to 20% in last monetary policy, leading to the crash of economy, which will remain bearish until announcement of next Policy announcement.

The hike in the interest rate by 300 basis points by the State Bank during the auction of T-bills has increased investors' problems. In addition, there is a fear of further hike in the interest rate in the monetary policy announcement on 2nd April because of which there is constantly selling pressure in the market, he added.

He said that expectation of further monetary tightening and high current account deficit had sparked panic selling across the board, leading to the capital market's massive tragedy.

Mian Anjum Nisar said

that the SBP had brought forward its policy meeting from an original date of March 16, saying the rate hike was a key requirement to get the IMF funding released.

In its last policy meeting in January the bank raised the rate by 100 bps to 17%. It has now raised rates by a total of 1025 bps since January 2022.

The MPC noted that the recent fiscal adjustments and exchange rate depreciation have led to a significant deterioration in the near term inflation outlook and a further upward drift in inflation expectations, as reflected in the latest wave of surveys.

The SBP sees inflation rising further before it begins to fall. The central bank states that the average inflation for the year is now expected in the range of 27 - 29% against the November 2022 projection of 21 - 23%.

NICVD: A lifesaving beacon for children with congenital heart disease

Zainulabedin Shah

Congenital heart disease (CHD), a heart defect or abnormality present in newborns, is a term that strikes fear in parents whose children are affected. Congenital heart disease is often associated with insurmountable medical expenses, emergencies, endless appointments, and persistent anxiety.

Pakistan has one of the highest global rates of CHD, disproportionately affecting the poor. Factors such as malnutrition, inadequate maternal health, and frequent pregnancies contribute to its prevalence. Dr. Abdul Sattar Shaikh, Head of pediatric cardiology at NICVD, warns that most untreated children will not survive their first year.

With roughly 60,000 new CHD cases annually in Pakistan, most patients pre-

viously had to seek treatment abroad, often in neighboring countries like India. Public institutions in other provinces typically have waiting lists of 6-12 months for procedures.

After President Asif Ali Zardari signed the 18th amendment, the Sindh Government assumed control of the NICVD program in 2015, with Dr. Nadeem Qamar becoming the new executive director. Under the leadership of Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the hospital's pediatric department has undergone a revolutionary transformation. NICVD is now the sole comprehensive children's heart center in Pakistan.

Over the past five years, around 600,000 children have been treated, an extraordinary number for any institution worldwide. The NICVD network con-

ducts an average of 1,500 pediatric open-heart surgeries and 2,000 interventions and minimally invasive procedures each year, using cutting-edge technology. In contrast to other provincial children's hospitals, NICVD treats critical patients within a week and moderately stable patients within one to two months.

Remarkably, all these services are entirely free of charge, while private hospitals charge R1 million to Rs.2 million per patient on average. The institution serves the entire country, with over 50% of CHD cases coming from outside Sindh, including Balochistan, Lower Punjab, and KP. The NICVD pediatric department has also treated patients from Iran, Afghanistan, UAE, and Oman.

Offering comprehensive pediatric cardiology services, the NICVD network

provides everything from diagnosis to treatment. These services include 24/7 pediatric emergency services, open-heart surgeries, interventions, catheterization, and echo and fetal echo services. Full services are available in Karachi, Hyderabad, Tando-Muhammad Khan, and Sukkur, while OPD, emergency, and echo services are offered in Mithi, Larkana, Nawabshah, Khairpur, Sehwan, and Lyari.

The NICVD network has implemented the CHD registry program, registering families with CHD history, and offering maternal screening, diagnosis, and counseling. This enables early detection of symptoms in pregnant mothers and encourages preventative measures. The network also educates and trains general practitioners and pediatricians across the

province through seminars and lectures. Further, a 300-bed Pediatric Cardiology building is currently under construction and is expected to be operational within two years, significantly increasing patient capacity and reducing waiting times.

The remarkable progress made by the NICVD network in recent years has provided hope and solace to countless families affected by congenital heart disease in Pakistan. By offering accessible, comprehensive, and free-of-cost treatment, NICVD has become a beacon of hope for children and their families, overcoming economic and geographical barriers. The ongoing expansion of facilities and the dedication to early detection, education, and prevention demonstrate NICVD's unwavering commitment to improving the lives of those afflicted by CHD. As this



vital institution continues to grow and evolve, it not only exemplifies the power of

compassion and innovation in healthcare but also serves as an inspiration for other

countries to address the needs of their most vulnerable citizens.



In brief

Balbirnie for Bangladesh T20s

CHITTAGONG. Bangladesh (AFP/APP): Ireland skipper Andrew Balbirnie will be rested for this week's T20 series against Bangladesh and will be replaced by vice-captain Paul Stirling, selectors said Sunday. "We flagged before the tour that there may be an element of player rotation this year due to the anticipated volume of cricket we will be playing," coach Heinrich Malan said. "I see it is an essential part of squad and player management that we give our leading players adequate down time for their physical and mental health," Malan said in a statement. The three T20s begin in Chittagong on Monday. Bangladesh took the preceding ODI series 2-0. The two teams will also play a one-off Test in early April. Ireland squad: Paul Stirling (capt), Mark Adair, Ross Adair, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Fionn Hand, Graham Hume, Matthew Humphreys, Tom Mayes, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White, Craig Young.

Clarke enjoys winning start

SCOTLAND (BBC): It's not just his capacity to score goals for Scotland that makes John McGinn such an admirable character, it's his candour in cutting through the PR and calling it as he sees it. His assessment of the performance against Cyprus was an exercise in straight-shooting. Not for him a glorification of a 16th goal for his country and a place in the top seven of all-time goalscorers for Scotland. In the aftermath of a 3-0 win that was stodgy but ultimately satisfying, nobody would have mistaken him for a cheerleader. He cited a number of things that could and should have been better before checking himself and admitting that he was being "a bit moany". That, actually, was to his credit. He expected more because this team is capable of more. When you're finding fault with a 3-0 victory then you're in a good place. A few years ago - maybe even a year ago or less - a 3-0 home win against anybody would have been hailed as an unconditional triumph, but Scotland's standards are higher now.

Denver claim statement win

NEW YORK (BBC): The Denver Nuggets beat fellow NBA conference leaders the Milwaukee Bucks 129-106 in a statement victory before the play-offs. Nikola Jokic, the two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, scored 31 points and had 11 assists for Western Conference leaders Denver. Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, the 2019 and 2020 MVP, also hit 31 points. However, only seven of those came in the second half as the Nuggets came from behind to win. The Nuggets are three and a half games clear of the Memphis Grizzlies in the west, with the Bucks two games up on the Boston Celtics in the east, making both favourites to secure top seed, with eight regular season games remaining. Jokic and Antetokounmpo are both strong MVP candidates after fine seasons. Serbia's Jokic got the better of his Greek rival here, with Antetokounmpo withdrawn for the final five minutes as the Nuggets cruised to victory, outscoring their rivals 66-40 across the final two periods. "It's better to win games, but our goal is to do something in a play-offs," said Jokic, whose side are aiming to win the Nuggets' first NBA championship.

South Africa smash record chase in first 500-run T20



CENTURION (Agenices): Quinton de Kock's first T20I hundred - and joint sixth-fastest in the format off 43 balls - helped South Africa complete the highest successful chase in T20Is. De Kock's knock innings came in the second half of a run-fest on a belter of a pitch at SuperSport Park.

In total, 517 runs were scored, the most in a T20 game, including 35 sixes, the most in a T20 international and two fewer than the most in any T20 match.

Johnson Charles was responsible for 11 of those sixes as he blasted his way to the joint second-fastest T20I century, and fastest by a West Indian, as they posted their highest score in the format. In the end, it was not enough. It was a tough day for bowlers on both sides, who struggled to get their lengths right. Only Kagiso Rabada conceded at under ten runs an over and there were poor disciplines on both sides, especially by West Indies. They bowled 10 wides and a no-ball compared to South Africa's four wides and may see that as an important difference in the final result. The series decider will be played about 40 kilometres away, at the Wanderers, on Tuesday.

Charles and Mayers do a demolition job

The early dismissal of Brandon King dissolved into a footnote when Kyle Mayers and Charles got together for an exhibition of power-hitting that dismantled the home attack. Marco Jansen's opening over cost 20, as

Charles peppered the off side and Sisanda Magala's first over went for 21 runs thanks to a merciless Mayers. He hit the biggest six of the innings when he sent Sisanda Magala 114 metres over midwicket, with the ball carrying over the hospitality suite roofs and into the practice nets. Charles brought up his fifty off 23 balls when he hit Tabraiz Shamsi over square leg. Mayers followed with a 24-ball fifty, and also brought his milestone up against Shamsi.

West Indies were 62 for 1 after the powerplay and 137 for 1 after the first 10 overs, which was their fastest start in a T20I. The openers were separated at the start of the 11th over, when Mayers miscued a pull off Jansen but by then, they had shared the third-highest stand for West Indies in T20I cricket - and all three of them have come against South Africa - and plundered 135 runs in 58 balls at a scoring rate of just under 14 runs an over.

The carnage continues

Charles was 18 runs away from his century when both Mayers and Nicholas Pooran fell to Jansen but he was undeterred. He sent Kagiso Rabada for six over square leg, then hit a Magala full toss over point for four and reached his century with a drive over extra-cover. Jansen was brought back and Charles sent him for sixes over extra-cover and long-off and then four through fine leg before he was bowled by a yorker that he seemed to have kept out but

trickled onto his stumps. Charles scored 73 of his 118 runs on the leg side, including eight of his 11 sixes, and when he was bowled, West Indies still had six overs to bat.

Shepherding the finish

Romario Shepherd picked up from where Charles' left off when he flicked a Parnell full toss off his pads for his first boundary. Then he tucked into Magala and took two sixes off his third over, prompting Aiden Markram to bring Rabada back. He wasn't spared either as Shepherd and Rovman Powell hit 18 runs of his final over. Magala returned to deliver the last over and could not find his

yorker. His full tosses were slammed over midwicket and long-on as West Indies scored 79 runs off the last six overs. Shepherd was unbeaten on 41 off 18 balls and Magala ended with the sixth most-expensive T20I figures.

De Kock and SA break records

There's probably no better batter to get a record chase underway than de Kock and he responded in exactly the way South Africa would have wanted. He started with consecutive fours off Akeal Hosein before slamming three successive sixes off Sheldon Cottrell in an over that cost 29. De Kock was then

dropped on 32, when he tried to reverse-sweep Hosein and got a thin edge but Nicholas Pooran could not hold on, and he went on to make West Indies pay. In that over, South Africa equalled the quickest fifty by a Full Member team in T20Is and de Kock hit Hosein back over his head for six and then for back-to-back fours.

De Kock then notched up South Africa's fastest T20I fifty, off 15 balls. In the process, South Africa broke the record for the most runs by a Full Member team in a powerplay - 102 - and the fastest hundred by a Full Member in T20Is. They went on to score the most runs in

the first 10 overs of a men's T20I - 149 - and the 152-run stand between de Kock and Reeza Hendricks was South Africa's fourth-highest of all time. De Kock brought up his hundred in the 11th over with a single.

With 46 runs off 21 balls in the first-wicket stand it would seem unfair to call Hendricks' role merely a supporting act and he soon had the chance to take centre stage. After de Kock's dismissal, Hendricks scored his first six when he sent Odean Smith over extra-cover and brought up his half-century off 22 balls. It was his fifth fifty in his last seven T20I innings and he was intent on moving through the gears from there. He scored 16 runs off the next five balls he faced including a scoop for six off Powell before he top-edged a slower bouncer and was caught behind. South Africa still needed 66 runs off 44 balls at that stage.

Markram and Klaasen take it home

West Indies pulled things back a touch after seeing the back of Hendricks. There were only two boundaries between the 14th and 16th over and David Miller was caught on the long-off boundary before Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen came together to finish things off. Markram destroyed Raymon Reifer's figures when he scored 17 runs off his fourth over, including a six over long-on, and Klaasen took successive fours off Jason Holder to take the asking rate to less than a run a ball. South Africa won with seven deliveries to spare.

Tom Latham returns to lead NZ in T20Is against Sri Lanka and Pakistan

LONDON (Agenices): Tom Latham will play T20 internationals for the first time since 2021 when he leads New Zealand in the T20I series at home against Sri Lanka, and away against Pakistan, in April.

T20I regulars like the captain Tim Southee, Kane Williamson, Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, Devon Conway, Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell and Lockie Ferguson were not picked because they have been given clearance to play the IPL starting March 31. "We saw against India earlier this season the power and range of shots that Tom possesses," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said about Latham's return to the format. "His adaptability also means he can feature in a range of batting positions. He led an inexperienced T20 squad to Bangladesh in 2021 and we were really impressed with his leadership of that group during a COVID bubble tour." The squads include two uncapped players -

Chad Bowes and Henry Shipley - while Jimmy Neesham returns after missing the T20I series in India and the home ODIs against Sri Lanka to play the SA20 and PSL. Shipley was part of the T20I squad that travelled to India earlier this year, but Bowes was selected for the first time in the format after his ODI debut against Sri Lanka in the first ODI in Auckland.

The squad for the home T20Is against Sri Lanka comprises 13 players, and includes Tim Seifert, who won't travel to Pakistan as he and his wife await the birth of their first child. Dane Cleaver, Cole McConehie, Blair Tickenr will join the squad of 15 for the tour of Pakistan.

"We've got players returning and guys potentially making their debuts, that's a really exciting mix to have in the group for these matches. Players like Tim and Cole haven't been around the squad for little while and I am sure they will bring good energy

when they are involved. They have both earned their selection with strong domestic form this season."

After the home T20Is against Sri Lanka, coach Stead will take a break during the T20Is in Pakistan and rejoin the squad for the five-ODI series that begins in Rawalpindi on April 26. Shane Jurgensen will lead the coaching staff for the three T20Is in Pakistan.

New Zealand squad for Sri Lanka T20Is: Tom Latham (capt & wk), Chad Bowes, Mark Chapman, Matt Henry, Ben Lister, Adam Milne, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Seifert, Henry Shipley, Ish Sodhi, Will Young

New Zealand squad for T20Is in Pakistan: Tom Latham (capt & wk), Chad Bowes, Mark Chapman, Matt Henry, Ben Lister, Adam Milne, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Seifert, Henry Shipley, Ish Sodhi, Will Young, Dane Cleaver, Cole McConehie, Blair Tickenr

Roglic edges Evenepoel to win Tour of Catalunya

BARCELONA (AFP/APP): Primoz Roglic of Team Jumbo-Visma struck a major psychological blow in the lead-up to the Giro d'Italia by holding off his Quick Step rival Remco Evenepoel to win the 102nd edition of the Tour of Catalunya on Sunday.

The pair scrapped all the way to the finish of the 135km final stage around Barcelona including multiple ascents of the Montjuic mountain.

Evenepoel, 23, went into the seventh and final stage 10 seconds adrift of Roglic.

Hard as he tried, the Belgian was unable to shake off his rival, with Roglic, 33, allowing him the minor honour of taking the stage win without a sprint for the line, cutting the winning deficit to just 6sec.

"We expected his attacks. The seven days were difficult but I had the legs," said Roglic after winning the Tour for the first time.

"I'm happy to add my name to the list of winners of this historic race."

The Slovenian, who had already won the previous week's Tirreno-Adriatico in Italy, took the lead in the general classification by winning the first stage. The two leaders did not let go of each other on the steep roads of the Catalan hinterland, with the Belgian winning the third stage ahead of Roglic. The Slovenian, though, set up the overall victory by dropping Evenepoel on the upper slopes of the final climb of Friday's stage.

Cameron Norrie and Dan Evans among seeds to fall

PARIS (BBC): Britain's top ranked duo Cameron Norrie and Dan Evans have been knocked out of the Miami Open in the second round. British number one Norrie, ranked 12th in the world, suffered a 6-3 6-2 defeat by France's world number 65 Gregoire Barrere. Evans, seeded 23 and ranked 30 places higher than Lorenzo Sonego, was beaten 6-4 6-4 by in-form Czech Jiri Lehecka.

They were among a number of seeds who went out of the tournament on Saturday in both the men's and women's draws.

Alex de Minaur and Matteo Berrettini exited, but the biggest casualty was women's sixth seed Coco Gauff, who lost to Russian Anastasia Potapova.

Australian De Minaur, the 15th seed, suffered an

agonising 6-7 (5-7) 7-6 (7-3) 7-6 (10-8) defeat by Quentin Halys, the world number 79 from France. Italian Berrettini, seeded 19, had a similar close encounter, losing 7-6 (10-8) 7-6 (7-5) to American Mackenzie McDonald.

Italian Lorenzo Musetti was the third of the men's top 20 seeds to fall as he was beaten 6-4 6-4 by in-form Czech Jiri Lehecka. Norrie's opponent Barrere will face Christopher Eubanks in the third round after the American qualifier, ranked 119th in the world, recorded the biggest win of his career by knocking out Croatian Borna Coric, seeded 17, 3-6 6-4 6-2.

In the women's singles, Belarussian Victoria Azarenka, seeded 14, was beaten 7-6 (7-3) 2-6 6-4 by

Poland's Magda Linette.

Meanwhile, fourth seed Daniil Medvedev, who lost last week's Indian Wells final to Carlos Alcaraz, cruised past Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena 6-1 6-2. Poland's eighth seed Hubert Hurkacz saved five match points before beating Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-7 (12-10) 7-6 (9-7) 7-6 (8-6) in a match lasting three-and-a-half hours, while 12th seed Frances Tiafoe came from a set down to beat Japanese qualifier Yosuke Watanuki 6-7 (7-5) 7-6 (7-3) 6-4.

Canadian fifth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime progressed with victory over Brazil's Thiago Monteiro on two tie-breaks, while women's third seed Jessica Pegula swept aside fellow American Danielle Collins 6-1 7-6 (7-0).



Spain make winning start as Croatia held in Euro 2024 qualifying

PARIS (AFP/APP): Spain won 3-0 against a Norway side missing the injured Erling Haaland in the opening round of Euro 2024 qualifiers Saturday, while Wales snatched a stoppage-time equaliser to frustrate Croatia. Dani Olmo turned in Alejandro Balde's driven low cross on 13 minutes in Malaga and Joselu scored twice on his Spain debut to give new coach Luis de la Fuente a victory in his first match in charge.

Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga pulled off a brilliant reflex stop to deny Fredrik Aursnes and clawed another effort off the line on his first start for Spain since October 2020.

Alexander Sorloth then volleyed wide before Espanyol striker Joselu came off the bench and bagged a quick-fire double -- heading in his first and sweeping home a rebound for the second.

"I still can't believe it," said the 32-year-old Joselu, the first Spain player to net twice on his international debut since Fernando Morientes in 1998.

"For any player this is just the best thing that can happen. It's the reward for all the daily work."

Three-time European champions

Spain next go to Scotland, who saw off Cyprus 3-0 in their Group A opener after Scott McTominay scored twice late on as a substitute at Hampden Park.

Cyprus finished with 10 men after Nicholas Ioannou was sent off for a second yellow in added time.

"It's a really good start but we have to try and back it up on Tuesday against the Spanish," said Scotland manager Steve Clarke.

Norway, who haven't played at a major tournament since Euro 2000, will again be without Manchester City striker Haaland for next week's trip to Georgia because of a groin problem. Croatia, finalists and semi-finalists at the past two World Cups, conceded a last-gasp equaliser to kick off Group D as Wales debutant Nathan Broadhead tapped home a flick-on from a long throw.

"I got a bit overwhelmed to be honest, a bit emotional," Broadhead, who plays for third-tier Ipswich, told S4C. "I've been waiting for this moment for so long."

"We needed a point, we came here to try and win but to get a point is good as well."

Andrej Kramaric's low shot from

just outside the area had given Croatia the lead in Split against a Wales team beginning life after the retirement of their record goalscorer and captain Gareth Bale.

Luka Modric won his 163rd cap for Croatia, who have never lost a home European Championship qualifier -- a run now spanning 36 matches dating back to 1994.

Turkey came from behind to defeat Armenia 2-1 in Yerevan as efforts from Orkun Kokcu and Kerem Akturkoglu cancelled out an early own goal by former Liverpool defender Ozan Kabak.

Renato Steffen scored a first-half hat-trick as Switzerland thrashed Belarus 5-0 in a game played behind closed doors in Serbia.

UEFA has banned Belarus from playing at home due to the country's support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Granit Xhaka and Zeki Amdouni, on his second international appearance, added goals in the second half as Switzerland powered top of Group I. Dennis Man and Denis Alibec were on target as Romania eased to a 2-0 win away to 10-man Andorra, while Israel drew 1-1 at home to Kosovo.



In brief

IRSA releases 72,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 72,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 69,700 cusecs. o the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1422.39 feet and was 24.39 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19,700 cusecs while outflow as 20,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1094.85 feet, which was 44.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 19,700 cusecs and 17,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 34,100, 35,700, 33,300 and 6,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 19,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 5,900 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

WASA ensuring supply of water

RAWALPINDI (APP): The authorities concerned of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi have been directed to ensure supply of clean drinking water particularly during 'Sehri and Iftar' time. According to Managing Director, WASA Muhammad Tanveer, the supply of clean drinking water to the citizens was being ensured from the filtration plants during 'sehri and iftar' time. Steps were also being taken for immediate repair in case of malfunction of tube-wells, he said. The MD said like other parts of the country, the citizens here were also facing water shortage, which was mainly due to the decrease in the level of underground water and lack of timely construction of new water reservoirs. In this situation where WASA was making every possible effort to provide clean drinking water to the citizens, it was also responsibility of the citizen to use water carefully and try to save this priceless blessing of Allah Almighty, he added. He urged the citizens to come forward and play their due role to conserve water. He also asked the citizens to cooperate with WASA and pay their water and sewerage bills on time. The MD further said that in order to save and prevent wastage of water, WASA had improved the quality of water and taking measures to eliminate underground water leakages, which would not only save water but also help eliminate dengue. He asked the officials to further improve the service delivery so as to enable uninterrupted water supply to the citizens during Ramadan.

Pirwadhai Bus Stand

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chatta has directed the authorities concerned to provide more facilities to the passengers at Pirwadhai General Bus Stand. According to a Commissioner Office Spokesperson, the Commissioner during a visit to the bus stand inspected the available facilities and directed the authorities concerned to provide all possible facilities to the passengers. He expressed his annoyance over poor cleanliness condition particularly in washrooms. Zero tolerance policy would be adopted on cleanliness arrangements, he added. The Commissioner also visited the hotel located at Pirwadhai General Bus Stand and reprimanded the hotel management for lack of facilities and poor cleanliness in the hotel.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers waiting for customers at sasta bazar during holy fasting month of Ramadan in the Federal Capital.

Engaging youth crucial to further bolster Pak-Saudi relations: Dr. Qibla

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) Chairman Dr. Qibla Ayaz on Sunday said engaging youth was crucial to further bolster bilateral ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Commenting on recently held a short video competition on 'Pak-Saudi Relations' organized by the Saudi Embassy here, he told official media that it was a healthy activity and would help strengthen existing bonds between the young generation of two brotherly countries.

He said Saudi Arabia was a time-tested friend of Pakistan as it had always extended all possible support to Pakistan whether it was facing economic meltdown or destruction due to earthquakes and floods in the country. Dr. Qibla said the Pakistani nation had a great emotional attachment to the Kingdom because of Haramain Sharifain which were the holiest places for the faithful.

Meanwhile, Saudi Press Attaché Dr. Naif Alotaibi, highlighting the background behind this compe-

titution, informed that it was organized to celebrate the 70 years of relationship between the two countries as in March 1953, the Governor General of Pakistan Ghulam Muhammad paid his first official visit to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and held a meeting with King Shah Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud in a congenial environment.

He said the royal embassy received 114 videotapes on Pak-Saudi relations which had always been a fascinating chapter in the diplomatic history of the two countries.

Dr. Naif said the videos were full of emotions expressing their strong feelings and love for the Kingdom and its people.

According to a video clip, Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Ashrafi exchanging his views on Pak-Saudi relations said, "If anyone looks in a devilish eye towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we will sacrifice our blood,

wealth, children and even life for the security and sovereignty of the holy land." In the same videotape, Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, elaborating on the depth of the relationship between the two brotherly countries – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, said it kept on growing and developing with every passing day.

He prayed to Allah Almighty for long-lasting peace, prosperity, security and stability in Pakistan adding that he was eying Pakistan in the future as one of the leading countries in the world.

There was another silent video which caught the audience's attention as the story was a mouthpiece of overseas Pakistanis who were not only earning bread and butter for their families but also adding a huge foreign exchange to the national kitty. It showed that after the death of a Pakistani laborer, how the Saudi government supported his family and translated his daughter's dream into a reality of becoming a doctor in life.

IESCO installs 8,702 net metering connections

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has installed 8,702 net metering connections having a total generation capacity of 106.43 megawatts (MW) in various circles of the company from January 2016 to February 2023.

Manager Public Relations Asim Nazir Raja told APP here that the company had received 9,177 applications of net metering with 114.29 MW capacity during the said period. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) issued licences to 9,122 net metering connections with an accumulative capacity of 113.68 MW so far, he added. He said that the import and export of billing units had been started from 7781 net metering connections with a total capacity of 95.35 MW. The total exports and imports from these connections stood at 133,529,246 units and 167,307,686 units respectively, he said.

Asim said that the company had paid an amount of Rs 2,327,559 to the connections' holders up to June 2022. To a question, he said that the company had authorised to grant licences up to 25 kilowatts (kW) capacity while over 25 kW capacity, NENPRA issued licenses for net metering connections.

It is pertinent to mention here that the net-metering project had been launched in 2016 countrywide. It allows any domestic, commercial, industrial and other consumers to have at least a three-phase meter connection.

Elections will be held after Aug 2023': Tanveer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Education Rana Tanveer Hussain Sunday said that the next general elections will be held on time after August 2023 and lauded the Election Commission of Pakistan's announcement delaying provincial assembly elections in Punjab as a decision 'in the best interest of the country.'

The ECP under the constitution had postponed the elections keeping in view the security, political and economic challenges, he said while talking to a private news channel.

"The term of the current National Assembly will end in August 2023 to be

followed by the establishment of an interim government that will hold elections," he further said.

He also called on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leadership to end growing polarization in the country and decide on an election date by coming together.

Minister emphasised for electoral reforms to ensure transparency in the next elections. Replying to a question, he replied that PTI through social media had damaged the system and misled nation, adding, the agenda of PML-N government is to bring stability in the country, and put the ailing economy back on a sustainable growth path.

500,000 deserving families of Rwp district to be provided free flour: DC

RAWALPINDI (APP):

Over 1.5 million free flour bags would be distributed among over 500,000 deserving families of Rawalpindi district, said Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Hasan Waqar Cheema.

He informed that he was visiting different free flour mega distribution points to review all the arrangements made to facilitate the citizens and inspect the process of providing free flour to the citizens.

He said that the supply of free flour would continue uninterruptedly in

Rawalpindi district.

Flour bags were being distributed among over 50,000 deserving people in Rawalpindi district on a daily basis, he informed.

He directed the officials concerned to treat the citizens who come to get flour with respect and negligence on part of the officials would not be tolerated.

He said efforts were being made to provide relief to the people and the administration under this initiative taken by the Punjab government was supplying flour to poor and deserving citizens.

The DC informed that the administration on the directives of the Punjab government had set up 10 mega points to supply free flour to poor and deserving people.

Hasan Waqar Cheema said four mega points were set up in Rawalpindi while one each established at tehsil level. Four desks were set up at each mega point, two for men and two for women, he added.

232 trucking points were also established in Rawalpindi district particularly for Ramadan to facilitate the citizens, he said.

Health specialist recommends well-balanced diet during Ramadan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Health specialist on Sunday has advised the public for a disciplined routine and a well-balanced diet while fasting as gaining weight during Ramadan can cause chronic inflammation, heart disease, diabetes and reduced lung function.

Talking to a private news channel, a renowned specialist Dr Shahzad Ali Khan advises people to avoid eating fried, oily and heavy food items as they cannot be easily digested and can make you feel bloated.

Meals should be chewed slowly and thoroughly rather than being eaten hastily, he said, adding, it is important to drink plenty of water and other hydrating fluids during the non-fasting hours to prevent dehydration during the day.

Regular short-distance walks for a couple of hours are also suggested after iftar also helps digestion.

Moreover, he recommended con-

suming foods that are rich in protein during Sehri and Iftar, adding, consuming too much sugar can also leads to feelings of fatigue, decreased energy and reduced alertness.

Replying to a question, the iftar meal should be a balanced meal that replenishes energy and nutrients, adding, it should include complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, along with some protein and healthy fats.

Sehri is extremely important as it is what helps people maintain their energy levels during the day, he said, adding, however, it is essential that the right food in the right quantity is consumed, especially if the person is working.

The most common complaints during Ramadan include constipation, indigestion and headaches, adding, a balanced meal during both Sehri and Iftar is vital to not experience any of these.

Tourism – A vital resource to support economy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite setbacks of earthquakes, floods and Covid-19, Pakistan's tourism sector still has vast potential and can still gear to achieve significant milestones serving as an engine of economic growth and uplifting residents of remote hilly areas.

An amalgamation of scenic beauty of mountain ranges, vast plains, soothing lakes, gushing rivers, enchanting coastline, calm deserts and religio-historic monuments, the country hosts socio-cultural relics gathered from knowledge and experience of invaders, rulers, historians, communities and anthropologists.

Diversified in cultures and cuisines, the country also boasts of noble traditions of hospitality, brotherhood, religious harmony encompassing Bhudda, Gandhara, Indus, Mughals, Sikhs and other civilizations in its architecture, attire and abode. It is geographically unique with archaeological heritage, spiritual and cultural sites providing ample tourism opportunities for nature lovers and followers of different religions. Thus one can judiciously claim that Pakistan's tourism industry holds limitless potential.

But unlike many countries of the world earning billions of dollars annually through their tourism industry, Pakistan is still struggling to fully capitalize this potential although some strides surface in recent past like winning the Best New Exhibitor Award at Travel and Adventure Show 2023 at New York in January this year. Around 20 prominent companies of Tourism and Hospitality Sector along with provincial tourism departments from Punjab, Sindh, KPK, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan presented Pakistan's rich tourism potential at the international show. The participating companies also had meetings with major tour operators in USA and counterparts in other countries as series of shows at this event had attracted over 2.5 million travelers to over 4,500 world's

top destinations. "Pakistan has variety of tourist destinations with the strongest and unique traditions of warm hospitality by local people as also acknowledged by foreign tourists," said Managing Director, PTDC, Rana Aftab. "Therefore, it is high time to promote awareness by educating our people of their duties to preserve environment and cultural belongings of our country."

He said Pakistan's participation in Travel and Trade Show has been highly impactful in terms of response from the public and international tourism organizations.

"The event provided an opportunity to interact with top international and domestic tour operators, cruise lines and travel providers," he stated. "Besides routine tourism, we also have vast potential to promote cultural and religious tourism by attracting believers of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikh religions."

The statistics show that on average around 7500 Sikh from India and around 2000 from Europe, USA and Canada visit Pakistan annually. Similarly, around 2000 Buddhist visit the religious heritage in Pakistan. This is far below the potential as there are around 30 million Sikhs and around 500 million Buddhism believers living in different countries across the world. "Pakistan is a country with landmarks of various religious ethnicities and unexplored potential for religious tourism," Rana Aftab said. "Therefore, PTDC is pursuing a plan to boost religious tourism for promoting inter-faith harmony and revenue generation." He however mentioned to some visa policy and security issues and suggested conducive environment for international tourists to have due share of earning from this industry.

"As the tourism sector directly contributes to US\$ 1.5 trillion and indirectly around US\$ 7.5 trillion, Pakistan owning vast natural and cultural beauty and religious tourism potential can earn its due share," Rana Aftab said.

"Therefore keeping in view its economic value, we need to ensure better and secure environment and ease of travelling for tourists to earn directly needed foreign exchange," he pleaded. As we witnesses scattered initiatives like participating in Travel and Adventure Show 2023 at New York and celebrating 2023 as China-Pakistan Year of Tourism Exchange also holding Gandhara Art Exhibition at Palace Museum in Beijing, there is dire need to widen this scope to other countries for having due share in global tourism economy.

For the purpose, we can promote group tourism through registered and licensed tour operators globally, ensuring amicable environment for international tourists.

Although PTDC arranges events like National Ice Hockey Championship at Ghulkin, Upper Hunza to promote winter tourism yet it also needs to broaden its spectrum to highlight multiple sites for tourism in world tourism market.

The statistics show that during 2021-22, around 91,185,177 local tourists visited Northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa tourists destinations like Chitral, Kalash, Dir-Kumrat, Swat, Kalam, Dasu, Kohistan, Manshera and Naran.

But this figure stood just at 3,500 in terms of foreign tourists that is too small for a country bestowed with amazing landscape, pines and deodar forests, rich historical and cultural heritage, snow covered mountain peaks in Himalaya, Hindukash and Korakorum ranges and glaciers, lakes, valleys, mesmerizing lush green landscapes and unique flora and fauna.

The country also boasts of 9000 years old history of mankind through civilizations like Meher Garh, Mohenjo-Daro and Gandhara and protected archeological sites and its potential for sports tourism is also less to none presenting vast opportunities for hiking, ice hockey, skating, rock climbing and mountaineering.

CDA directs owners to repair cracks of quake-affected buildings

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 veri-

fied 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."

He said the CDA had directed all the housing societies in the federal cap-

ital to conduct a survey as soon as possible of the skyscrapers and submit the report within three days.

The official said the authority has also asked the owners of the high-rise and medium-rise buildings to submit the latest strength and composition certificates to CDA, adding that the certificates must be obtained from firms registered with the CDA and the PEC.

He said the CDA directed the housing societies not to allow residents in buildings that did not obtain completion certificates and also instructed them to take action against the violators.

Public asked to discourage 'professional beggars' during Ramazan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Social activists on Sunday warned the public against 'professional beggars' who are encroaching cities to take advantage of their generosity during the holy month of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak 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 Beli 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 Ramazan.

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.

WHO assist Civil Hospital
HERAT (Agencies): Dr. Mohammad Arif Jalali, head of civil hospital of Herat province said that the World Health Organization assisted medical supplies worth \$260,000 to the hospital. He said that the assistance included equipment and medicine that would resolve shortages of the mentioned items from 40 to 50 percent for the hospital. According to him, these assistances could only meet 40-50% of medical shortages in this hospital.

MoRR provided assistance
KABUL (Agencies): A delegation of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, who traveled to Iran, provided cash assistance to a number of Afghan refugees in that country. Headed by Mohammad Jan Khadarkhil, a senior official of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has traveled to Iran to meet with Afghan refugees and homeless women in Sistan Baluchistan province. The Ministry delegation provided them with cash assistance on their visits to that country.

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

IEA security forces kill key Daesh fighter

KABUL (Agencies): The Islamic Emirate's intelligence department says it carried out an important operation on a Daesh hideout in Kabul's District 12, killing a key Daesh fighter who was involved in the attack on the interior ministry mosque.

The department said on Twitter that security forces conducted a special operation on a Daesh hideout in the Butkhaak district of Kabul city, adding that civilians were not harmed in the attack.

The intelligence department adds this special operation resulted in the death of Asad Laghmani known as "Qais", who was involved in the terror attack at the interior ministry mosque.

Earlier, General Michael Kurilla had warned that within the next six months, Daesh in Afghanistan will have the potential to target the US and other Western countries' interests. He further added that the militant group's ability to conduct operations in Asia and Europe is rapidly expanding.

In response to the US general's remarks, IEA's spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid rejected the presence of Daesh militants in Afghanistan. Mujahid said Daesh fighters have been suppressed and targeted across the country, and they will not have a chance to excel under the Islamic Emirate regime in Afghanistan.

It's the US that dignifies the presence of Daesh in the country, which gives the militant fighters the moment to accelerate their attack, and it needs to be stopped, Mujahid added.

Nearly six months ago, the mosque at the interior ministry came under attack, claiming the lives of four people, and injuring 25 others. Prior to this, IEA security forces reported several attacks on Daesh hideouts in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, and other parts of Afghanistan.

The Daesh group meanwhile has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif earlier.

Calls mount to reopen Afghan schools for girls

KABUL (TOLONews): Female students in Kabul said on the opening day of the 1402 academic year that they once again felt hopeless as a result of the closing of their schools.

They asked the Islamic Emirate to reopen girls' schools above sixth grade across the country.

Maryam, who was waiting for the schools to open along with thousands other students, said: "Why are schools closed to girls? When there is no female doctor, a woman should go to a male doctor?"

"Today is the day of despair for us. We were waiting to go to school on this day, but we were not allowed to go to school," Sadaf, a student told TOLONews.

"Today, I have a very bad feeling, because I could not go to school. When I see someone go to school, I feel bad that why I cannot go," Amina, another student in Kabul said.

Meanwhile, male students are asking the current government to allow girls to be educated as well.

"We went to school, it was great. One thing that made me sad was that girls' schools did not open," said Faizullah, a student.

"We ask the Islamic Emirate to reopen girls' schools because girls also have a right to education, so they serve their country," said Rouhullah, a student.

Several Kabul and Khost residents asked the Islamic Emirate to comply with the people's demand to open schools for girls.

"This is the demand of all the people and serious attention should be paid to these demands," said Haji Adam Khan, a tribal elder of Khost.

"Girls' schools should be opened so that we have a bright future," said Mohammad Hossein, a resident of Kabul.

Earlier, the head of the security department in Parwan, Azizullah Omar, told TOLONews that schools for female students will reopen soon after the work on the curriculum is finished.

"There is no problem about the start of schooling. There is only a problem in the curriculum. And therefore, a committee has been formed for its reform. After the confirmation of the clerics, the schools will start," he said.

Karzai meets Charles III; discuss Afghan situation

KABUL (Khaama Press): Hamid Karzai, the former president of Afghanistan, met with Charles III, the King of England, the Ministry of State for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Special Representative and several Afghans in London.

In his meeting with the king of England, the former president discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the beginning of a national dialogue for peace and stability in the country, said Tayeb Javad, the former ambassador of Afghanistan, quoted by BBC.

Sources said that Britain is concerned about the current situation in Afghanistan and supports a national dialogue for peace and stability in the country.

Earlier, the Foreign Ministry of the United Kingdom advised British citizens against all travel to Afghanistan.

"You should not travel to Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely volatile. There is an ongoing and high threat of terrorist attacks through Afghanistan, including around the airport," the announcement said.

Following the withdrawal of the international forces in August 2021, the UK and the NATO member states shuttered their Embassies and Diplomatic Missions in Afghanistan.

Due to several factors, no country, not even the UK, has yet recognized the Taliban's de facto rule as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

The current government is charged with violating human and women's rights in Afghanistan.



Last week saw violence claiming 18 lives in Afghanistan

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some sources once again asked the caretaker government last week to reopen education centers for teenage girls in the new academic year that started on Tuesday. The two former presidents of Afghanistan again stressed on a national dialogue in the country.

Casualties

Last week, 18 people were killed and 22 others were injured in separate incidents of violence nationwide.

Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said three Daesh militants were killed during an operation on their hideout in the Arzan Qimat area in the limits of the 12th security district of Kabul.

Six members of a family were killed in a hand grenade blast in Ghor and in a similar incident, two children lost their lives and five others were injured in Badakhshan province.

One child was killed and five others were injured in Ghazni province when an unexploded ordnance went off and two people were injured in a similar blast in Parwan province.

Unknown gunmen killed two people in Jawzjan and three people in Faryab and one person was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Jawzjan province.

In Badghis, one person died after accidentally shooting himself with his gun. In Khost province, one person was killed and six others injured during an armed clash between two families over land ownership.

A charred body of a child was found in Zabul province and one of the victims of last week's explosion in Balkh died in hospital.

In the previous week, 16 people were killed and 27 others were injured in various incidents of violence across the country.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and government forces would get killed and wounded each week.

World's interaction

Two days ago, Abdulaziz Kamilov, Uzbekistan National Security Council advisor, heading a delegation, arrived in Kabul and met with deputy prime minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Kamilov said his country had supported Afghanistan in international forums and meetings and wanted cooperation with the caretaker government of Afghanistan.

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the international community should increase interaction with the caretaker Afghan government if it wanted to protect human rights in Afghanistan.

Last week, deputy prime minister for political affairs Mullah Abdul Kabit met UNAMA deputy head Markus Potzel and asked the international community to take steps towards recognizing the Islamic Emirate.

Similarly, acting Foreign Minister Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi called for the lifting of curbs the west,

Heavy rainfall kills three in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): More than three people have died, and seven have been injured due to heavy rainfall and flooding during the last two days, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said.

On Friday and Saturday, nine provinces were affected by severe weather, which resulted in the partial or complete destruction of more than 756 homes.

Balkh, Zabul, Faryab, Uruzgan, Nimroz, Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, and Laghman were the most severely affected provinces.

Sahfiullah Rahimi, a spokesperson for the Disaster Management Authority, said that the affected families were provided with necessities such as food, tents and blankets.

And a team will send to visit and survey the damaged area.

Meanwhile, a powerful earthquake of 6.5 magnitudes hit Afghanistan last week, killing ten people, injuring more than 60 others, and damaging 800 houses, said NDMA.

Agencies adds: At least three people, including a child, died this week in snowstorms and heavy rain in the country, Shafiullah Rahimi, a spokesman for the ministry of disaster management confirmed.

The storms hit nine provinces in the country and injured seven people, damaged or destroyed more than 750 homes and ruined farmland, Rahimi said.

The nine provinces hit hardest on Friday and Saturday were Balkh, Zabul, Faryab, Uruzgan, Nimroz, Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, and Laghman.

Rahimi said government departments are providing families with basic necessities, such as food, tents and blankets.

Rahimi also said there was no change in the death toll from last Tuesday's 6.5 magnitude earthquake that struck much of Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan.

Ten people died and 60 were injured in Afghanistan in the quake, which damaged at least 800 houses across the northern parts of the country.

Heavy rainfall kills three in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Human Right Watch (HRW) in a report released, asked the caretaker government to reverse the ban on girls' education and reopen schools and universities for girls and women in Afghanistan.

The report further highlights that the ruling regime should stop attacking the future of girls, women and the country, adding that currently, Afghanistan is the only country banning girls from secondary school.

The organization expressed concern about the world's passive approach to dealing with the Taliban, and how the group's gender-based discrimination has negatively affected the future of women and girls in Afghanistan.

"The Taliban regime has made Afghanistan the only country barring girls from secondary school. They had promised to respect human rights, the rights of women and girls in particular.

However, with the beginning of the new academic year, they sent teenage girls back home,"

Injustice, corruption removed from higher education sector: Nadim

KABUL (TOLONews): The acting minister of higher education, Neda Mohammad Nadim, on Sunday said that injustice and corruption have been uprooted from the education and higher education sectors in the country.

Addressing a gathering to mark the start of the new school year, Nadim vowed to address "all challenges" facing the higher education sector in Afghanistan.

"The Islamic Emirate has ensured justice in the higher education and education sectors," Nadim said. "Today, students are being enrolled and graduated from educational institutions based on their ability. No pressure, power and nothing works here."

Meanwhile, Afghanistan Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority said that the education curriculum of the institution meets international norms. "We were able to rise the graph of the curriculum based on international norms," said Ghulam Haidar Shahamat, head of the Afghanistan Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority.

Based on information from Afghanistan Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority, Afghanistan has 370 technical institutes that have enrolled over 50,000 students.



HRW calls on Afghan govt to stop attacking girls' right to education

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However, with the beginning of the new academic year, they sent teenage girls back home,"

MoEW warns of floods possibility in some provinces

KABUL (Agencies): The Ministry of Energy and Water has warned of the possibility of floods in some provinces. The Ministry said that 21 provinces are in the danger of floods possibility, most of which are central provinces, are expected to have floods.

The possibility of floods and rising sea levels in some areas of the country's sea basins is predicted from the 6 to 7 in this year, the Ministry added.

As the climatic changes and on the basis of the comparative analysis of hydro meteorological station figures, and also taking into account the prediction of the National Meteorological Department and international reliable agencies that there is a possibility of successive heavy rain and snow accompanied by flash floods in the marine area (Panj Amo, Shamal, Harirud, Helmand and Kabul) are expected.

The possibility of floods, along with melting snow and rising water levels along the seas (Kokcha, Taleqan, Baghlan, Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, Herat, Farah, Uruzgan, Arghandab, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Kabul, Khost), Paktia, Paktika, Ghorband, Panjshir, Kunar and Laghman) and some related floods effected sites.

The Ministry of Energy and Water in its statement asked the residents of the mentioned sites to refrain from approaching the coasts of the seas, mainly during floods or high water.

BBC Farsi closes after 82 years of broadcasting in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has announced that after 82 years of operation, BBC Farsi Radio would stop broadcasting.

The final program of BBC Farsi Radio will be broadcast today, Sunday, March 26.

The corporation announced the closure of BBC Farsi and Arabic radio in September last year as part of "strategic changes" to focus on publishing content on digital platforms.

The World Service said in September 2022 that it planned to cut costs by closing its Persian and Arabic radio station, but an online service will continue.

At least 382 employees of the BBC World Service will lose their jobs. The World Service had stated that it aims to save £28.5m million by closing Persian and Arabic radio stations as part of a more considerable effort to save £500 million yearly.

The broadcaster has said that the cuts result from years of UK government-imposed limits on license fees below inflation, in addition to the rising cost of producing programs.

Also, the corporation will stop producing radio content in ten other languages, including Chinese and Hindi.

The BBC launched its first Farsi radio service as part of its Empire Service on December 29, 1940, with support from the Foreign Office during World War Second.

BBC Farsi broadcasting service provides the latest political, social, economic and sports news relevant to Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan.

Last week saw violence claiming 18 lives in Afghanistan

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some sources once again asked the caretaker government last week to reopen education centers for teenage girls in the new academic year that started on Tuesday. The two former presidents of Afghanistan again stressed on a national dialogue in the country.

Casualties

Last week, 18 people were killed and 22 others were injured in separate incidents of violence nationwide.

Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said three Daesh militants were killed during an operation on their hideout in the Arzan Qimat area in the limits of the 12th security district of Kabul.

Six members of a family were killed in a hand grenade blast in Ghor and in a similar incident, two children lost their lives and five others were injured in Badakhshan province.

One child was killed and five others were injured in Ghazni province when an unexploded ordnance went off and two people were injured in a similar blast in Parwan province.

Unknown gunmen killed two people in Jawzjan and three people in Faryab and one person was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Jawzjan province.

In Badghis, one person died after accidentally shooting himself with his gun. In Khost province, one person was killed and six others injured during an armed clash between two families over land ownership.

A charred body of a child was found in Zabul province and one of the victims of last week's explosion in Balkh died in hospital.

In the previous week, 16 people were killed and 27 others were injured in various incidents of violence across the country.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and government forces would get killed and wounded each week.

World's interaction

Two days ago, Abdulaziz Kamilov, Uzbekistan National Security Council advisor, heading a delegation, arrived in Kabul and met with deputy prime minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Kamilov said his country had supported Afghanistan in international forums and meetings and wanted cooperation with the caretaker government of Afghanistan.

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the international community should increase interaction with the caretaker Afghan government if it wanted to protect human rights in Afghanistan.

Last week, deputy prime minister for political affairs Mullah Abdul Kabit met UNAMA deputy head Markus Potzel and asked the international community to take steps towards recognizing the Islamic Emirate.

Similarly, acting Foreign Minister Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi called for the lifting of curbs the west,

Americans detained in Afghanistan

Efforts on to put economy back on track of sustainable growth: Dar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Finance and Revenue

Senator Muhamme Ishaq Dar has said that the government is making all possible efforts to steer the economy of the difficult situation in order to put it on the path of sustainable economic growth.

Addressing as chief guest an Iftar dinner hosted by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in honor of foreign diplomats, Dar said that friendly countries were expected to materialize their commitments with Pakistan that would pave the way to close the deal with the IMF and revive the economy.

He said that in 2016, Pakistan was a rising economy as it was expected to become the world's 18th-strongest economy, but was now facing serious economic challenges.

He said that Pakistan would not default and the government was making all possible efforts to steer it out of a difficult situation in order to put it on the path of sustainable economic growth. He lauded the ini-

tiative of ICCI for hosting an Iftar dinner for diplomats. Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI urged the government to ensure consistency in economic policies that would enable the business community and investors to invest in Pakistan with confidence. He assured that the business community would fully support the government in its efforts to revive the economy.

He highlighted the business and investment opportunities in Pakistan for diplomats and said that Pakistan was a huge market of over 220 million consumers and offered great investment opportunities in various sectors of its economy. He said that foreign investors should transfer technology to Pakistan and explore joint ventures and investments in areas of interest.

Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, former federal minister said that the government was determined to promote ease of doing business and hoped that the current difficult phase would be over

soon. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan needed exports to overcome its foreign exchange crisis and hoped that the foreign diplomats would fully cooperate with Pakistan in realizing this goal. Engineer Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI thanked the chief guest, diplomats and all the participants for attending the Iftar dinner. He said that if the government created a more conducive business environment, the private sector would be able to improve the health of the economy. Junaid Afzal, Chairman, Nova Group said that with the efforts of Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI, Nova Group was working out on an attractive discounted package of residential and commercial plots for the members of the business community. He said that Nova Group would cooperate with ICCI for the establishment of an industrial park in the region. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI said the business community is hopeful that Finance

Minister Ishaq Dar will soon conclude a deal with the IMF that will enable Pakistan to cope with its current economic crisis. He urged the government to work hard to end the country's reliance on foreign loans and make it self-sufficient and assured that the business community would fully support in achieving this goal.

Atadjan Movlamov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan, Yerzhan Kistafin Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Khazar Farhadov Ambassador of Azerbaijan, Ulanbek Totuiaev Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, Dr. Mehmet Pacaci Ambassador of Turkey, Adam M. Tugio Ambassador of Indonesia, Dr. Ramez Alraee, Ambassador of Syria, and diplomats of many other countries including Saudi Arabia, Australia, Malaysia, Poland, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Republic of Turkish Northern Cyprus attended the Iftar Dinner. They appreciated the ICCI for hosting a magnificent Iftar dinner for them.



HYDERABAD: A women cast her vote during the by-election in union council 28 in Hyderabad.

Imran does not want elections, rather he wants selection again: Marriyum

LAHORE (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Sunday that Imran Khan was not interested in elections in the country, he actually wanted his selection as Prime Minister again.

Addressing a press conference here, she said that Imran's Khan's tamashas of cypher, long march, avoid the jail campaign, elections, Zaman Park, attacks and threats to the courts have reached their conclusion.

Marriyum said the people of Pakistan remember his tenure as a 'black chapter in the history of the country as they were paying the price of Imran's four year misrule which was marked by corruption, incompetence and inefficiency.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan did not have political issues, rather he was facing psychological problems.

She said last year Imran Khan had concocted the fake narrative of foreign conspiracy for toppling his government which was accepted by followers of his cult and PTI social media gang working from abroad claimed that imported government had been installed in Pakistan.

The narrative of international conspiracy started from cypher, blaming the United States, Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif and then caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi. Those who accused the US of conspiracy were now tendering apologies and seeking pardon, she said, ridiculing the PTI. She wondered how the followers of PTI still believe in baseless allegations of Imran Khan. The minister said that yesterday the people of Lahore completely rejected Imran Khan and the PTI had to use old pictures and even Minar-e-Pakistan was removed from the pictures. The minister said that on failure of the cypher

narrative, Imran started a long march which was doomed while giving it Islamic touch, Jail Bharo movement was started after the long march disaster during which journalists and police personnel were martyred. The police officials were fired at from the houses of PTI leaders.

She said Imran was always ready to lead and address political rallies and marches but when the courts summoned him, he started making excuses of his old age, injury, diseases and above all threat to life.

The minister said that Imran, who refused to go to court, went to Minar-e-Pakistan to address a rally. She said he was neither sick, nor was he an elderly person, nor he faced any threat to life when going to address the rally but he will not go to court to face cases of foreign funding, Toshakhana and Tyrion Khan.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said that the constitution and law of the land could not follow the dictates of a person who had the mindset of a devil. She said terrorists were present in Zaman Park from where petrol bombs were thrown at police and slingshots and stones were used. The minister said that if Imran wanted fresh elections, why did he dissolve the National Assembly after no-confidence motion was tabled and why did he force the Speaker, deputy speaker and even the president to violate the constitution?

Castigating Imran Khan's so-called 10 point agenda, she said Imran Khan's PTI ruled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for ten years, it remained in power at Centre and Punjab for almost four years but set a record of bad governance and corruption. Taking a jibe at Imran, she said he was supposed to revive the national economy through 'buffalos and eggs' but the country's loans were nearly doubled in only 4 years' time.

She said when Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi, Farah Gogi and other looters from PTI would be brought to book, rule of law would be established in Pakistan.

About Imran Khan's claim of preparing a database of the poor, she said Benazir Income Support Program was a database which he shamelessly renamed as Ehsas program. She said if Imran would make a database, the beneficiaries would be Pinki Peerni, Farah Gogi and Shehzad Akbar etc.

She said during his tenure, Imran Khan only renamed the public welfare projects of the previous government. She said the PML-N health program was given the title of Health Insaf Card whereas PML-N youth programme was renamed as Kanyab Jawan programme but he could not run these programmes.

She said Imran claimed to provide 50,00,000 housing units to the poor segments of society and create 10 million jobs, but on the contrary, over 10 million people lost jobs during PTI rule and he failed to build housing units for the poor. She said that the house building scheme was taken over by Bushra Bibi through Al-Qadir Trust. Instead Imran Khan plunged the national economy in the Tsunami of unemployment and inflation due to which the common man suffered badly. About Imran's claims to control money laundering, she said that the PTI chairman should submit a reply to foreign funding case in the court, and the money laundering issue would get settled.

She said it was ironic that a person who laundered money by using private jets was talking about controlling money laundering. She also said that Imran got approval from the cabinet to hand over \$190 million public money to a private party.

Fawad says PM Shehbaz gave ‘ill response’ to President Alvi's letter

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior vice president Fawad Chaudhry on Sunday said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif gave an ill response to President Dr Arif Alvi's letter written within the constitutional provisions.

Mr Alvi had, earlier, asked the PM to direct the concerned authorities to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in line with the Supreme Court's order for holding elections to avoid any complication including the contempt of court. Addressing a presser along with PTI general secretary Asad Umar, he said the way PM had responded to the president's letter was enough to dawn [on people] how lowly a man he was. "There is no space for forced disappearances in the country and the country is not far from constitutional government", he added. He said hundreds of thousands of people rejected the tactics being employed by the fascist government at the PTI's Minar-e-Pakistan rally on

Saturday night adding that the entire country was standing beside PTI chief Imran Khan.

"All ways leading to Minar-e-Pakistan were blocked using containers and we cannot find an equivalence to this government's oppression", he added. People were being captured from Lahore and termed "missing persons", he said, and FIA was serving notices on them.

He alluded that he had not witnessed the worst treatment of political workers adding that women were being harassed inside their homes. "We cannot tolerate such ill-treatment", he added.

He went on to say that so far six persons had died in the pursuit of obtaining subsidized flour bags imploring where they [the government] had brought this country to.

"The incumbent government will drag down the country to the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list again", he added. Oil prices had decreased in the international market, he said, but they increased in

Pakistan. He said politics was defined as trekking forward after looking into others' arguments adding that the way the government was moving forward had given rise to a big crisis in the country. "You are so afraid that you are distancing yourself from elections and all eyes are on the Supreme Court", he added.

Mr Umar said there would be no space for democracy in the country if the country was run the way it was being run adding that next week would be decisive in the country's history. "Country has no longer a judiciary of the 1950s and everyone will see the judiciary defending the country", he added.

He continued saying that a case was lodged against Hassaan Niazi in Lahore after being commuted to Quetta adding they [the government] were taking the country to nothing but destruction. "People came out on their own for the PTI's rally on Saturday night and they did not do so for Mr Khan", he added. Fascism was, he said, at its peak in the country.

Russia, China are not creating military alliance, Putin says

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia and China are not creating a military alliance and the cooperation between their armed forces is "transparent", President Vladimir Putin said in comments broadcast on Sunday, days after hosting Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the Kremlin.

Putin and Xi professed friendship and pledged closer ties, including in the military sphere, during their March 20-21 summit, as Russia struggles to make battlefield gains in what it calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

"We are not creating any military alliance with China," Putin said on state television. "Yes, we have cooperation in the sphere of military-technical interaction. We are not hiding this. Everything is transparent, there is nothing secret."

China and Russia signed a "no limits" partnership accord in early 2022, just weeks before Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine. Beijing has refrained from criticising Putin's decision and has

touted a peace plan for Ukraine. The West has dismissed its proposals as a ploy to buy Putin more time to rebuild his forces in Ukraine.

Washington has said recently that it fears Beijing could arm Russia, something China denies.

In his televised remarks, Putin dismissed suggestions that Moscow's increased ties with Beijing in areas such as energy and finance meant that Russia was becoming overly dependent on China, saying these were the views of "jealous people".

"For decades many have desired turning China against the Soviet Union and Russia, and vice versa," he said. "We understand the world we live in. We really value our mutual relations and the level they have reached in recent years." Putin also accused the United States and NATO of seeking to build a new global "axis" that he said bore some resemblance to the World War Two alliance between Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and

imperial Japan.

Putin named Australia, New Zealand and South Korea as being in line to join a "global NATO" and referenced a defence agreement signed by Britain and Japan earlier this year.

"That is why Western analysts... are talking about the West starting to build a new axis similar to the one created in the 1930s by the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy and militarist Japan," he said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has visited Japan and South Korea this year, and stressed the importance of the Atlantic alliance working closely with partners in the Indo-Pacific region. He has also spoken of rising tensions between the West and China and urged more military support for Ukraine. Putin has depicted Russia's actions in Ukraine as a defensive pushback against an aggressive hostile West, drawing parallels with Moscow's fight against invading Nazi German forces during World War Two.

Ministry issues new guidelines for private security guards

LAHORE (PPI) The Interior Ministry has issued new guidelines for private security guards, wherein no private guard can interfere with police work.

According to the Ministry of Interior on Sunday, neither private security guards can restrain nor they resist law-enforcement officials.

"If the security guard stops the police, it will be a violation of clause 186 of the PPC Act," and that the licence of the concerned security company will be cancelled for violating the law. The Ministry of Interior has sent guidelines to all security guard companies. Moreover, it has also notified the four chief secretaries, as well as inspectors general of police, about the notification issued on Sunday.

Hassaan Niazi handed over to Punjab police

QUETTA (NNI): A district and sessions court in Quetta handed over Barrister Hassaan Niazi, the nephew of former prime minister Imran Khan, to Punjab police on one-day transit remand. Judicial Magistrate Kaleemullah approved one-day transit remand of PTI leader Hassan Niazi.

Sources said that a delegation of Lahore police were present in Quetta for the custody of Hassaan Niazi. In the letter, the home department noted the PTI leader was wanted by Lahore Police in FIR No. 388/23. It also directed IG Balochistan to ensure 'foolproof' security of Imran Khan's nephew. The Quetta police had registered a case against Hassan Khan Niazi for inciting violence and interfering in government affairs. Earlier, a judicial magistrate handed over Barrister Hassan Khan Niazi, the nephew of former prime minister Imran Khan to Quetta police on one-day transit remand.

US lawmaker says FBI briefed him on Trump’s rhetoric over New York probe

WASHINGTON (Reuters): U.S. Senator Mark Warner said on Sunday he was briefed by the FBI on Donald Trump's rhetoric after the former president verbally lashed out at a New York prosecutor overseeing a grand jury investigation into alleged hush-money payments.

"I have been briefed by the FBI. They say they are fully prepared," Warner, a Democrat and the chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told CNN on Sunday. "They have seen no specific threats but the level of rhetoric on some of these right-wing sites has increased."

Trump, who is seeking the Republican nomination for the 2024 presidential elections, has ramped up his rhetoric against New York prosecutors probing his hush-money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels. Prosecutors have said they would not be intimidated.

Trump has specifically condemned

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg in multiple posts on his Truth Social media site since March 18 when the former president wrongly predicted he would be arrested three days later. Trump has warned of potential "death & destruction" if he faced criminal charges.

Trump falsely claims his defeat in 2020 was the result of fraud - a claim that inspired his followers to launch a deadly Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol in a failed bid to stop Congress from certifying the election of Democratic President Joe Biden, who bested the Republican Trump by more than seven million votes.

Trump's lawyer, Joseph Tacopina, said on Sunday that some of Trump's online attacks against Bragg were ill-advised. "I'm not his social media consultant. I think that was an ill-advised post that one of his social media people put up & he quickly took down," Tacopina told NBC

News in reference to a post by Trump of his image holding a baseball bat next to Bragg.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams also said on Sunday the city was prepared for any fallout from a potential Trump indictment.

"We are just going to be ready no matter what happens," Adams told PIX11 on Sunday.

Daniels, an adult film actress and director whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, has said she received money in exchange for keeping silent about a sexual encounter she had with Trump in 2006. Trump has denied ever having an affair with Daniels, and has called the payment a "simple private transaction." He has said he did not commit a crime and has called the investigation, one of many legal hurdles that he faces, politically motivated. The Manhattan grand jury probing Trump is expected to reconvene in the coming week.

Kyiv says Russia took Minsk ‘hostage’ with tactical nukes plan

KYIV (AFP/APP): Kyiv on Sunday said Russia took Minsk as a "nuclear hostage" after President Vladimir Putin announced the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, bringing the arms to a country at the gates of the European Union.

Putin, who has issued thinly veiled warnings that Russia could use nuclear weapons if threatened, said the move was similar to the United States transferring weapons to allies. "The Kremlin took Belarus as a nuclear hostage," the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, wrote on Twitter.

He added that the move was "a step towards the internal destabilization of the country". On Saturday, Putin announced Russia would station tactical nuclear weapons to neighbour and ally Belarus "without violating our international agreements on nuclear non-proliferation". Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak on Sunday accused the Russian leader of breach-

ing such obligations.

"(Putin) admits that he is afraid of losing and all he can do is scare" people, Podolyak also said on Twitter.

Strongman Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power in Belarus for almost 30 years, is a key Putin ally.

Back in February 2022, Minsk allowed the Kremlin to launch its invasion of Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

Fears have since risen that Belarus may join its ally's offensive, but Lukashenko said he would do so "only if attacked".

In an interview broadcasted Saturday, Putin said the move to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus was "nothing unusual".

"The United States has been doing this for decades. They have long placed their tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of their allies," Putin said. Putin said he spoke to Lukashenko and said "we agreed to do the same." Russia will start training crews on April 3 and plans to fin-

ish the construction of a special storage facility for tactical nuclear weapons by July 1.

Putin has previously said nuclear tensions were "rising" globally but that Moscow would not deploy first.

The Russian leader said renewed discussions with Lukashenko on the issue were spurred by a British official's suggestion to send depleted uranium weapons to Ukraine.

Russia will respond if the West supplied Ukraine with such ammunition, he added.

"Russia of course has what it needs to answer. Without exaggeration, we have hundreds of thousands of such shells. We have not used them yet."

He said the weapons "can be classified as the most harmful and hazardous for humans... and also for the environment". Depleted uranium munitions are highly effective at piercing armour plate, but their use is controversial. The metal is toxic for the soldiers who use the weapons and for civilians in areas where they are fired.