

IMF deal likely next week

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are about to conclude and Staff Level Agreement with the fund is expected next week, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar said here on Thursday. In a tweet, the finance minister said some Anti-Pakistan elements were spreading malicious rumours that Pakistan may default.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting of federal cabinet.

SBP increases policy rate to 20% owing to inflation outlook

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Monetary Policy Committee of the State Bank of Pakistan, on Thursday, increased the policy rate by 300 basis points to 20 percent owing to an inflation outlook that warrants a strong policy response and continuity of ongoing monetary tightening.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) also stressed the need for fiscal consolidation with concerted efforts for improving the external position coupled with energy conservation measures to alleviate pressure on the external account, said a statement issued here. The committee noted that the national CPI inflation has surged to 31.5 percent on year on year basis while core inflation rose to 17.1 percent in urban and 21.5 percent in rural basket in February 2023.

The MPC observed that most of the near-term risks to the inflation outlook from external and fiscal adjustments highlighted in its January meeting had materialized and are partially reflected in the inflation outturns for February. The committee indicated that 'inflation to rise further in the next few months' and then it begins to fall at a gradual pace due to impact of recent fiscal adjustments and exchange rate depreciation.

"The average inflation this year is now expected in the range of 27 - 29

percent against the November 2022 projection of 21-23 percent," the MPC noted and emphasised that anchoring inflation expectations was critical and warranted a strong policy response. In January 2023, the current Account deficit (CAD) fell to \$242 million, the lowest level since March 2021. Cumulatively, the CAD - at \$3.8 billion in Jul-Jan FY23- is down 67 percent compared to the same period last year.

The MPC seen vulnerabilities continue to persist despite a substantial reduction in CAD as scheduled debt repayments and a decline in financial inflows amid rising global interest rates and domestic uncertainties would continue to exert pressure on foreign exchange reserves and the exchange rate. The MPC noted that FX reserves remain low and concerted efforts were needed to improve the external position. In this regard, conclusion of the ongoing 9th review under the IMF's EFF would help addressing near-term external sector challenges, the committee hoped.

The MPC also stressed on the urgent need for energy conservation measures to alleviate pressure on the external account and meet the import requirements of other sectors. The committee assessed that recent fiscal measures including an increase in GST and excise duties, reduction in subsidies, adjustments in energy

prices, and the austerity drive would help containing fiscal and primary deficits.

The committee reiterated that the envisaged fiscal consolidation was critical for economic stability and would complement the ongoing monetary tightening in bringing down inflation over the medium-term. The Committee emphasised that any significant fiscal slippages will undermine monetary policy effectiveness in the context of achieving the price stability objective.

The MPC while reviewing impact of further monetary tightening on financial stability and the near-term growth outlook asserted that risks to financial stability remain contained, given that financial institutions are broadly well capitalised while a trade-off would persist on growth. "Short-term costs of bringing down inflation are lower than the long-term costs of allowing it to become entrenched," the committee reiterated and noted that recent decision by MPC has pushed the real interest rate in positive territory on a forward-looking basis, barring unexpected future shocks. It would help anchor inflation expectations and steer inflation to the medium-term target of 5 - 7 percent by end FY25, the MPC maintained. The Committee also decided to hold its next meeting on April 4, 2023.

Pakistan values its ties with US: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday underscored that Pakistan valued its longstanding relationship with the United States and wanted to further deepen bilateral relations.

The prime minister was talking to a four-member US California State Assembly delegation led by Chris Holden that called on him. Other members of the delegation included Assembly members Eloise Reyes, Mike Gipson and Windy Carrillo, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister said Pakistan and the US celebrated the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations last year. In that backdrop, he said the signing of the 'Sister-State Resolution' between California and Punjab on January 9 this year was a welcome development.

Punjab and California could work together in areas of mutual interest, including trade, investment, agriculture, IT, education, and cultural exchanges, he added. The prime minister appreciated the positive role being played by the Pakistani-American diaspora in further strengthening people-to-people linkages. Chris Holden thanked the prime minister for the hospitality extended to the delegation during their visit and underscored the need to further expand Pak-US relations.

7 Pakistanis died in boat wreck near Benghazi: FO

Muhammad Asad

ISLAMABAD: Seven Pakistanis died in a boat wreck near the Libyan Port city of Benghazi on February 26, while the government was engaged in getting complete insight regarding Pakistanis onboard the wooden boat.

It was shared by the Spokesperson Pakistan Foreign Office, Mumtaz Zahra Balich during her weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday. According to her, the Embassy of Pakistan in Tripoli is currently engaged with Libyan authorities, and the International Committee for the Red Cross to confirm the number of Pakistanis onboard the sinking ship, identification of the dead bodies, and transportation of the dead bodies to the country.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan diplomatic missions in Rome and Tripoli are continuously in contact with the victims of both incidents of ships wreckage near Italian and Libyan shores and their families in Pakistan, however utmost caution is being observed in the identification and confirmation process because of sensitivity of the matter, added Zahra Baloch.

While answering a question regarding a recent report issued by the Brussels-based EU Disinfo Lab regarding anti-Pakistan propaganda, Baloch said the report released by the EU Disinfo Lab has validated Pakistan's longstanding claim regarding India's smear campaign and propaganda against it.

According to her, Pakistan has been consistently sensitizing the global community about India's ill designs to malign Pakistan through the fake infrastructure of unregistered and fake entities including media outlets, think tanks, and research organizations in various parts of the world.

To another question regarding the IAEA's Chief Rafael Mariano Grossi's recent visit to Pakistan, Baloch told the reporters that Dr. Grossi's visit was in the context of the IAEA's mandate that deals



with peaceful civilian uses of nuclear energy including power generation, agriculture, healthcare, and clinical research. The Spokesperson categorically said that there was no discussion or agreement regarding Pakistan's nuclear program and assets that are purely for defensive purposes.

To another question, Baloch said that the Indian human rights violations and state atrocities continued throughout February, and Indian troops killed five Kashmiris including 2 already held in government custody. According to the Spokesperson, 115 youths were arbitrarily arrested and seven injured as Indian troops continued the brutal use of force and torture against peaceful protesters in the valley.

The Spokesperson categorically noted that Pakistan would unceasingly continue its diplomatic, moral, and political support for Kashmiris' just struggle for the right to self-determination and will continue to raise its voice against grave human rights violations in the Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOJK).

Imran has no right to question govt policies, says Marriyum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Thursday said Imran Khan had no right to question the economic policies of the current government which had been striving to undo the "mess" created by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) regime in its four-year tenure.

She, in a tweet, said ironically, the "shameless person", who pushed the country into an economic quagmire with his own hands, had the audacity to lift finger on others. He (Imran Khan) did not only ruin the economy but also "plunged the country into political and constitutional crises", the minister added. The minister also shared some pictures on her Twitter handle giving a complete analysis of the economic performance of the PTI and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz respective governments.

She said the launch of "Imrani Project" in 2016 was the beginning of a conspiracy against Pakistan. The economic growth would not have nosedived if that project was not launched, she said, adding the inflation and the unemployment rate had also increased due to the wrong economic policies of the PTI's government.

Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb also said concocted story about a plot to kill Imran Khan was ridiculous.

She, in a tweet, said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) narrative of cipher and foreign conspiracy has been done and dusted and now it came up with another false story to mislead the masses. Marriyum termed Imran Khan a "foreign agent" and accused him of hatching a conspiracy against the country in connivance with his agents residing abroad.

She said Imran Khan's anti-Pakistan agenda had been exposed before the nation. His involvement in foreign funding as well as malicious campaign against the military martyrs was a living proof of his dirty mindset. The minister also referred to the economic mess created by Imran Khan's government.

IHC orders for LB polls in 120 days

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to conduct Local Body elections in federal capital within 120 days.

A two-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the intra court appeals of ECP and the federation against the decision of the single member bench. The Director General ECP informed the court that Local Body elections in the capital would cost around Rs 200 millions.

At this, the Chief Justice asked the ECP to conduct the elections as the government could easily provide these funds. The Chief Justice remarked that the court would pass an order so that the number of union councils wouldn't be increased for the upcoming elections.

Nation awaiting strict action: Shehbaz

PM orders action as inquiry report on power breakdown suggests 'human & tech error'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the Power Division to hold a departmental action after the findings of an inquiry report held responsible the 'human and technical error' for the countrywide power breakdown of January 23.

The prime minister gave the order as the inquiry report of the massive power breakdown was presented in the cabinet meeting. Chairing the meeting, PM Sharif said the nation was awaiting strict action

against those responsible for the incident that left the country in a power blackout for several hours.

The inquiry report also said that an abnormal increase in the frequency of the alternate current line tripped the automatic security system of power plants. It also said that the Kot Addu power plant had the facility of 'black start', however due to expiry of the contract of the plant, it could not be made operational. Black Start is the procedure to recover from a total or partial shutdown of the transmission system

which has caused an extensive loss of supplies.

The prime minister ordered the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to line the power system with Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA). The federal cabinet was proposed that a special police force be deployed in areas with 60 percent and more line losses. The prime minister directed to constitute a special cabinet committee to finalize a strategy to end line losses, theft of electricity and solarization of tube wells.

Doha pact empowered Taliban, weakened US, allies

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: One year has passed since the Doha Agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, in briefing US State Department Spokesperson, Ned Price acknowledged that the agreement empowered the Taliban and it made the United States and its partners weaker in the region.

Ned Price stated that so far Taliban have not honored their commitments which they made in Doha Agreement and these commitments were not only made to the United States but to the rest of the world as well. Taliban were not suppose to host terrorists on their soil but Aiman Al Zawahri, the Al Qaeda leader was found there and was eliminated by the US, Ned Price added.

Taliban were also suppose to hold a dialogue process, where all political parties were expected to participate but Taliban have not held any such dialogue, Ned price commented and added that Taliban have

shut down girls schools and colleges and have barred women from work. "We are waiting for girls schools to open this month" Ned Price commented. "No country can thrive when half of its population is arbitrarily held back" Ned further added.

When asked by The Frontier Post about the accountability of US spending in Afghanistan which President Biden had promised during his election campaign, Ned Price dodged the question and started talking about the future plans of the US. The Frontier Post again questioned about the recent report by SIGAR, highlighting huge corruption done by former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and former Afghan Ambassador to the US, Hamdullah Mohib.

The Frontier Post asked that both Ashraf Ghani and Mohib are US citizens and if the US government will ever dig into their their assets outside the United States. Ned Price replied by saying that different departments of the US government hold inquiries regularly



ly and that "we are looking into these reports and working with allies to substantiate these reports and will of course seek accountability as you would expect."

While referring to the Pakistani Supreme Court decision regarding elections, The Frontier Post asked whether US State Department holds any grudge against former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, Ned Price stated that US always supports democratic process and it is the decision of the people of Pakistan who they elect. The US works with countries and not individuals, Ned Price added.

Rupee tumbles by nearly Rs19 against dollar

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Pakistani rupee sank sharply by Rs18.74 against the dollar in the interbank market on Thursday, with the local currency trading at a historic high of Rs284.85 in morning trade, according to data shared by the Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan (ECAP).

Analysts attributed the record drop — which is 7.04pc — to the government's impasse with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On Wednesday, the PKR closed Rs266.11 per dollar, according to SBP data. Topline Securities chief executive Mohammed Sohail told Dawn.com that the fresh plunge was mainly because of uncertainty in the currency market regarding the delay in funding

from the IMF. Zafar Paracha, secretary general of the Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan (ECAP), explained that the IMF had asked Pakistan to trade the dollar at the current Afghan trade rate. "In other words, they had said our actual rate should be as in the grey market rate, not the interbank rate or the open market. They are right as the availability and trade of dollars taking place right now is only in the grey market," he added.

He said that the government imposed restrictions on foreign exchange, as a result, the trade shifted to the grey market. The dollar does not come or go because of the many restrictions they have imposed on foreign exchange companies on its

buying and selling, he said.

He said this is despite the government's crack-downs [on the grey market]. Paracha called for a revamp in the policies, saying conducting crackdowns would not help. "Inadvertently, we have greatly supported the grey market because of our policies. The IMF can also see this so they have said to bring our rate — of the rupee and dollar — to that point," he added.

Tresmark Head of Strategic Planning Komal Mansoor said: "The IMF demanded a 20pc reduction in the rupee's value before the new agreement that was fulfilled." Saying she hoped the dollar would eventually settle between Rs278-Rs280. "If it gets above this, then the State Bank would intervene."

Pak emphasizes NAM, world's role for just resolution of Kashmir dispute

BAKU (APP): Pakistan on Thursday urged the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the international community to promote a just, peaceful and expeditious resolution of longstanding Jammu and Kashmir dispute as per the UNSC resolutions and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

"Foreign intervention and occupation, and the accompanying denial of the right to self-determination to peoples, are of the root cause of conflicts and disputes and of grave violations of human rights. This is manifest in Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK)," Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said addressing the summit level meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to COVID-19 on post-pandemic global recovery held here.

The minister, who headed the Pakistani delegation at the summit, said the decisive condition for achieving all our development goals rested on the promotion of just and durable peace and security, nationally, regionally and globally. "It is impossible to talk about a post-pandemic global recovery against the backdrop of wars, conflicts and foreign occupation," the minister told the meeting attended by the delegates representing from around 70 countries and chaired by Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev as NAM chair.

He said Pakistan deeply valued the NAM's fundamental ideals, especially its principled support for the right to self-determination of people living under foreign occupation. He said NAM, which numbered two thirds of UN member states, had

a critical role to play in shaping the post pandemic global recovery.

Proposing a comprehensive and cooperative strategy to "build forward better" which, the minister said, should include, ensuring global food security through the urgent provision of food supplies to the 250 million living in hunger. The strategy should also feature urgent and adequate concessional financing for developing countries facing liquidity challenges, reform of the international financial architecture, through a comprehensive debt solution and implementation of the climate change agenda and climate commitments, especially the fulfillment of the climate finance commitments and the launch of the Loss & Damage fund agreed at COP27.

"Climate justice requires full adherence to the Principle of Equity

and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities," the minister said. He also suggested the mobilization of large-scale investment from the public and private sector to build sustainable and resilient infrastructure, in developing countries. He told the international gathering that the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc worldwide, putting the lives of billions of people around the globe in turmoil, inflicting grave suffering and destabilizing the global economy.

Besides exposing the fragility of the societies and economies to shocks, it has laid bare deep inequalities threatening the achievement of the SDGs, the said COVID-related challenges were further compounded by the inflationary spiral caused by supply chain disruptions and the impact of the war in Ukraine, the

minister said. "The crowning blow to our endeavour for sustainable development was the devastating floods last summer — our worst disaster in history," he told the summit.

He said the floods left one third of Pakistan submerged killed over 1700 people, injured 15,000 and displaced eight million others besides destroying over 2 million homes and over four million acres of agricultural land. "An estimated 9 million more people in Pakistan could descend into poverty as a direct consequence of these floods," Appreciating the support by the development partners to Pakistan's 4RF framework plan for resilient rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction, the minister conveyed solidarity with Türkiye and its people as they moved to the recovery and rehabilitation phase.

He also assured Pakistan's contin-

uous all possible assistance to Türkiye for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Minister Ayaz Sadiq said the "poly crises" of COVID, climate change and conflicts had affected developing countries disproportionately and reversed their efforts to achieve the SDGs. "Two hundred and fifty million people in the global South face hunger, around a 100 million have been pushed back into poverty. Nearly 60 developing countries are in debt distress," he remarked and emphasized the NAM's role on responding to these monumental challenges confronting the developing countries. He appreciated Azerbaijan and its President Ilham Aliyev, as the current chair, for leading the Movement with dedication and success at this critical and challenging juncture of world history.

KP Police to provide all possible security to Chinese, says IGP

PESHAWAR (APP): IG Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan on Thursday said Pakistan-China relations are higher than mountains, deeper than the ocean and sweeter than honey and both countries have supported each other in every difficult time; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police will provide all possible security to the Chinese throughout the province.

He expressed these views on the occasion of his visit to China Window, a Chinese Cultural Center established in Peshawar. The IG Police was briefed about the security of China Window. He visited various galleries related to Chinese culture and expressed deep interest in them. Talking to the media, Akhtar Hayat Khan said that the CPEC is a project for the development and prosperity of Pakistan, while the ongoing projects in KP will provide employment to the local people and the economy will also be strengthened.

IG said in this regard, he especially visited Rashkai Special Economic Zone, while the relevant regional police officers across the province have reviewed the

issues related to the security of the Chinese working on the various projects and all possible measures are being taken in this regard.

Akhtar Hayat Khan said that in view of the popularity of digital media and the importance of the Chinese language the youth should be encouraged to take advantage of this most important medium and should learn the Chinese language, it is commendable that the National Commission for Technical and Vocational Training NAVTTC and UNHCR, training was organized in the China Window, which will yield very important results in the future.

The IG Police described the establishment of the Chinese Cultural and Information Center in Peshawar with the support of the Chinese Embassy as a centre of excellence. He said that it is commendable that a large number of people have visited this state-of-the-art centre to learn about the culture of their brotherly neighbouring country, China. Earlier, IG Police distributed certificates amongst participants of the Digital Media and Chinese Language

course Course organized by the China Window. On this occasion, China Window Administrator Amjad Aziz Malik informed the IG Police about the training course.

US Ambassador, INL delegation calls on IGP

A six-member delegation of US Mission and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) called on the Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan at Central Police Office Peshawar on Thursday.

The delegation was led by US Ambassador Mr. Donald A Blome. The other members included Mr. Panfilo Marquez, US Consul General Peshawar Consulate, Ms Iori J. Antolene, Director Nick Katsakis, Political Economic Section Chief and Ahsan Ali, Programme Coordinator INL.

In the meeting various activities launched by the INL regarding increasing the manpower capabilities of the KP police were discussed. The Police Chief Akhtar Hayat Khan informed the delegation about the training programme and scientific

investigation provided to the police jawans, re-organization and up-gradation of counter terrorism department to effectively combat terrorism and modern technology based policing.

The IGP further informed that separate women desks have been set up in most of the Police Stations of KP to exclusively hear and solve women problems.

The head of the delegation appreciated the efforts KP police especially the measures taken to combat terrorism and assured full cooperation to construct various buildings required for the police in the province and to equip the police with modern equipment and tools.

The IGP thanked the members of the delegation and reiterated his commitment that no efforts would be spared to bring quality policing in the province and come upto the attached expectations of the general public. The IGP also presented special souvenirs and police shields to the members of the delegation.

Additional IGP CTD, DIG CTD and DIG Finance were also present on the occasion.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Caretaker Minister for Industries Adnan Jalil chairing meeting on Technology University Nowshera at Civil Secretariat.

RTPSC monitors more than 2m public services F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Public Services Commission (RTPSC) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa monitored as many as two million and forty-seven thousand delivery of services within stipulated timeframe during 2022, on Thursday.

This was disclosed by RTPSC Data Analyst Shahab Khan during his lecture to newly promoted Superintendents, personal Assistants to Secretaries and Ministers along Tehsiladars and added that public servants are bound by law to ensure delivery of services within stipulated timeframe.

RTPSC monitoring 80 notified public services within stipulated timeframe of 13 departments across KP. According to data analysis Deputy Commissioners stands first in delivery of services while Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education least services in all departments.

Mayor announced road lights, wheelchairs

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali on Thursday announced to provide ten wheelchairs for physically challenged students and installation of 50 road lights in Islamia College Peshawar.

He also announced to provide five electric pumps and bricks and blocks for construction of courtyard in Tribal Mosque. During visit, City Mayor also planted a sapling in the college in connection with tree plantation drive.

Speaking on the occasion, he highlighted the significance of educated youth for progress and development assuring cooperation and help to students.

He urged students to explore their innate capabilities and come forward to serve the country. He also advised them to develop natural virtues of patience, mutual respect and morality for their personal grooming.

VC Islamia College, Gul Majeed, Chief Proctor, Saleem-ur-Rehman and faculty members were present on the occasion.

Adnan appreciates University of Technology Nowshera's performance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Industries and Technical Education Muhammad Adnan Jalil has appreciated the performance of University of Technology Nowshera in various fields of science and technology. However, he said, it is clear that the comparison of a quality university should be at the international level and not at the national level because we are neither lacking in resources nor brains.

He was presiding over a meeting related to University of Technology Nowshera at Civil Secretariat

Peshawar. The meeting was attended by University Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Zafar Khan, Special Secretary Industries Abdul Qadir Safi, Economic Advisor of Industries department Munir Gul and other relevant officers.

On this occasion, the university's performance and problems were reviewed in detail and some important decisions were taken.

Adnan Jalil gave the university administration three new goals in addition to the general academic, teaching activities and hoped that no effort would be spared in achieving these goals according to the deadline.

These goals included establishing an electronic vehicles technology lab, revamping TEVTA syllabus with modern requirements and imparting industrial training to university students.

The provincial minister regretted that is despite the passage of eight years of its establishment, this university is running in a rented building, although 610 kanals of land has been allocated for the university in Nowshera.

He directed the immediate acquisition of the land award for the university and also directed the immediate start of its construction work.

Activity held for child protection policy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: KP Child Protection & Welfare Commission with the support from UNICEF conducted a two-day workshop, from 1 - 2 March 2023, for consultations with relevant stakeholders and children aimed at developing a comprehensive Child Protection

Policy for the province. The workshop was chaired by Mr. Zia Ul Haq, Secretary for Social Welfare, Special Education and Women Empowerment Department and facilitated by a team of consultants from Oxford Programme Management (OPM).

Mr. Ijaz Muhammad Khan, Chief Protection Officer, KP CP&WC in his

opening remarks shared that KP CP&WC has drafted a comprehensive Child Protection Policy for the protection, welfare and wellbeing of children living in KP province.

The intent of this policy draft is to provide policy direction to all relevant government departments and institutions for ensuring the prevention and protection of children from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and harmful practices within their mandates and maintain an integrated strategy and referral system with KP CP&WC and its district based Child Protection Units as well as Child Protection Helpline in situations of child protection incidences and reports.

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Blood donation camp organized

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassaemia Hospital and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar on Thursday

organized one day blood donation camp at Peshawar Medical College with the support of Principal & Director Social Welfare Society Prof. Dr. Muhammad Aman Khan, Male Coordinator SWS Prof. Dr. Mutahir Ali Shah and Female Coordinator SWS, Peshawar Medical College (PMC) Associate

Professor Dr. Muhsina Haq. 115 healthy volunteer students donated their blood for saving the precious lives of 1451 registered Thalassaemia Hemophilia and Blood cancer patients of Hamza Foundation.

Atiq Ur Rehman RMO and Ibrarullah Jan RMO delivered motivational lecture to the students about

Thalassaemia disease its prevention and also about the importance of blood donation.

Chairman Hamza Foundation Ijaz Ali Khan has thanked the entire management and students of PMC for extended their help and support for saving the precious lives of ailing humanity of KPK.

Power shutdown notice issued

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Due to necessary work at 132KV GSS Mattani, power supply will remain suspended from 08:00 AM to 04:00 PM on 03, 04 and 05 March, 2023 for improvement of system.

TESCO issued here today, Areas connected with 11 kV Darra, 11kV New College and 11 kV Fata University will be affected due to this work.

The company has regretted the inconvenience to be faced by consumers due to unavoidable maintenance work.



PESHAWAR: Provincial chairman All Pakistan CNG Association Fazal Muqem Khan addressing a press conference.

KPIC launches study program

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) here on Thursday launched a study program on 'Comparative Analysis of Right to Information Laws in Pakistan.'

The program was attended by the retired officers of KPIC, lawyers, journalists and civil society members while Chief Commissioner KPIC Mrs. Farah Hamid Khan attended the program as a chief guest.

Highlighting the objec-

tives of the study program, Farah Hamid said that the program would review Right to Information (RTI) Act and its implementation throughout the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

She praised the work done by KPIC team and asserted that educated citizens can evaluate performance of their government, and can raise their voices against misappropriation, corruption and incompetence.

She claimed that despite

facing significant obstacles, KPIC was promoting good governance in the province by providing timely information to public.

The event was also addressed by Director Centre for Governance and Public Accountability (CGPA) Mohammad Anwar. He also praised the KPIC system for digitizing data and urged other provinces and government departments to adopt it for better service delivery and organization.

Exams pressure could ruin students' life

Ishaq Khan

PESHAWAR: Every time the students have to face a certain amount of pressure during the exams, in some cases this pressure could change the individual's life in the form of anxiety and nervousness for the rest of their life.

Bushra Bibi, a 53 years old mother of three children, told The Frontier Post that every mother and father wants their children to be successful and bring some good grades for their own bright future.

"Sometime parents keep very high hopes from their children and put some extra pressure on the children with the aim to make sure their son or daughter could bring good results to make them proud but unfortunately sometimes that extra pressure could ruin their children's life as it happened with my own daughter," Bushra said.

Bushra explained that her daughter (Aqsa) was a very bright student throughout her school life and we had some high expectations from her that she will make us proud by acing in the exams, without understanding our own daughter, we put some

extra pressure on her before the matric exams.

"We didn't realize that our daughter is avoiding family functions and other activities, only seen to be busy in her books, In fact we were happy for her loneliness and concentrating on studies without knowing that this behavior could drag our child far from us", Bushra Bibi added.

"But unfortunately in 2019 her Matric result was very poor comparing to her previous academic exams and everyone in the family and teachers were disappointed to see her marks as we all were expecting some extra ordinary" She said.

After the result, we witnessed that she is avoiding everyone in the family and crying in loneliness but we didn't take it seriously and one day she announced that she did not want to continue her study because everyone will make fun of her, she lamented.

"We tried so much to convince her for enrollment in college but she refused and started irritating on name of study, my husband (Who is doing job in Saudi Arabia), and my son everyone tried to pacify Aqsa, to continue her study but in vain", Bushra shared.

To know and understand the state of mind of Aqsa towards education, the 19-year-old Aqsa said that she has no wish and interest in study anymore.

"Despite all my hard work and preparations still I was an average student after the board exams; all my fellows got better marks its embarrassing for me to face them and my family members as all were taunting and laughing at me after the matric result", Aqsa shared her pain with teary eyes.

While interviewing the Psychologist about putting the extra exams pressure and its effects on the students, Arshi Arbab, a Clinical Psychologist told The Frontier Post that we have to handle the students very carefully during their studying phase because in some cases the extra care and putting pressure on the youngsters could ruin their lives.

"We have to understand that every child has different intellectual level, some are sharp in learning and some are slow in learning, but we expect all of our children to perform well in every field without realizing their feelings, pressurizing them to bring good grades is like to giving

them mental and psychological torture" Arshi said.

Psychologist informed that those children who were unnecessarily pressurized by their family for getting good marks could lead to inferiority complex, irritation, mood swings, anxiety, depression and it can change their eating, sleeping behaviors. They (students) started to believe that their only purpose in life was to perform well in exams and slowly became anti-social and introverts which could damage their personality for the rest of their life.

She further said that if we couldn't take good care of those children, they could commit suicide which we seen in past in many cases after their failure or meeting the family/teachers expectations because of shame and anxiety.

In some cases, the extra pressure from teachers and family could develop a rebellious behavior among the students towards the school and family which would become a part of his/her personality, Arshi said.

"We (Parents, teachers) need to maintain a stress-free environment, so that our children can easily

speak their heart, leaving behind all their fears during exams in the better interest of a healthy society" Psychologist recommended.

While commenting on the issue, Dr Amjad Reba, Assistant Professor of Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Peshawar, we have created a craze among the students of getting high marks in exams without knowing or delivering the actual concept of education.

Dr Amjad Reba informed that unfortunately our education system is following the traditional or conventional way of teaching and we are only trying to prepare the students to get good marks which created hype in the society.

"This whole process is very harmful for education, forcing the parents and teachers to put extra pressure on the students otherwise no one will open the doors of further education for them in future", Reba said.

He claimed that education became business in our country, mostly the private education institutions only focusing and preparing the students for exams with the help of untrained teachers, then what could you expect from these institutions. We

could see the advertisements and billboards of these institutions displaying their students' marks with the purpose to attract the parents and students.

"All these flaws in the education system and society put an extra burden on students to perform well in exams without understanding the meaning of education, otherwise they will face shame and embarrassment in society for not passing the exams with good grades" Reba said.

Dr Reba said that we should focus on the values and character building of the students rather than preparing them for only exams and ignoring conceptual learning, for this purpose we trained teachers in government and private education institutions to provide a stress-free environment to our generations.

Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Peshawar (BISEP) shared the documents that in the year 2022; total 87,517 students appeared in the exams of class 9th in which 38,365 including (28,130 boys and 10,235 girls) failed to pass the exams. In the 10th exams, total

80,044 students appeared in which 12,781 including (9493 boys and 3288 girls) failed to clear the exams.

Similarly, in the HSSC Part-I, 59,664 students have given the exams and 17,049 (13,389 boys and 3,660 girls) failed to get the required marks. In the HSSC Part-II exams, 59,664 students appeared in the exams in which 3,788 (3,255 boys and 533 girls) students failed to get promotion in the next class.

There are a total 2,480 including 1,110 government and 1,370 private sector schools and 490 colleges including 292 government and 398 private education institutions providing the education facilities to these students in Peshawar region.

While contacting the Chairman Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Peshawar (BISEP), Prof Nasrullah has accepted the fact that the hype of getting high marks in exams was created by the private sector education institutions for marketing purposes and in the end all the burden was put on the student's shoulders.

He claimed that BISEP is utilizing all the resources to discourage the unfair

means of getting good marks in the exams as some of the education institutions are trying to influence the education system with these tactics.

Nasrullah informed that the said the issue of getting high marks pressure on students was also discussed in the meeting of Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) in which all Pakistan Secondary Board Chairmen were present and the committee worked on it and prepared recommendations for it.

"We (IBCC) recommended introducing the 'Grading' system instead of marks in the examinations as this concept will also decrease the psychological pressure on the students to some extent" BISEP Chairman said.

He claimed that BISEP is all set to introduce SLO (Student Learning Outcome) based papers in the upcoming year of exams as it will not only improve the conceptual learning of student but will also improve quality of education, adding that we are also trying to improve the practical exams with the aim to make it more effective in the better interest of the students.



In brief

DPO visits police station
F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: District Police Officer Lakki Marwat Ashfaq paid a surprise visit to Shaheed Haibat Ali Khan police station in Darra Pezu town on Thursday and checked security arrangements and presence of cops there. He conducted the security audit of the police stations and issued instructions to the station house officer to improve the situation. Ashfaq inspected different portions of the station and directed the cops to wear bullet proof jackets during duty hours and implement security related SOPs in letter and spirit. He directed the station house officer to make the environment of the police station people's friendly and ensure provision of quick relief to problem-stricken citizens. Also in the day, the district police chief also inspected the offices of police access service (PAS) and police assistance line (PAL) located at the police lines in the District Headquarters Complex Tajazai.

Cops claim killing bandit

LARKANA (PPI): Police on Thursday claimed to have gunned down an alleged bandit in an encounter and recovered weapons from his possession late at night in the limits of Badah police station. SSP Dr Muhammad Imran Khan told newsmen that the killed dacoit has been identified as Arif son of Yousif Khuhawar and as per initial information he was an active criminal and was wanted by Larkana and Karachi police and police of other districts in various heinous criminal cases. In another action, police arrested Ghous Bux son of Morio Khan Brohi, resident of Sher Khan Brohi village of Garhi Yasin Taluka, SSP said that he was wanted by police in more than 20 criminal cases of kidnapping for ransom, murders, robberies and police encounters by various police stations of Shikarpur district. He further said that during a search operation on the bordering areas of Larkana-Jacobabad accused Qavi Bosan and Saeed Bosan were also nabbed who are involved in bloodshed of Waris Dino Machi police station in Nazir Bosan murder land dispute case.

Road accident claims one life

OKARA (PPI): An 18-year-old boy was killed and another was critically wounded in a tragic road accident in Okara on late Wednesday night. According to details, the accident occurred at the National Highway near Tabrook Adda in Okara where two motorcycles collided due to over-speeding, killing a youth on the spot and injuring another. Rescue 1122 teams reached the spot after being informed and shifted the dead and injured to District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital. According to rescue sources, the deceased has been identified as 18-year-old Hassan Ali.

Census kicks off
F.P. Report

BANNU: Bannu division commissioner Parwez Sabathkel inaugurated the 7th digital housing and population census in Bannu the other day. Officials of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and district and divisional administrations were present. The national exercise began with a door marking by the divisional commissioner in an urban locality. An official said on the occasion that a total of 1272 enumerators had been engaged to carry out the month-long housing and population census in 2195 blocks of Bannu, Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan districts.

Traders observe shutter down strike against load shedding

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: A shutter down protest was observed in Landi Kotal bazaar against excessive power load shedding in rural areas here on Thursday. It is to be stated here that on the last day; tribal electric supply company (TESCO) through a notification asked the local grid station to provide only two hours electricity supply to the tribesmen that annoyed the dwellers of the merged tribal region.

Last day a meeting of all political, social and religious figures of the society under the chair of the tehsil chairman was held in which it was decided to demonstrate a comprehensive agitation against what they said was the injustice of the TESCO.

The officer bearers of Anjumane Tajeran(traders union),Landi Kotal bazaar while expressing integration with general masses announced complete shutter down. On the other hand, the protestors approached the Charwazgai point and suspended the Pak-Afghan highway for all kind of traffic.

Addressing to the angry mob their leaders including Mufti Ijaz, Kaleemullah, Syed Muqtader Shah Afridi and others lamented that since the first day of the creation of the country, a step mother behavior had been extended towards the



tribal as they had been totally ignored. They would adopt necessary initiatives to win basic rights for the tribal, they vowed.

Later on, the protestors thronged the local grid station and turned off all the feeders to cut supply to the whole subdivision including forces cantonment, hospitals and government installments. They threatened that till resuming minimum six hours electricity in 24 hours to residents, they would not let the officials continue power supply to the officials. When the TESCO high official was contacted on the matter he said that earlier the power supply was made on subsidize rate with assistance of the federal government but when the later one withdrew the subsidy, the WAPDA could afford to grant electricity to the tribesmen for free.

Koki Khel tribesmen stage protest demo against load-shedding:

The Kokikhel tribesmen staged a protest demonstration against long hours load shedding in Khyber tribal district and demanded an end to the unannounced power outages in their areas.

The Kokikhel tribesmen and other local tribesmen of tehsils Bara, Jamrud and Landi Kotal gathered at Jamrud and demanded of the tribal electric supply company (TESCO) to immediately end the unannounced load shedding in Khyber.

The protestors threatened to block Peshawar-Torkham road for traffic if their demands were not addressed on priority basis. Later, Deputy Commissioner Khyber, Abdul Nasir Khan and chief executive officer of TESCO held negotiations with tribal elders of Kokikhel and urged them to end their protest peacefully. They assured resolution of their problems.

Status of development projects in Swat reviewed

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Commissioner Malakand Division Shahidullah Khan visited Deputy Commissioner Office Swat at Saidu Sharif where he presided over a meeting and reviewed the status of development projects in Swat. Deputy Commissioner Swat Irfanullah Khan Wazir gave a briefing on the ongoing development projects, overall situation, and problems in the Swat district. Heads of district departments participated in the meeting.

In the meeting, service delivery centers, health projects, construction of schools, colleges, and universities, road projects for access to tourist destinations, restoration of infrastructure affected by floods in 2022, clean water and irrigation projects, sports projects, land settlement,

river protection, and traffic-related issues were reviewed. Deputy Commissioner Swat Irfanullah Khan Wazir said in the briefing that the work on settlement and land computerization is going on rapidly and six out of seven service delivery centers have been activated in the district.

It was told in the meeting that various restrictions had been imposed regarding river protection and monitoring is going on. DC Swat also presented the progress in the development projects to Commissioner Malakand Division Shahidullah Khan and said that the progress is going on. While presiding over the meeting, Commissioner Malakand Division directed to ensure progress on projects of public importance, especially projects related to the tourism industry.

Reviewing the public issues in the district, Commissioner Malakand Division directed to take measures on a priority basis to solve traffic-related problems.

Taking notice of the problems related to bus stands and vegetable markets in Mingora, Commissioner Malakand Division issued orders to solve the problems within two weeks. In the meeting, the supply of quality flour at a discounted price was also reviewed and orders were issued to monitor the situation. Commissioner Malakand Division also issued instructions to speed up road maintenance measures in view of the tourist season. Addressing the heads of the district departments, Commissioner Malakand Division urged them to perform all duties honestly and diligently.



QUETTA: Central president of All Pakistan Marri Ittihad Mir Shafqat Marri addressing a press conference.

Ex-MNA Sher Akbar gets PTI ticket NA-9

F.P. Report

BUNER: The resigned MNA Haji Sher Akbar Khan got PTI for NA-9 Buner by elections schedule on March this year. The PTI ticket for this constituency had issued to new joinee Kamran Khan and he had submitted it to the RO Juned Saeed in the elections commission office but the ex MNA Haji Sher Akbar Khan visited Imran Khan at Zaman Park in Lahore who called the party ticket holder Kamran Khan and asked to announce via social media that he handing over party ticket to Sher Akbar Khan on the directives of Imran Khan and Kamran

did it from Zaman Park.

The three times MNA enjoyed Haji Sher Akbar Khan to enter into elections for the 4th time as candidate from NA-9 Buner in the scheduled by elections. Haji Sher Akbar Khan brought to the RO office in a caravan of motorcades despite raining large number of district chapter leaders and workers.

Haji Sher Akbar Khan and his sole son Shehzad Akbar Khan with other leaders Shahid Khan, Amirul Aman, Tor Nana, Iqbal Khan, Advocate Inam and Advocate Irshad Khan in their brief speeches on the occasion and media

chatting claimed ex MNA was not sold out to opposition against heavy offer and stand with Khan till last moment.

They claimed it was a conspiracy hatched by occupied group to sideline the ex MNA but Haji Sher Akbar Khan being a committed and honest political figure not bowed to conspirators rather visited Khan and appraised him of the situation. They praised Khan for standing with his promise of awarding party ticket to resigned MNA and graced Haji Sher Akbar Khan and proved himself a true leader and person with promise.



HYDERABAD: Students of Government Nazareth Girls College presenting tableau during a ceremony.

RPO Ghafoor welcomed in D I Khan

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: District Police Officer Dera Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani warmly welcomed the RPO after the newly appointed Regional Police Officer Abdul Ghafoor Afridi took charge of Dera Ismail Khan post on his arrival at Police Lines Dera.

The armed police team saluted, RPO Dera placed flowers on the martyrs' memorial and prayed for the elevation of the ranks of the martyrs. He also planted a sapling in Police Lines Dera in connection with the plantation drive and offered a special prayer for the security of the country.

On this occasion, he made a detailed visit to Police Lines, DRC and District Police Office, Dera, while reviewing the security arrangements himself, and issued instructions to the police officials regarding the cleanliness and maintenance of the internal and external parts of the buildings.

On this occasion, Regional Police Officer Dera paid tribute to the sacrifices of police martyrs and said that regional peace and stability and country's survival and security are owed to them by the sacrifices of martyrs. Dera Police will perform its duties honestly and politely, corruption and corruption will not be tolerated in any case.

Smart school system inaugurated

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Speakers at a function held at Timergara said that the role of the private sector in the development of education and health cannot be ignored. They were addressing the opening ceremony of the Smart School System Timergara campus held here the other day.

The function was addressed by former provincial minister advocate Muzafar Syed, former MNA Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, former MPA Saeed Gul, academic manager of the institution Ms Asima Naseema, regional director Asif Khan, Malik Jehan Alam and others. The speakers said that it was the age of science and technology and only those nations could compete with the world which excelled good in those fields. They said that no one could think about progress and development without education. They said that the process of education started in Dir after 1970 as education was banned during the rule of 'Nawab' of Dir.

They said the inauguration of the Smart Schools System in the area was a good omen and the parents should get their children educated in this institution. The Dir Qaumi Pasoon chief Malik Jehan Alam while addressing the gathering condemned the English medium private schools for ignoring the mother tongue in its syllabus. He demanded the private schools' management to include Pashto in its courses as a child could better understand it. He said that the majority of the students of private schools could neither read nor write in Pashto, that was not less than a tragedy.

Rescue 1122: The Rescue 1122 Lower Dir provided services in 524 cases during the month of Feb. According to its spokesman it received a total of 7153 calls including some 6000 fake emergency calls.

Sanitation staff demand release of salaries

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The private sanitation staff of the Timergara Teaching Hospital on Thursday staged a protest demonstration outside the Timergara press club against a private company for its failure to pay their salaries for the last four months.

The protestors blocked the road for some time and chanted slogans against the concerned company. Speaking on the occasion the site manager Ziaur Rehman, supervisor Muhammad Naeem, Tariqullah and others complained that a private company hired a total of 58 sanitation staff including men and women at Rs 17000 per month on June 27, 2022 on a contract till Dec, 2022.

They said they were paid during the first two months but their salaries for the last four months were withheld for unknown reasons. The protestors said that their families were facing severe financial difficulties as they had no other means of income. They demanded the project director Niaz Muhammad to take notice

of their issue and release their salaries without any further delay. Otherwise, they threatened to bring their children and families onto the roads if their salaries were not released soon.

Subsidized flour: The residents of Dag Gosam on Thursday complained that the subsidized wheat flour was being distributed in their area on political bases. The residents while talking to local journalists alleged that the subsidized flour bags were being distributed among the political workers of some parties instead of deserving people. They said the lower middle class was finding it difficult to get subsidized flour while a 20 kg flour bag was being sold in the market at Rs 2600. They demanded of the district administration to take notice of the matter and ensure the distribution of subsidized flour on merit at official rate.

Ramzan Sasta Bazaar: The Lower Dir deputy commissioner Iftekhar Ahmad along with additional deputy commissioner Abdul Wali Khan and deputy director industries,

commerce and trade Asif Raza on Thursday visited the office of the Dir Chamber of Commerce and Industries. The chamber's president Mian Noor Alam briefed the officials about the local trade and problems faced by the chamber. The DC informed the traders that the administration had planned to establish Ramadan sasta bazaars in the district for which they needed the traders' support and cooperation. He said that a meeting to that effect would be held at his office with the stakeholders next week. He asked the traders to select suitable sites for the Ramadan sasta bazaars in the district so that local residents could benefit from them.

Mian Noor Alam informed the deputy commissioner that the former chief minister Mahmood Khan had announced the construction of an office for the chamber at Timergara but the promise was yet to be materialized. The chamber vice president Khalid Iqbal, Haji Hussainullah, Sahibzada and other senior businessmen were also present on the occasion.

Security Forces distribute free seeds to farmers

F.P. Report

BARA: Efforts are being made by the security forces to support the farmers of Bagh Maidan area of Khyber district. The initiative is being taken in collaboration with the Agriculture Department, with the aim to provide essential resources to the farmers to help them increase their yield and improve their livelihoods.

Security forces with the collaboration of Agriculture Department has provided 1,50,000 kgs of Seeds of Potatoes to 300 farmers, 200 kgs of Seeds of Sunflower to 100 farmers, 5000 Saplings of Walnut to 100 farmers with 20 saplings of Sunflower as

a special incentive. These resources have been distributed among the farmers to help them improve their yields and increase their income. In addition, security forces has conducted training sessions with the farmers to teach them about safety and preservation techniques to ensure the sustainability of their crops.

Through special schemes farmers are receiving their share of seeds and saplings. This will not only provide the farmers with the necessary resources but will also boost their morale and encourage them to work harder to improve their yields. In the future, the security forces in collaboration with Agriculture Department will continue

to provide assistance to the farmers of Bagh Maidan.

They will facilitate the provision of livestock (sheep, hen, cow), provide a sunflower oil extraction machine, and improve the existing 40 mushroom farms. These efforts will help to improve the living standards of the farmers and ensure their sustainable growth.

These initiatives by the security forces are significant steps towards achieving sustainable agriculture and improving the living standards of the poor farmers of Bagh Maidan. It demonstrates the commitment towards supporting the local communities and promoting sustainable development in the area.

Enrollment campaign launched in Zhob

F.P. Report

ZHOB: District Education department formally launched a campaign to enroll nine thousand children for the upcoming academic year 2023 in public sector schools across the district.

Addressing a press conference District Education Officer Lal Jan Musakhail said that education was the fundamental right of every child and under article 25-A, providing free and compulsory education to children aged 5-16 was the responsibility of the government.

Assistant Commissioner Hafiz Muhammad Tariq, Deputy District Education Officer Asadullah Mardanzai, Coordinator UNICEF Education Support Programme Razziq Jan

Kakar, DDO Ajab Khan Kakar and President Government Teachers Association Fateh Khan Mandokhail were also present on the occasion. A banner displayed behind the officers reads: 'Every child in school', asking the parents to enroll their children at the government-run schools.

EDO Lal Jan Musakhail said all-out efforts would be made to enroll the maximum number of children at schools. He asked the parents to send their children to schools, allowing them to fulfill their dreams, talent and desires through education. In order to increase the enrollment ratio at government-run schools, the department has kicked-off enrollment campaign for the new academic year

2023 in every nook and corner of the district,' adding 'the campaign aims at creating awareness regarding the importance of education, improving literacy rate and maximum enrollment of children in government-run schools,' the officer added.

ESP Coordinator Razziq Jan Kakar on the occasion said that under UNICEF-funded ESP project free books are being distributed among the students at cluster level. Furniture, sitting mat, reading-writing material, uniform and other essential items will be provided to schools soon. He appealed to the parents to enroll their children and urged the community members to play their key role in persuading the teachers to ensure their presence at schools.

Two human traffickers held

GUJARAT (INP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) claimed to have arrested two human traffickers involved in the Libya boat accident from Gujrat. As per details, the FIA arrested two agents, who were involved in human trafficking in Gujrat, and recovered illegal passports, fake rubber stamps and other stuff from their custody.

The Foreign Office has said that after Italy, in another incident, three Pakistanis were killed in the boat sinking incident in Libya.

FIA has registered a case on the complaint of the father of Muneeb-ur-Rehman who was killed in the Libyan boat accident and arrested two of the six accused. Deputy Director FIA Ghulam Sarwar Warraich said that the suspects arrested during the operation included Raja Raheel and Sufyan while the accused have been arrested from Kotla Arab Ali Khan, Gujarat. Dy Director FIA further said that the two human traffickers named in the case Hamza and Afaq were based in Libya.



Argentina wants Ukraine war to end, says foreign minister

DHAKA (AP): Argentina's Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero said that Russia's invasion of Ukraine must stop and has not only destabilized peace but also impacted prices in his country. "Latin America is a zone of peace, the most densely populated zone of peace," Cafiero told The Associated Press in an interview. "And we have no military developments and no military infrastructure to participate in a war that we demand should be finished and should not continue."

He said that Argentina had condemned Russia's invasion from the onset "because Argentina believes that the principle of territorial integrity was violated by Russia. Argentina has always had the same message at international forums." "What we need is peace and escalation will only destroy ... especially when it comes to creating lasting peace," he said. Cafiero said that the war, coming on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in the increase in food, fertilizer and energy prices that had also impacted Argentina. "Even though we are producers, the impact on prices, of course, generated high inflation," he said.

He was in Dhaka to reopen Argentina's Embassy as a gesture toward Bangladesh and its people who fervently support Argentina in the World Cup. Soccer legends Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi are household names in Bangladesh, where thousands of Argentine flags are hoisted during the games. Argentina was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh as a new nation after a nine-month war with Pakistan in 1971. Argentina opened its embassy in 1974, but it was closed by the military junta in Buenos Aires in 1977. Argentina is looking to expand trade with Bangladesh, the 35th largest and among the top five fastest-growing economies in the world. Trade volume between Bangladesh and Argentina is currently below \$1 billion.

"I believe our trade is currently below our mutual capacities. Even though there is certain volatility, I believe that based on the mechanisms and agreements we were able to establish today ... we will double trade in the next two to four years with Bangladesh," Cafiero said. He said Bangladesh could benefit from

"great opportunities" in South America through the regional economic bloc Mercosur, which covers 270 million people. It can also learn from Argentina's expertise in nuclear technology for medicine, he said. "And we can also create joint ventures to benefit our countries and for other countries as well. I believe that technology intensive companies is an area in which both Bangladesh and Argentina have a lot to explore and a lot to grow," he said.

Cafiero also met with the Bangladesh Football Federation and signed a memorandum of understanding on sports development "to build bridges with young people who want to practice sports and continue to build this relationship based on the history of our nations." Shahriar Alam, Bangladesh's junior foreign minister, said that the reopening of Argentina's Embassy will deepen relations between the countries. "Bangladesh is keen to expand its relations with Argentina, the leading economy in South America, in all possible areas of collaboration in depth and dimension," he said, adding that the countries share a special bond that goes beyond politics and diplomacy.

Moldova and Romania vow to boost ties

BUCHAREST (Reuters): Moldova and Romania pledged to boost economic ties following Russia's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine, and Bucharest reiterated support for Chisinau's bid to join the European Union. On his first trip abroad since taking office last month, Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean held talks with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca.

Moldova has been hit hard by the economic fallout of the war in Ukraine, which borders both Moldova and Romania, and tensions with Russia have risen over the war in Ukraine and the tiny former Soviet republic's EU accession bid. "Business on both banks of the Prut speaks the same language," Recean told a joint news conference with Ciuca, referring to a river on the border between Romania and Moldova, and the countries' mutual use of Romanian. "We will soon integrate our financial markets and Bucharest's capital market will be accessible to Chisinau. I call on entrepreneurs from both banks of the Prut to develop business and use all the economic potential."

Recean said talks also covered regional security and that Moldova, which is highly dependent on Russian gas, was considering signing long-term contracts on gas and electricity supplies from Romania. Ciuca said bilateral trade grew by \$1.2 billion last year to more than \$3.5 billion, and that he saw big potential for more. "Romania will firmly support Moldova's European agenda, economic recovery and strengthening its security," said Iohannis, whose country joined the EU in 2007. Recean said Moldova and Romania enjoyed a "special relationship" and that Romania's experience in joining the EU was helpful for Chisinau.

Brazil's Amazon must be protected

BRASILIA (Reuters): The world cannot meet its climate goal to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius unless it protects the Amazon rainforest, climate envoy John Kerry said in Brazil while discussing possible US funding for jungle conservation. Brazil's new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva assumed office on Jan. 1, jump-starting cooperation with the United States on climate change and deforestation after rocky relations under his right-wing predecessor Jair Bolsonaro. Deforestation hit a 15-year high under Bolsonaro, who rolled back environmental protections.

Lula and US President Joe Biden pledged to work together on climate change in a meeting at the White House earlier this month. On deforestation, Washington announced it intended to contribute to Brazil's Amazon Fund, which supports conservation projects in the jungle region. "The truth is that unless the Amazon is protected from those who would deforest it and who abuse it, we cannot keep the temperature to 1.5 degrees (Celsius)," Kerry said, referring to the climate target in the Paris Agreement.

"The reality is that the Amazon is the test of all of our humanity." Protecting the Amazon is vital to curbing climate change because of the vast quantity of greenhouse gas its trees absorb. Appearing alongside Brazil Environment Minister Marina Silva, Kerry told reporters in Brasilia that he traveled to Brazil to work out the details of what Lula and Biden agreed to.

He said that the United States was still considering how much to give to the Amazon Fund. Kerry said the US Senate is considering a bill with \$4.5 billion in funding for forest conservation, while the House of Representatives is studying a proposal with \$9 billion. But, Kerry said the administration "will have to fight" to get those proposals through Congress. Kerry and Silva said that the United States and Brazil had restarted a bilateral working group set up in 2015 to discuss cooperation on climate and environment, which had stalled under Bolsonaro.

Taiwan says 25 Chinese planes, 3 ships sent toward island



TAIPEI (AP): China sent 25 warplanes and three warships toward Taiwan, the island's Defense Ministry said, as tensions remain high between Beijing and Taipei's main backer Washington. The ministry said 19 of those planes crossed into Taiwan's air defense identification zone while the ships were continuing to operate in the Taiwan Strait. It said Taiwan responded by scrambling fighters, dispatching ships and activating coastal missile defense systems to "closely monitor and respond."

China stages such incursions on a near-daily basis, part of what are termed "gray zone" tactics, aimed at intimidation and wearing down Taiwan's equipment, exhausting its personnel and degrading public morale. Those also include cyberwarfare and disinformation campaigns, along with a relentless drive to deprive Taiwan of diplomatic allies. Taiwan has

responded by upgrading its fleet of F-16 fighter jets and ordering 66 more of the planes from the US, while purchasing a range of other weaponry and extending its mandatory term of military service for all males from four months to one year.

Relations between Beijing and Washington, Taiwan's primary ally and source of defensive weaponry, have spiraled over China's actions toward the island, trade, technology and the South China Sea. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled a visit to Beijing last month after the US shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the US east coast, drawing furious protests from China.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and has been rapidly expanding its military to meet that challenge should it arise. In memos and testimony, top US officers have called for heightened preparations,

saying China sees a shrinking window for action and may move on Taiwan within a few years. China says it prefers peaceful unification between the sides, but the Taiwanese public overwhelmingly favors the current state of de-facto independence.

Incursions were relatively modest by recent standards. During China's National Day weekend in 2021, Beijing dispatched 149 military aircraft southwest of Taiwan in strike group formations. In August, in response to a trip to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, China staged war games surrounding the island simulating a blockade and fired missiles over it into the Pacific Ocean. Along with ordering new hardware from the US, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has been pushing for a revitalization of the domestic defense industry, including producing conventionally powered submarines.

Endangered Mexican wolf population makes strides in US

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP): Endangered Mexican gray wolves are making more strides, as more breeding pairs and pups have been documented since reintroduction efforts began in the southwestern US more than two decades ago, federal wildlife managers said. The US Fish and Wildlife Service released the results of its annual survey in New Mexico and Arizona, saying this is the first time the population has topped 200 and the seventh straight year that the numbers have trended upward.

In all, at least 241 of the predators were counted, marking a nearly 23% increase over the previous year and a doubling of the population since 2017. Since the first wolf release in 1998, the program has had its share of fits and starts due to illegal killings, a lack of genetic diversity and legal wrangling over management. "To go from zero wild Mexican wolves at the start to 241 today is truly remarkable," Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator

Brady McGee said in a statement.

The annual count started in November, with members of the interagency field team conducting ground and aerial surveys of a rugged forested area along the Arizona-New Mexico line. Aside from tracking radio-collared wolves, they used remote cameras and collected scat to estimate the population. The work is done over the winter when the population is most stable. It's estimated that thousands of Mexican wolves once roamed from central Mexico to New Mexico, southern Arizona and Texas. Predator eradication programs began in the late 1800s and within several decades, the wolves were all but eliminated from the wild.

The rarest subspecies of gray wolf in North America, Mexican wolves were listed as endangered in the 1970s and a US-Mexico captive breeding program was started with the seven remaining wolves in existence. Wolf-livestock

conflicts have been a major challenge of the reintroduction program over the past two decades, with ranchers saying the killing of livestock by wolves remains a threat to their livelihood despite efforts by wildlife managers to scare the wolves away and reimburse some of the losses. Jim DeVos, Arizona Game and Fish Department Mexican Wolf Coordinator, said recovery for any endangered species is difficult and this has proven to be the case for the Mexican wolf. Still, he described growth over the last year as stunning. "By every possible measure, progress was made," he said, pointing to 31 breeding pairs that produced 121 pups, about two-thirds of which survived to the time of the count. The survival rate for pups in their first year is typically around 50%. The field team was able to capture and collar 21 wolves during the survey. Officials said the additional collars will help them gain a better understanding of wolf activity

and help with on-the-ground management.

The cross-fostering of captive bred pups with packs in the wild also has added to the population and has helped to address concerns about genetic diversity. This year, two of the 11 pups that were fostered survived. Officials also documented the lowest annual total of wolf deaths since 2017 - six in Arizona and six in New Mexico for 2022. In 2020, 29 wolves were reported dead and another 25 the following year. Environmental groups celebrated the numbers but cautioned that more work needs to be done to improve genetics among the wild population and that the US Fish and Wildlife Service needs to allow wolves to roam beyond what they call arbitrary boundaries that have been established for the recovery area. Citing low survival rates for cross-fostered pups, the groups have been pushing for more family groups - adult wolves with pups - to be released into the wild.

Hungarian PM's party backs ratification of Finland, Sweden NATO entry

BUDAPEST (Reuters): Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Fidesz party will back the ratification of Finland and Sweden's bid to join NATO, the party's parliamentary group said, as lawmakers began the process after a months-long delay. The announcement followed calls by Hungary's president and a government official to swiftly endorse expansion of the Western defence alliance in response to Russia's year-old invasion of neighbouring Ukraine.

Sweden and Finland applied last year for membership in the transatlantic military pact after Russian forces swept into Ukraine. But all 30 NATO members must ratify the applications, and Sweden has faced objections from Turkey for harbouring what Ankara considers to be members of terrorist groups. Turkish

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said talks with Sweden and Finland on their NATO membership bids would resume on March 9, although he said Sweden had still not fulfilled its obligations under a memorandum signed last year.

With Hungary's ratification process stranded in parliament since July, nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban aired concerns about Sweden and Finland's NATO membership for the first time. Among other criticisms, Orban has accused both countries of spreading "out-right lies" about the quality of democracy and rule of law in Hungary. While Fidesz lawmakers said bilateral meetings in the two Nordic countries would still go ahead next week, for the first time since Budapest's concerns sur-

faced, they also made clear they would swing behind their NATO entry.

"We will provide our support to Finland and Sweden's NATO accession," the ruling party, which along with a junior partner controls just over two-thirds of seats in Hungary's parliament, said in a statement. Opening a general debate of the legislation, both President Katalin Novak and a Foreign Ministry official urged lawmakers to ratify Finland and Sweden's NATO entry "as soon as possible".

Only around a 10th of Hungary's 199 lawmakers attended the opening debate on the process, with a final vote not expected until the second half of March. "The expansion of NATO to Finland and Sweden is a significant step towards strengthening the security

of the euroatlantic region," Foreign Ministry State Secretary Peter Sztyarto said, speaking to a nearly empty chamber.

"The countries wishing to join meet all conditions of NATO entry," he said. "Finland and Sweden's NATO membership serves our foreign policy, security and economic interests and it also strengthens NATO." Speaking to Reuters on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said he hoped the vote would be positive after Hungarian lawmakers meet counterparts in Sweden and Finland. Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said Hungary intended to send a parliamentary delegation to Finland on or around March 9 for discussions on Helsinki's NATO bid.

Italy's Meloni urges EU to do more to halt people smuggling after tragedy

CROTONE, Italy (Reuters): Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni called on fellow European Union leaders to do more to halt illegal immigration and prevent further tragedies at sea, after dozens of people were killed in a shipwreck off Italy. Meloni, who heads a right-wing coalition, said criminal gangs and people traffickers should not be able to control the flow of migrants and warned of unprecedented pressure from the number of people trying to reach Europe.

In a letter to EU leaders, Meloni called for urgent steps "to counteract and dissuade illegal departures," holding out the prospect of "special payments to the countries of origin and transit to which they cooperate actively." Her comments came as the death toll from migrant shipwreck off the southern

Italian coast rose to 67, with many people still unaccounted for. Rescuers found two more children, bringing the underage victims of the tragedy to 16. Some family members arrived from northern Europe to mourn the dead and try to trace survivors. Rescuers said most of the migrants came from Afghanistan, with others from Pakistan, Iran, Somalia and Syria.

The vessel, which authorities believe was carrying up to 200 migrants, had set sail from Turkey and sank in rough seas near Steccato di Cutro, a seaside resort on Calabria's eastern coast. The tragedy has intensified a debate on migration in Europe and Italy, where the recently elected right-wing government's tough new laws for migrant rescue charities have drawn criticism from the United Nations and oth-

ers. Elly Schlein, the new leader of Italy's opposition centre-left Democratic Party (PD) criticised Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi after he made remarks appearing to blame migrants and traffickers for embarking on dangerous sea journeys with their families.

"What real alternative do people fleeing in search of protection have, beyond being tortured to death or dying at sea?" Schlein said in parliament. In her letter, Meloni said countries should be free to decide how many immigrants they wanted to admit by legal routes. She said the 27-nation EU should provide help to victims of war and disaster both outside of its borders and by establishing humanitarian corridors for those it chose to admit. The relatives of victims paid their respects to their loved

ones in a sports hall in the Calabrian city of Crotone, where the coffins of more than 60 migrants who perished in the incident were laid out.

Locals have also been leaving flowers, messages, candles and other mementoes by metal railings outside the sports arena. "I've felt very affected by this situation. I didn't come only this morning, I have been here for days and I've seen how the number of dead has been rising," Giovanni Antonio Marsala, a 53-year-old resident of Crotone, told Reuters. In Italy, further controversy raged over whether the coast guard and police could have done more to prevent the shipwreck. Authorities have said that patrol boats were sent to intercept the migrants, but severe weather forced them to return to port.

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Taliban regime in global optics

THE US State Department Spokesperson, Ned Price has acknowledged that the Doha Agreement has empowered the Afghan Taliban but it significantly weakened the United States and its regional allies. The American Diplomat noted that the Taliban did not honor their commitments, which they made to the US and the global community through the Doha Agreement. According to him, the Taliban hosted terrorists on their soil, and abandoned their commitment to political inclusiveness, civil liberties, and human and women rights in Afghanistan.

Three years after the signing of the historic Doha agreement between the United States and the Taliban then powerful anti-US armed resistance group in Afghanistan, the US authorities admitted the fact that the Doha deal not only paved the way for US withdrawal from Afghanistan but also weakened the US and its allies. Historically, Washington repeated the mistake made by the former Soviet Union and unilaterally pulled back its troops from Afghan soil without constituting a consensus political system in Kabul that not only provided the Taliban an opportunity to form a unitary government but pushed the South Asian nation into fresh violence, along with the economic and humanitarian crises. The people of Afghanistan endured unimaginable miseries over the past four decades, so the international community and friendly nations including Pakistan wanted to form a broad base and consensus political system that can ensure peace and stop violence and instability in the war-hit nation. The global community also intended to preserve the gains made by the Afghan society during the US rule in terms of social, human, and women development, so the peaceful transfer of power and economic revival subsequently lead to the dignified return of millions of Afghan refugees currently residing in other countries in the region.

Unfortunately, the Taliban interim government could not comprehend a single dream of the global community over the past one and half years of rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime made no effort for political inclusiveness and economic revival, it imposed a ban on girls' higher education and women's employment and also restricted women's travel without a male escort. Similarly, the Afghan interim government failed to uphold its commitment regarding the elimination of terrorism from Afghan soil, because a US drone strike killed Al-Qaeda's top leader in the Afghan Capital while Afghanistan-based banned TTP ceaselessly carried out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan that not only killed thousands of innocent Pakistanis but also enraged longstanding ally of the Taliban. Ironically, the cleric regime blocked women's education and employment in the name of Islam that definitely hurt Islam and denounced by the Muslim scholars across the globe.

The Afghan interim government has earned the utmost global censure for its narrow-sightedness that not only added to the sufferings of the Afghans but isolated the Afghan rulers as most of the world nations shut down their embassies in Kabul and no single country formally recognizes the regime so far. In fact, ruling the people using guns, dealing with friends like foes, and bulldozing people's rights and liberties to satisfy self-esteem is counterproductive and could not fulfill Afghan interests. The Taliban must demonstrate responsibility and soberness because they are not a mere armed group, but rulers of the entire Afghanistan. The Taliban must understand that no nation can survive in isolation and no government could exist without public support thus they must work to grab public sympathy and forge good relations with their neighbors. Otherwise, an economically weak, diplomatically isolated, and unpopular Taliban government will collapse under the burden of its legacies.

THERE is no Moroccan ambassador in Paris. A communique released last month advised of the "termination of his mission," causing a frenzy at the Quai D'Orsay as France's relationship with an old and valued partner took another turn. President Emmanuel Macron, who had hoped to plaster over the cracks in his fraught relationship with Morocco with a visit, has yet to find an invitation to Rabat in the Elysee's in-tray. Morocco, still recalibrating to a more surefooted diplomacy, has forged new bilateral relations while rekindling an old one with the UK. However, these have come at a cost to its already complicated relations with France and the EU.

Unlike much of French Africa, including nearby Algeria, France did not seek to make Morocco in its image. Having struggled to impose Paris' will on its existing African possessions, the administrator of Morocco, Marshal Hubert Lyautey, sought to work with and not against the country's existing institutions, which in turn used the presence of France to strengthen themselves. After a 44-year effort to pacify the country and the dramatic exile of King Mohammed V to Madagascar, France's situa-

tion became untenable and, decades before doing so elsewhere on the continent, the French left Morocco in 1956. This background informs the fascinating "frenemic" nature of relations since. There is no doubt that Macron is a talented politician. However, as he warmly embraced his Algerian counterpart last August and evoked sorrow for the "painful" history of France's actions in that country, little love was lost elsewhere in Africa, as the consummate political performer sought a 50 percent increase in gas imports to France.

After having made one of the most significant diplomatic gaffes of his presidency by sharing the poorly advised statement that Algeria did not exist as a nation before the French invasion in 1830, his visit last year was a marked volte-face. However, the honeymoon period was not to last and Algeria also withdrew its ambassador to Paris last month. Macron's trip to Algeria was not itself

invited - that shone a spotlight on a relationship that was rapidly growing more contentious. As Morocco has sought to broaden its international relations, with a strong focus on south-south cooperation, relations with Europe have become more troubled. In the wake of a 2021 European Court of Justice decision to annul EU-Morocco agriculture and fishing agreements, Rabat decided to halt all contact with European institutions. Since then, an initial period of toing and froing with Spain and Germany resulted in an improvement in ties, but relations with France have remained strained. Last month's sacking of Moroccan-French journal-

ist Rachid M'Barki by leading French television channel BFMTV for alleged foreign meddling in his work was in the same vein as a wider effort to discredit Morocco both in Brussels and Paris.

hope of building bridges during his bid to become president, one Moroccan official quipped "we know the French better than they know themselves." Indeed, such sentiment was on display as Macron chose Morocco as the destination for his first overseas trip as

Geopolitical concerns and Macron's propensity for a tenacity that can sometimes seem flippant have made a state visit a distant prospect. Despite the tensions, bilateral trade exceeded €13 billion (\$13.8 billion) in 2022, up 24 percent on the previous year. France is also Morocco's largest foreign investor, ahead of Spain. However, this relationship is likely to change. Morocco has been courted by others, with the new trade protocol signed by the Spanish and Moroccan governments and the UK-Morocco association agreement showing how Rabat has changed tack. The agreement with the UK led to a 60 percent uptick in trade in the following 12 months.

France's tactical consideration to mitigate Morocco's expansion of its ties with others by frustrating its efforts in the EU put the soaring French trade with Morocco in jeopardy. As Paris seeks an ambitious "20-year road map" with Rabat, it would do well to reacquaint itself with its history. Morocco is well networked. It is America's oldest ally and has enjoyed diplomatic ties with the UK for more than 800 years. Leaks and parliamentary machinations do not "confirm the solidity of the partnership," which France publicly seeks, but rather privately disrupts it.

Given that investigations show that the recent leak surrounding Moroccan favors to EU officials bear the marks of a major European government, fingers have been pointed at Paris. The European parliament has also voted for a resolution calling on the Moroccan authorities to respect the freedom of the press. As the only North African country to be subject to such introspection, the "exceptional relationship" that French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna sought to underline during her visit to Rabat last December seems a world away from the state of the bilateral relationship today. The situation was not always so. When Macron first sent out feelers in the

How far the UK has fallen when it fears becoming poorer than Romania

Jeremy Warner

THE Office for National Statistics doesn't record how many Romanians live and work in Whithy, North Yorkshire, but according to Bram Stoker's, Dracula, this is where Nosferatu, arguably Romania's most famous persona - albeit a fictional one - berthed his plague ship on leaving his ancestral home in Transylvania.

These days he wouldn't bother. Instead he would stay at home, for according to Labour Party analysis, Britain will be poorer than Romania by 2040 on present trends, and is therefore a rather more attractive proposition than Whithy. For the pedants among you, at the time Stoker wrote his novel, Transylvania was in fact part of Hungary, which still to this day yearns after its former province. It was only later ceded to Romania.

But no matter. If Sir Keir Starmer is to be believed, this once impoverished, if stunningly beautiful, backwater of Europe, will soon be richer than Britain, birthplace of the industrial revolution and much that we associate with economic modernity. The same goes for Poland and Bulgaria, both of which, Sir Keir says, are set to overtake Britain in terms of income per head if things carry on

as they are.

Much like Starmer's goal of making Britain the fastest growing economy in the G7, the projection is largely meaningless. On the goal of superior growth, Starmer has no control over how other economies perform, so whatever success or otherwise he achieves on these shores, should he get the chance, he is powerless to influence such an outcome. The projections for Bulgaria, Poland and Romania are equally spurious, since all three only relatively recently emerged from the yoke of Communist rule. Once freed from these shackles, stellar growth was virtually inevitable, boosted by fast track entry into the EU and not a little help from the strong ties Eastern Europe developed with Britain via mass migration. If you start at the bottom, you are almost bound to climb faster than those at the top.

Taking Poland by way of example, GDP rose by more than 150pc between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the start of the pandemic, which is more than any other country in Europe. The Eurozone, by contrast, grew by less than 40 percent in the same period. Growth in per capita income has been more impressive still. In 1991, during the recession that followed the chaotic dis-

mantling of communism, income per head fell to less than a quarter of the German average. Today, it is more than two thirds of the Eurozone norm, and is indeed fast catching up with Britain. Like the tiger economies of the Far East, this is a story of rags to relative riches in just one generation.

In his book, Europe's New Growth Champion, Marcin Piatkowski attributes Poland's success mainly to good policy, including the establishment of strong institutions, foreign debt restructuring, a demanding education system, and an open and transparent privatisation process, which - unlike most other former communist states - did not produce oligarchs. The details need not concern us too much here, suffice it to say that, though prospects for the Polish economy continue to look good, growth is almost bound to slow from here on in. The further up the ladder you climb, the harder it gets.

It is fair to say that Poland has probably already escaped the so-called "Middle Income Trap", where growth gets stuck at a mediocre level and the country struggles to attain advanced economy status. The same may not

yet be true of Bulgaria and Romania. Yet despite the advantages Eastern European states have of beginning with a clean slate, in contrast to the debilitating legacy of past political choices that Britain contends with, the UK would have to do something very wrong indeed for Starmer's prophecy to come true.

Serious relative decline does happen over time. Just look at Argentina, once one of the richest countries in the world. But it's far from common in the post war era. Examples of successful catchup with the economic powerhouses of the US and Europe, moreover, are even rarer. Smaller countries generally stand a better chance than big ones. There are areas of China, admittedly, which are already as high income as Italy, but across the country as a whole, China is still firmly marooned in middle income territory.

Big regional differences also apply to Britain. London is the richest place in Europe. But there are other areas which are among the poorest. What is more, it appears to be true that even America's poorest state - Mississippi - is richer in per capita terms than the UK. In any case, simply extrapolating from current

growth rates doesn't tell you an awful lot about the future.

The wider point that Starmer was trying to make - that Britain is stuck in a low growth rut - is however undoubtedly true, if also only a statement of the blindingly obvious. This has been the case ever since the financial crisis. Sir Keir's claim that the public finances would be &40bn a year better off had the growth achieved by New Labour before the crisis persisted, is almost as ridiculous as his extrapolation of growth in Poland and Romania. The crisis was the culmination of more than a decade of delusional, economic manipulation. There was bound to be a price to pay for the candyfloss growth that had preceded it.

Nonetheless, something plainly has to be done to break free from Britain's growing sense of malaise. It is quite something when the big battalions of business start suggesting that Labour has better answers than a notionally Conservative Government, but this is what the likes of John Allan, chairman of Tesco, now repeatedly say. Personally, I struggle to see the difference. Beyond the schmoozing of business lobbies and a rather more determined approach to net zero, which in itself is like-

ly to be hugely costly, Labour's plan for growth is otherwise just a list of motherhood and apple pie aspirations and worthless platitudes.

After the tragi-comedy of the last seven years, there is something to be said for the sense of grown up, pragmatically-minded, technocratic government that now emanates from Downing Street. In seemingly defusing the standoff with Europe over the Irish Protocol, Rishi Sunak has made a promising start in righting the ship. But it is not enough to turn things around. The Government needs much more actively to engage with business concerns; it must radically reform our struggling education and health systems, and it must bulldoze its way through the vested interest and planning constraints that stand in the way of growth.

There's another Budget next month, and as luck would have it, the fiscal constraints on the Chancellor's room for action seem to have eased somewhat. He must act decisively, or Romania's unlikely "il sorpasso" - the term used by Italian commentators when Italy's GDP per head briefly exceeded that of Britain - may indeed become a reality.

The Telegraph

In a war of unending surprises, Biden has another up his sleeve

Frida Ghitis

AS the world prepares to mark the first anniversary of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, President Joe Biden made a historic, unannounced visit to the capital of the embattled country. The risky trip on Monday to an active war zone was not just a powerful symbol of American support, it was a shot in the arm to a population that has endured Russia's devastating attacks on civilian apartment blocks, hospitals, schools and the power stations that provide heat and electricity.

"It's just something unbelievable that at a time like this the President of the United States is coming to Kyiv," Andrei Ketov, a 48-year-old Ukrainian service member, told CNN. Biden's visit to Ukraine a year into the biggest war in Europe since World War II underscores just how badly Russian President Vladimir Putin miscalculated. Putin didn't just misjudge Ukraine's determination to resist and its revulsion with his claims that Ukraine is not a real country. He may have just

bought into the Kremlin's own malicious propaganda about the feebleness of America's leadership - echoed and amplified by Biden's political foes.

Standing alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Biden reminisced about a phone call the two had "that dark night" a year ago when the war started. Zelensky could hear explosions in the background. The world was preparing for the fall of Kyiv, Biden recalled, "perhaps even the end of Ukraine." Now, a year later, "Kyiv stands, and Ukraine stands. Democracy stands," he declared, adding, "The Americans stand with you, and the world stands with you."

Who could have imagined in 2022, when Ukraine's situation looked so hopeless that the United States offered to evacuate Zelensky - and he famously refused - that a year later the Ukrainian people would have put up such a strong resistance, and the West would have given so much support for their efforts? And that instead of Putin having a military parade in Kyiv, it would be Biden walking in the Ukrainian capital's streets, arriving at the ornate

Mariinsky Palace, the official residence of the Ukrainian President? Russia's military bloggers were agast. A "demonstrative humiliation of Russia" is how Russian journalist Sergey Mardan described the moment. An account on the Telegram app managed by Russian service members remarked with bitter sarcasm that "we are waiting in the Russian city of Kiev for the president of the Russian Federation, but not for the (President of the) United States."

Recall that in the early days of the invasion, Ukraine said it found Russian forces had brought along their dress uniforms apparently expecting a victory parade. Instead, the war has given the world an unending series of surprises. Russia's army turned out to be much less competent than anyone expected; Putin was not quite the genius many believed.

Zelensky was much steelier and inspiring than almost any leader in recent memory. NATO was more united, and Europeans more willing to support Ukraine than anyone -

including Putin - anticipated. And then there's Biden.

It's a curious phenomenon that those who have most feared Biden have tried to undermine him by claiming he is weak and incompetent. Biden is 80 and walks with a stiff gait. But he has no shortage of courage (air raid sirens sounded over Kyiv while Biden was there) or, crucially, competence. It's possible that under a different US President, Russia would have quickly conquered Ukraine. Biden made mincemeat of Putin's strategy to make it look as if the war was a result of a Ukrainian provocation, revealing the plan before it unfolded. Then he rallied the NATO alliance, which had been so grievously disparaged by former President Donald Trump.

Perhaps Putin, after watching the divisions inflamed by Trump's rhetoric, thought NATO would not stand with Ukraine. In fact, one might excuse Putin for thinking the US would not support Ukraine very forcefully. After all, one of the two major political parties in the United States had made Trump its

leader. And Trump - in one of the sharpest contrasts with Biden - had toyed with Zelensky's pleas for help.

Who can forget the infamous phone call after which Trump was impeached, when Zelensky implored the US President for help to deter an aggressive Russia? Trump's response, "I would like you to do us a favor though," trying to push Ukraine into launching an investigation against Biden, the candidate Trump claimed was weak, even though he feared him as his most effective opponent.

Now Biden has made it possible for the Ukrainian people to stand strong against a Russian President so obsessed with conquering his neighboring country that he has destroyed Russia's standing in the world, rolled back three decades of progress and seems prepared to send untold numbers of Russians to die to prevent a democracy from flourishing next door to his autocracy. A joyous Zelensky said Biden's visit "brings us closer to victory," adding it will "have repercussions on the battlefield in liberating our

territories."

Biden promised continuing support from the US, which is what most Americans want though backing has weakened somewhat. GOP Rep. Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told CNN that bipartisan support for Ukraine is "still very strong." Of course, some GOP members criticized Biden for going to Ukraine. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene called the trip "incredibly insulting," a sign of an "America Last" policy. And Rep. Scott Perry - at the center of a legal dispute with the Justice Department over his cell phone in the special counsel's January 6 probe - described as "breathtaking" that Biden would help Ukraine defend its borders and not do the same for America.

The day after his visit to Kyiv, Biden will give a major speech, rallying the world to Ukraine's side, and vowing to continue helping Ukraine defend its independence and its democracy, because Ukraine today is the front line in the global contest between democracy and autocracy.

Trapped in Putin’s embrace: Erdogan’s Russian dilemma

Vlada Stankovi

THE catastrophic earthquake that hit Turkey earlier this month has put mounting pressure on embattled Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead of key presidential and parliamentary elections due to be held on May 14. It has also served to spotlight Erdogan's problematically close ties with Moscow. As Erdogan is one of the few world leaders in frequent contact with the Kremlin and Kyiv, enjoying equally friendly relations with both, the outcome of Turkey's election has the potential to disrupt not only relations within NATO as Erdogan continues to leverage Turkish approval of Sweden's membership bid but also the course of the year-old war in Ukraine itself.

Yet the fact that a president of Turkey has forged such a close relationship with Moscow remains an anomaly. The historic rivalry between Turkey and Russia dates from their centuries as neighboring empires, but as in many other aspects of Turkey's mercurial foreign policy under Erdogan, tradition has been upended and the Turkish president's instincts have guided Ankara's diplomatic endeavors. It wasn't always so. Russia barely registered on Erdogan's political radar during the first decade of his now 20-year rule. In his hunger for recognition as the leader of a major global power, Erdogan initially appeared to look down on Vladimir Putin. With time, however, their competing geopolitical agendas in the wake of the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War made the pair rivals, with each supporting opposing sides in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The already tense relations between the two men reached a nadir in November 2015, when

Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet that had illegally entered its airspace. Moscow responded to the incident with sanctions, stemming the flow of Russian tourists to Turkey, as well as the import of Turkish goods to Russia. Meanwhile, Ankara's Western allies were lulled into a false sense of security, believing that Turkey represented a powerful check on Russian influence in the Middle East. All that changed on July 15, 2016, when an attempted coup against Erdogan's increasingly autocratic rule ultimately failed. Putin had been quick to react to the news, immediately offering his support to the Turkish president, in stark contrast to the sluggish reaction of Turkey's supposed allies in the US and EU.

Never one to differentiate between his personal agenda and that of the Turkish state, Erdogan was so flattered by the lavish reception he received from Putin on a visit to St. Petersburg a month later that he went on to perform a foreign policy U-turn. Clearly fascinated by Putin's recent string of foreign policy successes - including the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine - and noting the lack of any meaningful reaction to his landgrab from the West, Erdogan made the decision not only to trust Putin but to hitch his wagon to Putin's horse as well.

Believing himself to be the Russian president's equal despite most observers seeing him as the relationship's junior partner, Erdogan has found himself locked in Putin's suffocating embrace ever since. The following year, after being rebuffed by the US in his attempts to obtain the Patriot missile system, Erdogan opted to buy the Russian S-400 rocket launching system instead. Still smarting from

Washington's belated support during the 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan sought to leverage the purchase of the Russian missile system with Washington - only to have his bluff backfire spectacularly.

If the US had already been viewing his partnership with Putin suspiciously, Erdogan's missile system miscalculation had the effect of distancing him from the US once and for all while simultaneously bringing him uncomfortably close to the Kremlin. Instead of being recognized as a key US partner as he'd hoped, Erdogan was sanctioned by Washington, and rather than being seen as Putin's equal he found himself being a useful tool in Russia's attempts to undermine NATO unity.

Neither position allowed Erdogan the degree of prestige he desired, not least as his policies received only rare support even from Moscow - and even that was mostly in the form of permission being given for Turkey to intervene directly against Kurdish forces in Syria. The outbreak of war in Ukraine seemingly brought a new opportunity to the Turkish president, whose personal relations with Putin only seemed to grow stronger despite Turkey voting at the UN to condemn the Russian invasion.

While he was able to position himself as a key mediator between Moscow and Kyiv in the Ukraine grain deal last summer, Erdogan nevertheless failed to win US or Russian support for any of his other key proposals. Both the US and EU rejected his plan to build a huge gas storage facility near the Turkish-Greek border, for example. While officially protesting Turkey's continued sale of Bayraktar drones to the Ukrainian military, Putin's widely anticipated recognition of

North Cyprus failed to materialize - dealing another blow to Erdogan, who had wanted to bolster his reputation as a nation-builder in the mold of Atatürk.

In the same way, the Kremlin put an end to Erdogan's proposal to build a gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan to Turkey, jealously eyeing Ankara's increasing interest in, and influence on the predominantly Turkic former Soviet republics in Central Asia. With Putin's reputation as a brilliant political strategist in tatters a year after his decision to invade Ukraine, Erdogan finds himself in an unenviable position. Unable to rid himself of the Russian president's now toxic grip, he desires nothing more than to crush his political opponents at home through repressive legislation, as Putin did, while remaining a key US partner and Washington's preferred candidate in the upcoming presidential elections.

Already not viewed fondly in Washington, Erdogan's friendly relations with Putin make US support for his upcoming re-election campaign even less likely. Former National Security Adviser John Bolton recently wrote in The Wall Street Journal that with Erdogan at the helm, Turkey was once again "the sick man of Europe." US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Ankara last week, during which he pledged \$100 million in aid to help Turkey recover from the earthquake, may herald Erdogan's return to Washington's fold, but only if he stops leveraging Sweden's NATO membership bid to extract political concessions from his nominal allies. If Washington is prepared to offer Erdogan an escape route from Putin's stifling embrace, they may find the mercurial politician surprisingly keen to switch allegiance once again.



Ron DeSantis’ new book offers a powerful warning to US electorate

Jay Parini

AS is increasingly apparent in many of his public appearances, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is rather like Donald Trump, only without the charm. And that charmless demeanor seeps through his latest book, "The Courage to Be Free: Florida's Blueprint for America's Revival," a grievance-laden tome written in advance of a presumed bid for the Republican nomination in the 2024 presidential election.

The question is, will it help his chances? That's unlikely. Only fans or parties actively looking for someone to back in 2024 will read the book, and within a few months unsold copies will lie on the remainder tables, rubbing shoulders with Mike Pompeo's new memoir, "Never Give an Inch," or past examples of campaign self-advertisements such as "A Call to Service" by John Kerry, "A Time for Truth" by Ted Cruz or even Trump's "Crippled America."

I've read a number of these books and they're rarely good. Nevertheless, DeSantis takes the usual dullness to a fresh level, redefining what cliched writing can sound like. It's one thing to offer the public

interest in helping recently-arrived migrants on their American journey; he famously flew two plane-loads, primarily comprised of Venezuelan migrants, from Texas to Martha's Vineyard in 2022, a cruel, calculated political stunt designed to embarrass the Biden administration and liberal elites with their "sanctuary cities." That he would play politics with the lives of these poor souls doesn't, I fear, speak well for him - nor that he performed throughout the ensuing media cycle with such glee. But this hard-heartedness is a core part and parcel of the narrative, which offers a litany of resentfulness. "Before my time at Yale," DeSantis writes of his undergraduate years studying history at the Ivy League school, "I had never seen a limousine, much less a limousine liberal. Those students who were the most strident in their leftism... came from the most privileged background." He experienced "unbridled leftism" on campus, and this pushed him far to the right, where he has remained.

Everywhere in the book, one senses his rage against political correctness. He rails, on nearly every page, about "the woke agenda"

fessors in the state university system who teach "woke" ideas. He wants to restrict the rights of women seeking abortions and those of LGBTQ people seeking to live their lives. He hopes to punish corporations, such as the Walt Disney Company, for criticizing his policies.

Again and again, DeSantis shows little interest in the First Amendment - except when his own free speech is concerned. He seems not to have heard the great words of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote: "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." Jefferson understood that we each have a right, even a patriotic duty, to speak without permission from the authorities. Instead, DeSantis rails against the "legacy media" - by which he means The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlantic and so forth. These are "the praetorian guard of the nation's failed ruling class, running interference for elites who share their vision and smearing those who dare of oppose it." (I suspect he would, no doubt, wish to exempt Rupert Murdoch's media empire from this judgment.)

So, if "The Courage to Be Free" is a sign of things to come, DeSantis will like-

They were Italian-Americans - a family of immigrants, although DeSantis has shown little interest in helping recently-arrived migrants on their American journey: he famously flew two plane-loads, primarily comprised of Venezuelan migrants, from Texas to Martha's Vineyard in 2022, a cruel, calculated political stunt designed to embarrass the Biden administration and liberal elites with their "sanctuary cities." That he would play politics with the lives of these poor souls doesn't, I fear, speak well for him - nor that he performed throughout the ensuing media cycle with such glee. But this hard-heartedness is a core part and parcel of the narrative, which offers a litany of resentfulness. "Before my time at Yale," DeSantis writes of his undergraduate years studying history at the Ivy League school, "I had never seen a limousine, much less a limousine liberal. Those students who were the most strident in their leftism... came from the most privileged background."

a bit of wooden prose, but DeSantis gives us an entire lumber yard. I don't blame DeSantis entirely for that lousy prose. Like most politicians, he's a busy man who will have likely farmed out the writing of his book to nameless minions. The governor doubtless talked at length to the "hardworking team of literary professionals" mentioned in his acknowledgments; these ghostwriters will have also had his speeches, social media feeds, appearances and policy papers to draw on.

And we can be sure the governor read the book and approved of its contents before publication. So we must assume the ideas (and "ideals") in this book, such as they are, belong to him. That's not a good thing. As one might expect, the book runs through DeSantis' life and times, talking about his love of baseball and hard work; about his parents and their working-class roots in Pennsylvania and Ohio. They were Italian-Americans - a family of immigrants, although DeSantis has shown little

that he sees permeating almost every level of life in America. In DeSantis' mind, a dire phalanx of "woke" fanatics is led "by the likes of Dr. Anthony Fauci," who is seen as public enemy #1. He devotes a whole chapter of this book to railing against Dr. Fauci and people who used the powers of the federal government to implement "heavy-handed public health interventions" during the Covid-19 pandemic. These measures did little, in the governor's opinion, to slow the course of the disease - rather, they "destroyed livelihoods, hurt children, and harmed overall public health."

(The jury is probably still out on how DeSantis governed with regard to the pandemic. It's possible he had some good instincts at work.) The title of this book must surely be ironic: "The Courage to Be Free." DeSantis is all about the restriction of freedoms wherever possible. He wants to cancel librarians who allow kids to read certain Black or LGBTQ writers and to fire tenured pro-

ly hang his presidential campaign on efforts to find what he calls the "pressure points" in the system, finding ways to "leverage" his authority to advance his agenda. He's a lawyer, as he reminds us, educated at the famous Harvard Law School. If the book is any guide, he's going to use his lawyerly skills to dismantle our heritage and, in his Orwellian manner, he's going to proclaim that he's freeing us by doing so. Overall, I found the hectoring quality of DeSantis oppressive. He's a chilly man, with a heart of ice and - like so many politicians on both the right and left these days - full of resentments, grudges and the urge to destroy anyone who doesn't agree with him. The courage he claims for himself he would deny to many others. I should to think what he might do if handed the presidential bully pulpit. The good news, I suppose, is that the lack of charm this book illustrates could well severely limit his chances of success on the national stage.

CNN

Robust disaster management plans can improve resilience

Sara Al-Mulla

THE world is today beset by natural hazards, many prompted by the climate crisis, which necessitates governments taking urgent actions toward becoming more agile and resilient. A study by the World Bank last year revealed the extent of the devastation spurred by natural disasters across the globe, estimating that, since 1980, more than 2.4 million lives have been lost, in addition to financial losses amounting to over \$3.7 trillion, including an average of \$167 billion a year in the last decade.

Designing robust disaster management strategies can amply reward all kinds of stakeholders. For societies, resilience ensures that human lives are prioritized and injuries are avoided. Upgrading and investing in climate-resistant structures can protect many important legacies, including community assets, critical facilities and cultural heritage sites. At the same time, cities will face fewer disruptions to essential services, such as education, healthcare and transportation. For enterprises, resilience will contribute to economic rewards, including better tax revenues, more business opportunities, higher economic growth, job creation and better-governed cities that attract more investment.

For governments to attain the maximum resilient stance when disasters occur, they must adopt a preparedness mindset rather than a reactive one, relying on optimizing response plans for various scenarios in order to make more thoughtful decisions. Concerning disasters, every minute is precious and acting swiftly and wisely can make a significant difference in both the short and long terms. Responding effectively to disasters can only come

from building a competent and skilled workforce. Critically, this includes rescue teams, emergency health workers, fire brigades, counsellors, municipal service workers and engineers. Moreover, disasters have accelerated the need for research investment in the areas of alert systems, prevention, preparedness, risk management, response and recovery. Disaster risk assessments can identify specific vulnerabilities that various communities are exposed to and highlight the best plans for anticipation, mitigation and recovery.

Investment in state-of-the-art technology is a critical factor in accurately and swiftly responding to disasters. Modernizing information systems to collect live geographic data and create forecasts are an essential first step toward creating high-risk exposure maps. For instance, geospatial imaging technologies can track hurricanes and create sophisticated models that forecast a storm's destructive force and evaluate different response scenarios. Mass alert systems can then trigger the necessary evacuations. Optimal disaster preparedness relies fundamentally on spearheading a coordinated response by the public, private and civil society sectors, harnessing the collective powers of all stakeholders to expedite recovery periods. As such, disaster management strategies must outline the roles and responsibilities of these various agents.

National government agencies must take responsibility for developing detailed charters that outline the roles and responsibilities of all national and local government agencies in the event of disasters. Furthermore, it is important for the

national government to streamline the various programs under healthcare, welfare support, social services, shelter facilities and relief aid with sufficient funding, defined roles, clear accountability, approved policy charters and empowering legislation. Before the occurrence of a disaster, governments should shift to financing resilient infrastructure that can withstand the shocks associated with disasters, such as wind-resistant buildings, climate-proofing buildings against excessive heat, earthquake-resistant structures, sealed roof decks and floodable transport systems.

Success in responding to disasters depends greatly on having a clear communication matrix between various stakeholders, especially on media arrangements. In crises, it is imperative to promote desired behaviors and actions among communities through targeted education and awareness campaigns. Additionally, governments can promote preparedness online by sharing important advice on social media accounts and websites. Local government agencies can further coordinate on a micro level to deliver a suite of operational services directly to affected areas and communities. Leveraging solid community networks can enhance the delivery of disaster management resilience and recovery.

The recurrence of natural disasters led the US government to launch an effective national public service campaign called "Ready" in 2003, in order to be more forward-looking by empowering communities with practical knowledge and the skills to prepare for and respond to different kinds of

emergencies. Its website has an abundance of comprehensive guidance on what to do in the event of hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, tornadoes, tsunamis and earthquakes. These include insuring one's property and making it resilient to disasters, receiving alerts, safeguarding family documents, having a shelter plan, defining an evacuation route and creating a household communication plan. Moreover, households are encouraged to have ready emergency kits that include essential items, such as water, food, prescription medicines, infant formula, cash and family documents. Furthermore, special guidance should be published for enterprises to create practical business continuity plans, such as transitioning to e-commerce, automation or remote work solutions. Enterprises should also be encouraged to offer support, in the form of financial and in-kind donations.

Community groups can support victims of disasters by volunteering their time for rescue operations and donating important items, such as food and clothing. Educators can create awareness among students by incorporating preparedness skills within curricula. International organizations are pivotal in coordinating relief aid, in addition to providing technical cooperation, capacity development and resources. Nonprofit organizations can also train communities on basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, disaster medical operations, first aid and rescue operations. The natural disaster landscape poses complex but not insurmountable challenges. However, it clearly illustrates the importance of designing robust disaster preparedness and response strategies well in advance.

Arab News

Reversing Brexit must not be taboo in UK’s political discourse

Mohamed Chebaro

THE Brexit saga has again and again been the absolute disruptor of British life since 2016. Despite the many excuses, it is increasingly clear that the process that has divided the country has hurt Britain, the UK economy and the standing of this leading union in Europe and the world. It is maybe a relief to see the breakthrough announced this week that might open a new chapter in UK-EU relations after years of Brexit tensions.

Brussels and London have agreed to set aside their differences over the Northern Ireland protocol and come up with a sweeping overhaul of trade rules in Northern Ireland. The deal was cheered by most in the UK and on the continent, as well as across the Atlantic in the US, as the Biden administration is determined to ensure no damage is done to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland after 30 years of violence. But a few in the Conservative Party's hard-line wing remain, it seems, bent on spoiling the party.

Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson has apparently warned Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party to be cautious about the deal that could facilitate

the flow of goods between the UK mainland and Northern Ireland without infringing on the EU customs arrangement introduced after Brexit. The anti-EU voices in the UK remain strong, but their impact is surely waning in the face of new realities in the weakened post-Brexit British economy. The Ukraine war has made all Western countries rethink their primary interests, compared to those interests conceived in the pre-Brexit referendum era.

This was reflected in a recent poll conducted by Savanta for The Independent, which revealed that almost two in every three Britons believe that Brexit has damaged the UK's economy. According to the same survey, 61 percent of voters believe that quitting the EU has made Britain's economy worse, with only 13 percent claiming Brexit has improved the economic situation of the country. Nearly 50 percent of respondents said Brexit had negatively affected their personal finances. Many Leavers have also been coming to the conclusion that they were mis-sold Brexit. And there is skepticism about the mantra of "taking back control," as 44 percent of respondents said Brexit had made immi-

gration worse. A report by Durham University last month concluded that the Brexit deal is a primary factor in the small boat crisis, as the UK leadership left the EU without a returns agreement in place, leading to a skyrocketing increase in the number of English Channel crossings.

Pressured by the polls and the changing public attitude toward Brexit, a cross-party summit was convened last month at a private retreat. It aimed to discuss "How can we make Brexit work better with our neighbors in Europe?" Clearly, such an event, attended by both Leavers and Remainers, points to the realization that something needs to be done to lift the country from its clear descent toward economic catastrophe. It was, therefore, not a surprise to hear some experts - the same ones whose warnings were swept aside by Brexiters ahead of the referendum in 2016 - say that, unless action is taken, Britain's economic growth is destined to retreat to second-last among the G20 countries this year, ahead of only Russia. A Labour Party expert analysis has also forecast that Britons are likely to become poorer than people in Poland,

Hungary and Romania in the coming years.

All the above points to one thing, and that is the need for the UK leadership, regardless of the party they represent, to face reality and address the elephant in the room, as it is always possible for the country to change course. Britain's traditions, customs and laws have always been agile and able to adapt to the changing circumstances of both the country and the world. The vision, though full of holes, to leave the EU, which was sold to the people in 2016, might have been the result of a foresightedness that did not materialize. It is normal, therefore, to reopen the debate about Brexit and reverse it, if the national interest of the country requires it, before it is too late and if the EU would agree to readmit the UK. Europe has divided Britain, and particularly the Conservative Party, since the 1950s. Initially, the Tories opposed the European Economic Community, but then they changed their mind to become the party of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Later, the Conservatives became more and more euroskeptic, ultimately leading to the disaster of Brexit that we have been watching unravel since 2016.

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Pakistan needs to increase local, foreign investment: Ambreen

LAHORE (APP): Board of Investment (BoI) Additional Secretary Ambreen Iftikhar said on Thursday that 'Invest Pakistan' initiative was being launched keeping in view the fact that in year 2021, US \$ 175 billion were invested in South Asian countries out of which Pakistan could attract only US \$ 2 billion foreign investment.

She added that Pakistan needed to take effective and appropriate measures to increase its local and foreign investments, adding that under 'Invest Pakistan' initiative, a national framework for investment would be developed at first.

She was briefing the business community at Invest Pakistan Concept Launch Event here at Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) where LCCI President Kashif Anwar, BoI Director General Zulfiqar Ali and Director Adnan Munir Rajput also spoke, while the chamber's Executive Committee members attended the event.

The Additional Secretary said that process through which BoI would encourage investors to invest in Pakistan, would be based on investors' targeting.

She said that national framework would not only notify the investment but also help operationalize it and facilitate the investors by identifying and realizing them regarding investment opportunities.

Ambreen Iftikhar said, "Apart from this, we are taking the budget proposals in a different way. Because of the IMF conditions, we have suggested that these conditions should be shared with the private sector so that they know which policies cannot be changed and which policies have the scope. Under this new

process, the suggestions of the business community will be brought into the finance bill so that they can be implemented easily."

She added that BoI wanted all the chambers to introduce a joint plan, and 'we understand that the business community is currently facing many challenges but the most important thing is that the government cannot solve these problems alone but we all have to come up with a joint solution because these are common problems.'

BoI Additional Secretary said, "We want to attract our own investors before the foreign investors. To know the needs of the investors, we are working on the investor targeting model." LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that Lahore Chamber had always emphasized on simplifying the rules and regulations, and making these business friendly so that the business climate could be improved in the country, asserting that this would definitely help in promoting 'Ease of Doing Business (EoDB)'.

He said that LCCI had been working with provincial government and the World Bank for many years to improve Pakistan's ranking of EoDB, which had helped brought Pakistan EoDB ranking to 108th from 148th. Lahore Chamber also held many meetings with relevant authorities in this regard and had always talked about simplifying regulatory complaint because it created many cases for local and foreign investors to make investments and set up new businesses, he mentioned.

"Although the World Bank had stopped issuing EoDB rankings after 2020, we commend the Board of Investment's management for taking new initiatives to

advance the reforms agenda in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments. To our opinion, promotion of local and foreign investment is need of the hour," he added.

According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan, the ratio of total investment in Pakistan was only 15 percent of Gross Domestic Production, which was quite low. The share of private investment in this was only 10 percent of GDP, which had become inevitable to increase. "We hope that PRMI (Pakistan Regulatory Modernization Initiative) and Invest Pakistan will be helpful in this regard," he added.

He said that as per data of Net Foreign Direct Investment, it was US \$ 2.6 billion in FY 2019-20, which decreased to US \$ 1.82 billion in FY 2020-21, while in 2021-22, its volume was limited to only US \$ 1.87 billion, which was extremely low in terms of requirements. He said that the local investment could not increase until the problems of local industries were resolved. "For example, our industries have to import a lot of raw materials, essential components and various machinery which are not available in the country, on which they have to pay 100 percent cash margin, regulatory duty, customs duty and additional customs duty, which are needed to be eliminated. Besides reducing the rate of withholding tax for businesses, the issues of pending refunds and multiple audits should be resolved," he added.

He said that in order to promote local investment, the government had to solve some problems related to taxation on a priority basis, which would also improve the ease of doing

business. Currently taxpayers had to undergo multiple audits of income tax and sales tax, the business community appealed that the number of these audits should be reduced. He said, it was almost impossible to increase investment without reducing the cost of doing business. "Our industries are facing problems like policy rate which has reached up to 17 percent and high energy cost due to which the production cost has increased a lot.

The economic conditions require that the government should give first priority to import substitution and give second priority to increase exports to the desired extent, which we think can be possible only with industrialization and localization," he added.

Mian Kashif Anwar said that Board of Investment also needed to attract private investment to build new dams and reservoirs. "We should also expand the solar energy network as we still get less than five percent of our energy requirement from it. It will also help in bringing the imports to minimum level."

He said that with the help of Special Economic Zones, the process of industrialization would be strengthened, but if they were considered as Special Export Zones, it would be very easy to invest in them as well as increase exports.

The LCCI President said that the government should immediately announce the Declaration Scheme so that the undeclared foreign reserves could become part of the economy. He informed the participants of the meeting that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry had asked heads of the political parties to share their economic plans with the Lahore Chamber.



LAHORE: MD/CEO Bank of Khyber Muhammad Ali Gulfaraz with other participants at inauguration ceremony of BOK Branch at Allama Iqbal Town.

Foreign reserves rise to \$ 9.26b

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan's total liquid foreign reserves stood at US\$ 9.26 billion as of February 24, data released on Thursday showed.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here, stated that reserves held by the central bank increased by US\$ 556 million to US\$ 3.81 billion while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were at US\$ 5.45 billion.

The central bank received US\$ 700 million as GoP commercial loan disbursement from China and after accounting for external debt repayments, SBP reserves increased by US\$ 556 million, the statement added.

In the previous week ended on February 17, the total liquid foreign reserves held by the country was US\$ 8,726.5 million.

Among them, foreign reserves held by the SBP were US\$ 3,258.5 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were US\$ 5,468 million.

Outlet sealed over failure to install App

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Tax Office (RTO) Rawalpindi on Thursday sealed a famous business outlet over failure to install the Point of Sale (PoS) App on their systems and connecting their systems to the FBR for tax collection.

Additional Commissioner Income Tax Kamran Ullah took action against Carobar/Karegar a garments/cloth shop located at Kashmir Road, Saddar for failing to POS App under the sales tax act 1990, said a news release.

The RTO Rawalpindi is committed to bringing all major retailers under its Tax Net by integrating them with FBR's online system. It is pertinent to note that FBR has allowed its field formations to seal Tier-1 retailers' outlets by amending provisions relating to penalties of the Sales Tax Act, 1990.

Rupee plunges by Rs18.97 against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan rupee plunged by Rs 18.97 against the dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs 285.08 against the previous day's closing of Rs 266.11.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 287 and Rs 289 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 20.02 and closed at Rs 303.10 against the last day's closing of Rs 283.08, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen gained 13 paise to close at Rs 2.08, whereas an increase of Rs 19.74 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 341.26 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs 321.52.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal increased by Rs 5.16 and Rs 5.06 to close at Rs 77.61 and Rs 75.96 respectively.

BOK inaugurates new branch at Allama Iqbal Town

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Bank of Khyber, one of the growing banks of the country has opened a new branch in Allama Iqbal Town Lahore. Bank of Khyber has now 09 branches in the provincial capital and plans to further strengthen its presence and customer reach in the provincial capital by opening more branches by year-end.

The branch was inaugurated by Mr. Arif Saeed CEO-Service Industries and Mr. Muhammad Ali Gulfaraz, MD/CEO, Bank of Khyber. Ms. Madiha Kamran- Regional Head Corporate & Commercial Conventional banking Lahore along with her team

also attended the branch inauguration ceremony.

At the occasion Tariq Gaba- Gaba Carpets, Mr. Mehboob - CEO Clinix Pharmacy, Mr. Shakeel Mughal - Chief Operation Officer- Mughal Iron & Steel, Khawaja Irfan - Finance Manager Fatima Fertilizer Ltd, Sheikh Tariq-CEO, Ms. Hina Mustafafinance Manager Fatima Fertilizer Ltd, Badar Ul Islam- Group CFO Service Industries, Muhammad Farooq- CFO KIPS, Sohail Ahmed- CEO Ahmed Construction and several other prominent traders and industrialist of the vicinity attended the event.

On the occasion, Mr. Arif Saeed said that "Bank of Khyber's excellent serv-

ices are commendable, this new branch opening in Allama Iqbal Town will help customers manage and grow their businesses further. I congratulate the entire management of the bank and express my gratitude."

"We are happy to inaugurate one more branch in the provincial capital, which is a rapidly growing market. Considering the vast potential of banking requirements yet to be explored, BOK is aggressively pursuing branch expansion in Lahore to increase its market share as well as build its Brand equity" said Bank of Khyber's MD/CEO, Muhammad Ali Gulfaraz.

LKMWT opens its 4th Medi-Health Clinic

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Latif Kapadia Memorial Welfare Trust (LKMWT) has opened its fourth Non-Profit Medi-Health Clinic in Khuda Ki Basti, Surjani Town, Karachi, with a commitment to providing affordable healthcare services to underprivileged people in Pakistan. The clinic was inaugurated by legendary Mr. Anwar Maqsood, and Mr. Ahmed Kapadia, a devoted trustee of LKMWT.

During the inauguration ceremony, Mr. Maqsood praised the high standard of medical facilities at the clinic and recalled the late Latif Kapadia's efforts towards improving the lives of people and the community. He applauded the project and emphasized the need for more initiatives like these, saying that the people of Surjani Town and surrounding areas will now have access to good medical services within their reach and at a minimal cost.

The newly established LKMWT clinic is equipped with modern medical tools and offers free medical consultations, diagnostic tests, and medication facilities to residents of Surjani Town and adjacent areas. The clinic reflects the vision of Late Mr. Latif Kapadia to enable basic healthcare facilities for less privileged communities. The project was completed within a year of laying the

foundation stone, thanks to the sheer dedication of LKMWT and its volunteers.

Mr. Ahmed Kapadia, Trustee of LKMWT, expressed his gratitude to the donors and volunteers of LKMWT for their contributions, as well as to Mr. Gulzar Mughal for providing the land for the clinic. He also acknowledged the efforts of other trustees of LKMWT, including Mr. Sabir Sami, and vowed to continue the mission of the trust by managing this welfare project and enhancing its future medical capabilities.

The LKMWT's fourth Non-Profit Medi-Health Clinic is a testament to the trust's commitment to providing affordable healthcare services to underprivileged communities in Pakistan, and its dedication to fulfilling the vision of its late founder, Latif Kapadia.

Founded in 2007, the trust has been providing medical care facilities to underprivileged communities. Previously, LKMWT established world-class health clinics in Shah Faisal Colony, Khokhrapar-Malir & Quaidabad-Landhi. These clinics provide medical checkups, consultations, and medications at only Rs. 40 per patient. Each year, over 120,000 patients took benefit from these Medi-Health clinics.

LKMWT has a mission to carry forward the dream of 'Latif Kapadia' towards

bridging the gap between quality medical facilities and underprivileged groups of society. The trust will continue working for the betterment of the society by promoting education, alleviating poverty, fighting socio-economic challenges, besides paving the way for a high-quality health care ecosystem with the ambit of the trust.

Gold prices up by Rs.9,400 to Rs.206,500

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.9,400 and was sold at Rs.206,500 on Thursday against its sale at Rs.197,100 the previous day. All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.8,058 to Rs.177,040 from Rs.168,981 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold increased to Rs.162,287 from Rs.154,900 respectively.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs.120 to Rs.2,200 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs.102.88 to Rs.1,886.14.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by US\$1 to \$1,836 from US\$1,837, the association reported.

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Banks' Association (PBA), on behalf of all its member banks, signed the project contract for the development and execution of Pakistan's first, blockchain based, national eKYC banking platform with the Avanza Group. The signing ceremony was held at the PBA office in Karachi on Thursday.

The ceremony was attended by PBA Chairman, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, who is also President HBL; Mr. Akhter Javed, Director BPRD, SBP; Mr. Tawfiq Hussain, CEO PBA, the signatory for PBA; Mr. Waqas Mirza, CEO Avanza Innovations; and Mr. Omer Khan, CEO, Avanza Solutions (Pvt) Ltd; the signatory for Avanza.

The eKYC (electronic Know Your Customer) project is part of SBP's ongoing efforts to strengthen the control infrastructure for Anti Money Laundering (AML)/Terrorist Financing



(TF) in the country. PBA has been overseeing the planning and management of the project on behalf of the banking industry, under the aegis of the State Bank of Pakistan.

In addition to strengthening AML controls, the deployment of this platform will bring about efficiencies at participating banks and will result in improvement in customer experience, especially at the time of account opening, thus

facilitating financial inclusion.

Avanza Group's eKYC platform, 'Consonance', is being implemented for PBA. The platform will use blockchain technology through which banks will be able to standardize and exchange, with customers' consent, their details via a decentralized and self-regulated network. This will be a support platform for Pakistan's banking industry and all participating member banks will be able to

perform assessments of their existing, as well as new customers, by utilizing information/ data available with any other bank on 'Consonance'.

Once performed by a member bank, the eKYC data can be utilized by other banks for Customer Due Diligence (CDD), thus minimizing cost and effort in customer onboarding and improving the customers' account opening experience, thus facilitating financial inclusion.

PSX gains 258 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend, gaining 258.11 points on Thursday, a positive change of 0.64 per cent, closing at 40,670.88 points against 40,412.77 points the previous day.

A total of 152,162,654 shares were traded during the day as compared to 167,399,748 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs.8.150 billion against Rs. 9.282 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 313 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 108 of them recorded gains and 182 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 23 companies remained

unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 12,619,643 shares at Rs.1.27 per share; Hub Power Co. with 11,207,903 shares at Rs.72.04 per share, and Maple Leaf with 7,626,212 shares at Rs.23.81 per share.

Sapphire Tex witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.74.00 per share price, closing at Rs.1,080.00, whereas the runner-up was Mari Petroleum with an Rs.29.46.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.1,469.98.

Unilever Foods witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.499.00 per share closing at Rs.22,499.00; followed by Nestle Pakistan with Rs.164.22 decline to close at Rs.5,299.78.

Public Notice

It is Published Through This Notice That I Amna Bibi Wife of Sher Alam R/o Dara Adam Khel FP Kohat is The owner of Plot No. 179-C Sector E-3 Size 5 Marla Phase.II KDA Kohat has Appointed Mr Imran Shah S/o Pir Badshah R/o Pir Khel Jungle Khel Kohat Through (Special) Deed no 377 Bahi No 04 Volume No 203 Dated 23/09/14 which is Registered in the office Kohat of Tehsildar/Sub Registrar The Attorney Holder now wants to Transfer The Above Said Plot If Any Bank/ Institution/ Firm/ Person has any objection about the transfer he should contact the Housing officer UADA Within 15 Days in Writing with Proofs otherwise Plot will be Transfer and no objection will Be Accepted (Project Director Urban Area KDA Kohat).

Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 382/1. Institution 17/9/2021. Date of hearing, 11/3/2023. Nawar Khan etc VS Bakht Rawan etc. Notice to No. 5/1/3. Mst. Taja. 5/1/6. Salma daughters of Mst Jajena Bibi. 5/3/1. Gul Mern Roh. 5/3/2. Gul Sher son of Manay resident of Jowar thehsel Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 11/3/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



KARACHI: Legendary Anwar Maqsood with Trustee of LKMWT Ahmed Kapadia cutting ribbon to inaugurate 4th Non-profit Medi-Health Clinic at Khuda Ki Basti, Surjani Town.



In brief

Asian Jr Girls Netball C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Netball Federation (PNF) has announced a four-member selection committee to pick the national junior team for the Asian Junior Girls Netball Championship. According to the details, the selected team would participate in the Asian Junior Girls Netball Championship to be played in Korea in June this year. The four-member selection committee has been approved by PNF President Mudassir Arain. The selection committee would be headed by Muhammad Riaz while members include Ijaz ul Haq, Anwar Ahmed and Qurat ul Ain. The national junior girls team selection would be held on March 12 at the PSB Coaching Center Karachi and girls from all over the country can participate in the trials.

Punjab varsity girls shine

MULTAN (APP): Three-day inter-university badminton championship concluded here on Thursday at Women University Multan (WUM) where Punjab university girls emerged victorious and lifted the championship trophy. President Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Mian Rashid Iqbal, ex-MCCI president Mian Fazal Mukhtar, secretary Muhammad Shafiq, WU director sports Prof. Dr. Maimoona Khan, deputy director Sonia Nasir, assistant director Zill-e-Shams, registrar Qamar Rubab, Adeela Saeed and others were present to witness the final round matches. Punjab university lifted the trophy, Abdul Wali Khan university Mardan was declared the runner-up while the university of management technology secured third position. Islamia University Bahawalpur stood forth. MCCI president distributed prizes among the winners and hailed the WU officials for arranging sports competitions for university girls.

Opening ceremony of Karachi Games

KARACHI (APP): The opening ceremony of Karachi Games 2023 under Karachi Metropolitan Corporation will be held on Friday at KMC Sports Complex, Sindh Governor Muhammad Kamran Khan Tessori will be chief guest, who along with Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman will formally inaugurate the Karachi Games 2023. On this occasion, sports greats Jahangir Khan, Shoaib Muhammad Khan, Naseem Hameed and Olympian Hanif Khan will light the torch of Karachi Games 2023, with which the competitions of Karachi Games 2023 will begin. Before this Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman will visit Mazar-e-Quaid in the morning on the occasion of the opening of Karachi Games from where the torch of Karachi Games 2023 will be conveyed to KMC Sports Complex via People's Chowrangi and Kashmir Road. For Karachi Games KMC Sports Complex and Kashmir Road have been decorated with electric lanterns, sports and national flags, while banners, hoardings and big balloons have been displayed on various highways. Karachi Games 2023 will continue for ten days during which over five thousand players and athletes will take part in record 42 games.

Qalandars win from 50 for 7 thanks to Raza fifty and Rauf three-for

LAHORE (Cricinfo): Defending champions Lahore Qalandars staged a magnificent recovery from 50 for 7 to win by 17 runs at Gaddafi Stadium and keep Quetta Gladiators rooted to the bottom of the PSL table. Sikandar Raza was their hero with the bat, smashing an unbeaten 71 from 34 balls, before the Qalandars attack recovered from a poor start to comprehensively throttle the chase, led by Haris Rauf's 3 for 22. By the end, they laid claim to the record of joint-lowest total (148) successfully defended in a PSL match in Pakistan.

Qalandars were in deep trouble after being inserted, but were given something to bowl at by Raza's first PSL half-century. The Zimbabwe allrounder struck eight fours and three sixes in a stunning counter-attack, putting on an eighth-wicket stand worth 69 off 6.3 overs with Rashid Khan and helping to set Gladiators a target of

149 despite being bowled out early.

Gladiators were seemingly cruising as they reached 53 for 1, with Yasir Khan falling to Rauf from the last ball of the powerplay. Will Smeed had struck six crisp fours in 32 off 25 balls to help get his side ahead of the asking rate, but after he fell lbw to Rashid in the seventh over, Gladiators began a slow-motion collapse that saw them add 11 runs in five overs while losing three wickets.

It got worse for Gladiators when Martin Gupthill launched David Wiese down the throat of deep midwicket, with the required rate crossing 10 per over. Odean Smith and Mohammad Nawaz were dismissed by Rauf as the home side took control, conceding just five boundaries in the second half of the innings and ensuring the victory was all but secure with an over to spare. For the first quarter of the match, it seemed nailed on that the Lahore fans would

go home disappointed. Qalandars lost a wicket in the opening over of their innings, Umaid Asif marking his Gladiators debut with a direct hit that caught Fakhar Zaman short; Umaid's night then got better when he struck with his third ball, taking a simple return catch after Mirza Baig top-edged a pull. Naveen-ul-Haq struck twice in as many overs as Qalandars limped to 29 for 4 at the end of the powerplay.

Qalandars' attempts to disrupt the flow involved sending the captain, Shaheen Shah Afridi, out at No. 6 - he had never previously batted higher than No. 8 in a T20. It was a partial (and relative) success, as he outscored the rest of the top six with 16 off 16, before running himself out looking for a non-existent single in the ninth over. With Abdullah Shafique and Wiese falling to Nawaz either side of Shaheen's dismissal, Qalandars were seven down at halfway.



LAHORE: Sikandar Raza laps one during his unbeaten 34-ball 71.

PCB releases Women's League exhibition matches details

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board on Thursday confirmed the details of the three Women's League exhibition matches which will be played on 8, 10 and 11 March at the Pindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi.

The two participating teams are Amazons and Super Women. The women's matches will start at 1400 PKT and will be played in the lead up to the men's fixtures in the HBL PSL 8 matches. Peshawar Zalmi will take on Quetta Gladiators and Multan Sultans on 8 and 10 March, respectively, while, Quetta Gladiators will meet Multan Sultans on 11 March. As such, tickets for three men's HBL PSL matches will be valid for the women's fixture with the stands on these match days to open three hours before the first ball is bowled. Furthermore, the PCB as part of its social corporate responsibility will use Wednesday's T20 match to celebrate Women's Day. The second exhibition match on Friday will be played to create awareness about breast cancer in partnership with Pink Ribbon Pakistan. The third and final exhibition match on Saturday will be played to highlight women empowerment through education in collaboration

with Circle Women.

Meanwhile, the PCB also confirmed the match officials for the three matches. Mohammad Anees will perform the refereeing duties for all the three matches.

Shozab Raza, will join Saleema Imtiaz as on-field umpire for the first T20 match on 8 March. Tariq Rasheed will be third umpire and Humaira Farah will be the fourth umpire.

For the second T20 match, Shozab Raza and Humaira Farah, will take on-field duties with Tariq Rasheed and Saleema Imtiaz performing third and fourth umpire duties. For the third and final T20 match, Tariq Rasheed and Saleema Imtiaz will perform the on-field umpire duties. Shozab Raza and Humaira Farah will perform third and fourth umpire duties.

Expressing the joy on officiating the matches, Humaira Farah said: "I feel really honoured to officiate exhibition matches of the Women's League. These matches will not only help the women cricketers to express themselves on the field, but it will provide us with an opportunity to further enhance our skills. This will go a long way in encouraging more

women to come in this game as a player and as an official."

Saleema Imtiaz said: "The PCB has taken a great step in organising the women's league exhibition matches. These matches will go a long way in introducing full-fledged Pakistan Women's League, which will help the players and officials to pursue this game as a professional."

Head of Women's Cricket Tania Mallick: "I am thrilled and excited that the exhibition matches for the Women's League are taking place. These exhibition matches provide an exposure to our players to exhibit their talent and play at their best."

"When you play a league with foreign players it provides the local players an opportunity to know about their skill level and it also motivate the players to improve their game."

"The three exhibition matches on 8, 10 and 11 March are also played with a message which relates to the women across the country. This will go a long way to empower our women, not only as cricketers but will provide them a platform and with an opportunity other than playing cricket." Tania also urged the fans to come to the stadium in support of women's cricket.

Army, Wapda & Punjab players dominate 2nd day of Combaxx-Roshan Squash C'ship

KARACHI (APP): Army, Punjab and Wapda players dominated the 2nd day of the ongoing Combaxx-Roshan Khan National Team Championship.

The squash championship has been organized by Pak Navy in collaboration with Combaxx Sports here at Pakistan Navy Roshan Khan Jahangir Khan Squash Complex here. Following five matches were played:

In the morning session, Pool-A (Men's category), Punjab trounced Sindh 3-0. Ahmed Amin comprehensively beat Huraira Zafar 11-2, 14-12, 11-2 (14 mins). Anas Ali Shah thrashed Abdul Basit 11-5, 11-7, 11-9 (19

mins) while Shoaib Hassan beat Aayeman Zahid 11-1, 11-2, 11-5 (10 mins).

In Pool-B (Men's category), Army thumped KP 3-0. Sadam ul Haq overcame Mutahir Ali 11-6, 13-11, 11-8 (28 mins).

And Ashab Irfan beat Shahzad Khan 11-3, 11-8, 11-8 (7 mins).

While Hamza Khan thrashed Nasir Khan 13-11, 11-7, 11-7 (18 mins).

In the Women's category, WAPDA defeated Punjab by 3-0.

Mehwish Ali overcame Rushna Mehboob 11-1, 13-15, 11-9, 13-11 (25mins) and Saima Shokat beat Fajar Hamid 11-1, 11-4, 11-1 (8 mins), while Sammer Anjum overcame Tayyaba

Abbas 11-4, 11-3, 11-2 (10 mins).

In the Evening Session Pool - B (Men's contest), WAPDA thumped Balochistan 3-0. Nasir Iqbal beat Jahanzaib Yousaf 11-6, 11-8, 11-1 (17mins) and Noor Zaman Beat Mazhar Ali 11-2, 11-7, 11-5 (14mins), while Danish Atlas thrashed Abdul Waqar 11-4, 11-3, 11-4 (14mins).

In the Women's category, Army thumped Sindh 3-0. Noor ul Huda beat Mahnoor Ali 11-4, 11-6, 11-1 (14mins) and Sana Badur defeated Sehrish Ali 11-5, 11-6, 11-2 (11mins), while Mariam Malik overcame Anum Mustafa Aziz 7-11, 11-5, 11-7, 11-8 (26mins).

PM Youth Talent Hunt Program Women Volleyball trials begin in Swat

SWAT (APP): Under the Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif Youth Talent Hunt Program, the Women Volleyball trials started at three different Kabal Ground here Thursday wherein more than 80 women players participated. On this occasion, Principal of Government Higher Secondary School Miss Salima was the chief guest. Former athlete Miss Sumayyah, former Pakistan team captain and national selector Abdul Rahim, Director Sports Hazara University Khalid Jalal Shah, Director Distance Education System Dr. Noorzada, selector Hidayatullah Khan, women selectors and national and other important personalities were also present on the occasion.

Under the Prime Minister Muhammad Shahzaz Sharif Youth Talent Hunt Sports League, the women's vol-

leyball trials started in the Swat region under the supervision of Pakistan's national players Abdur Rahim with two national women selectors who will select 11 players. Khalid Jalal Shah said to facilitate the women players, we conducted the trials in three different venues and hopefully, good talent would come up as per the expectation and the objective of the program.

He said that there was a good talent of the women volleyball and other games in Swat but they lack opportunities to come forward but now after introducing of the Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif Youth Talent Hunt Program, not only the women players in 10 different games but also the men players in 12 different games would come to the main pool of talent.

He said efforts have been taken by the Hazara University to conduct

women volleyball trials all across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa so hopefully, good talent would come forward in future. He also appreciated Miss Sumayyah for keeping the players engaged in different games. He said training and coaching would be given to the selected players before the provincial league and later on two teams would be selected for the forthcoming national league.

He said the Prime Minister Youth Talent Hunt Program is ongoing due to the efforts of special assistant of the Prime Minister Youth Program Head Shaza Fatima, Prime Minister Advisor Amir Muqam, Higher Education Commission Islamabad Chairman Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, Arif Rawan, DGHEC Javed Ali Memon. The women's trials in Hazara will be held on March 5-6, 2023 at the committee ground, Haripur, he added.

Waited & worked hard for my chance: Aamer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Peshawar Zalmi all-rounder Aamer Jamal was brimming with joy for his outstanding performance with the ball in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 8 match against Karachi Kings, saying he had worked hard and waited desperately for his chance.

"I worked on my bowling for every situation. Although the last over didn't go well but we were head in front of them (Karachi Kings). I'm happy that Zalmi won because of my performance and that is all that matters," he said in a presser at Pindi Stadium, Rawalpindi after the match late Wednesday.

Aamir Jamal finished with three for 43 to help Peshawar Zalmi down Karachi Kings by 24 runs in what was the first game of the HBL PSL 8 at the Pindi Stadium.

He said though the team's morale went down after we lost early wickets, Zalmi's head coach Darren Sammy backed us to be positive as the pitch was good to bat. "One good partnership was needed to put up a decent total on the scoreboard and we planned accordingly to go to the end and not lose wickets," he said. Speaking about not getting a chance in the team in previous matches, Jamal said, "The team comes first and I was not fitting in any of the combinations in the previous games. But I did my homework and wanted to do my best whenever got a chance," he said.

To a question, he said length matters to a bowler no matter on whichever pitch you play. "If a player could pick it early on which length to bowl on a particular wicket then he can execute," he said. About match planning before games, he said we plan, by keeping in mind the teams we have to face on the day. "The crowd of Rawalpindi is very good and I didn't feel any pressure playing there. Even I have got 2 to 3 man of the match awards in this ground. On Skipper Babar Azam, Jamal said the prolific batter was a great captain.

Australia battle back to rattle India in third Test

INDORE (AFP/APP): Australia fought back to leave India in trouble at 79-4 in their second innings at tea on day two of the second Test on Thursday after the tourists had suffered a spectacular batting collapse.

India were still nine runs behind at the break on a viciously turning pitch in Indore with Cheteshwar Pujara looking assured on 36 and Shreyas Iyer yet to get off the mark.

Having skittled India for just 109 on day one thanks to five wickets from spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, Australia hoped to build a strong lead in their bid to come back from a 2-0 deficit in the four-match series. But resuming at 156-4, Australia imploded to be all out for 197 before lunch, their last six wickets tumbling for just 11 runs as seam bowler Umesh Yadav and spinner Ravichandran Ashwin ran riot.

Cameron Green and Peter Handscomb did well to survive the first hour on a pitch with unpredictable bounce, the tall Green using his long stride to neutralise India's spin attack.

But after the drinks break Handscomb departed for 19, caught by Iyer at short leg off Ashwin, having added 12 to his overnight score.

Soon afterwards Green fell for 21, trapped lbw by Umesh, who then bowled Mitchell Starc for one, sending the left-hander's off-stump cartwheeling towards wicketkeeper Srikanth Bharat.

In a dizzying disintegration, Alex Carey then departed for three, lbw to Ashwin. Umesh bowled Todd Murphy for a duck and Nathan Lyon was cleaned up by Ashwin for five. Ashwin took 3-44 and Umesh 3-12.

India sensed their chance

and openers Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill survived a tricky 10 minutes before lunch.

But after the break, Gill was beaten for spin as he tried to hit across the line and was bowled middle stump for five by Nathan Lyon.

Skipper Rohit was then trapped lbw by the spinner Lyon for 12.

Virat Kohli looked to take on Kuhnemann, cutting the spinner for a glorious four, only to be trapped lbw the following ball for 13, sending a hush around the rowdy Indore ground.

Pujara gave the home crowd something to cheer about, reducing the deficit by smashing Kuhnemann for a succession of boundaries. Lyon though proved a handful, particularly for Ravindra Jadeja, who was out lbw for seven just before the break to leave India reeling.

2nd President of Pakistan Polo Cup 2023

LAHORE (APP): The semifinals of the 2nd President of Pakistan Polo Cup 2023 will be played tomorrow (Friday) here at the Jinnah Polo Fields.

The first semifinal of the prestigious tournament will be played between BN Polo and Diamond Paints at 2:30 PM, while FG Polo will face Master Paints/Newage Cables at 3:30 PM in the second semifinal. Earlier on Thursday, two important matches were played, after which Remounts and Master Paints qualified for the subsidiary finals.

In the first match of the day, Manuel Sundblad steered Remounts to a nail-biting 6-5 win over DS Polo in the extra time, known as sudden death chukker. For Remounts, Manuel Sundblad played brilliant polo and smashed in five fabulous goals while Jota Chavanne converted one goal. For DS Polo, Hissam Ali Hyder fired in

four fantastic goals and Bilal Haye struck one. But their efforts proved futile in the end.

Remounts opened their account with a fabulous field goal to take a 1-0 lead, but DS Polo cracked an equalizer just before the end of the first chukker to make it 1-1. They thrashed in two back-to-back goals to gain a slight 3-1 lead in the second chukker. The third chukker saw DS Polo adding one more goal in their tally, stretching their lead to 4-1 but Remounts then made a strong comeback by banging in two back-to-back goals to reduce the margin to 3-4.

In the fourth chukker, Remounts continued to play well and fired in a field goal to draw the blood at 4-4. At this point, it was anyone's match, but DS Polo came from behind to smash a field goal to have an edge of 5-4. Remounts also showed their class and

converted a field goal to level the score at 4-4 just before the end of the chukker and the match entered the sudden death chukker, where both the teams fought well against each other, but it was hero of the match Manuel Sundblad, who hammered the match-winning goal to help his side score a thrilling 6-5 victory.

Manuel Crispo's superb performance guided Master Paints to an impressive 7-4 triumph over HN Polo in the second match of the day. Inform Manuel Crespo emerged as top scorer with a contribution of six splendid goals while Agha Musa Ali Khan struck the remaining one from the winning side. For HN Polo, Santi Losa thrashed in three goals while Mikayal Sami hit one goal. The first chukker saw both the sides scoring one goal each to make it 1-1.



FAISALABADA: A batsman in full form during cricket match played between State Bank and Habib Bank Limited teams for State Bank Governor Cup 2023 at Bohranwali Ground.



In brief

IRSA releases 99,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 99,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 50,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1455.52 feet and was 57.52 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow in the dam was recorded as 14,300 cusecs while outflow as 50,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1108.60 feet, 58.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded 16,600 cusecs and 30,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 58,900, 41,200, 31,600 and 7,300 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 8,500 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

Seven anti-social elements rounded up

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police, in their ongoing operations against law-breakers, conducted raids in different areas and rounded up seven drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other criminals besides seizing over four kg charras, liquor, three 30 bore pistols, ammunition and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Gujar Khan, Kalar Syedan, Bani and Gungmandi police rounded up Naseer Ahmed, Shabbir Ahmed, Toqeer, and Siddique on recovery of four kg charras and five litres of liquor. He informed that Gujar Khan and Mandra police held Shehzad, Ismail and Aftab and recovered three 30-bore pistols and ammunition from their possession. Meanwhile, Rawalpindi district police under their ongoing campaign against professional beggars rounded up 22 on Thursday. The spokesman informed that separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process. SSP Operations directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against anti-social elements.

MAP organizes candlelight vigil

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Minorities Alliance Pakistan (MAP) on Thursday held a candlelight vigil to pay tribute to visionary leader Shabbaz Bhatti on his 12th death anniversary at the place where he was assassinated in Sector I-8 Markaz in the federal capital. MAP Vice Chairman Shamaun Alfred Gill, addressing the gathering, paid tribute to Shabbaz Bhatti's tireless struggle and sacrifice for the oppressed and marginalized communities of Pakistan. He said Shabbaz Bhatti devoted his life for the promotion of interfaith harmony across the country. He presented the enlightened face of Pakistan to the entire world, he added. Gill condemned all the terrorist attacks being held in the country and said the nation would never allow terrorists to hijack Pakistan for their evil designs. He also lamented that despite clear orders from the apex court, 30,000 job opportunities which were lying vacant in various departments for minority communities. He further complained that the members of minority communities could not elect their representatives by using their right to vote which was completely against the spirit of democracy.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain met the Saudi Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Mr. Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki in his office.

Gandhara Research Center opens to support cultural heritage of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Advisor to Prime Minister for Political, Public Affairs, National Heritage and Culture Eng. Amir Muqam here Thursday inaugurated the newly established Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center at the Department of Archeology and Museums (DOAM).

PM's aide termed the Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center as a great gift from the Korean Government for the cultural heritage of Pakistan while Secretary of National Heritage and Culture Division, Fareena Mazhar, Administrator (Minister) of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Rep. of Korea (CHA) Dr. Choi Eungchon, President of the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation (KCHF) Choi Youngchang, Ambassador of the Korea embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan Suh Sangpyo, Director of the International Cooperation

Division, CHA, Jo Dongjoo, Director General of the International Cooperation Department, KCHF, Jeon Bumhwan and Director General, DOAM, Dr. Abdul Azeem were also present on the occasion.

Engr Amir Muqam on the occasion said that Gandhara Cultural Heritage Center at Islamabad was established with the generous technical and financial support of the Government of the Republic of Korea. "It will help to establish a systematic approach for preservation and conservation of the Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Gandhara in particular and the overall cultural heritage of Pakistan in general. Pakistan is a unique country, strategically located giving it a highly important place not only in the past but also in the present era, and will continue to enjoy the same status for all the

times to come," he said.

"Pakistan generally and Gandhara Region of Pakistan particularly is famous for the rich cultural heritage of diversified nature", he said adding that the richness of Pakistan is not confined to tangible cultural heritage. Its rich traditions, arts and crafts, music, poetry, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies, and varying landscapes are indeed treasures that very few countries of the world have ever inherited, all these treasures handed down to us by nature and by successive civilizations.

Adviser to the PM said that he was thankful to the Government of the Republic of Korea for taking keen interest and continuous support for the cultural heritage of Pakistan, adding that especially for the preservation and promotion of the Buddhist Heritage of Gandhara.

Saad directs to complete survey of illegal occupants on PR's commercial land

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique Thursday directed the official concerned to complete the survey of illegal occupants on the commercial land of the Pakistan Railway (PR) during the next seven days.

While chairing a meeting here, the minister said the Carriage Factory should find business from the market to earn more revenue.

The Management Committee on optical fiber submitted a report during the meeting. Also, the deliberations on the action plan for the next 100 days of the department had come under discussion. It was informed during the meeting that the Carriage Factory and Mughalpura Workshop would upgrade three trains to provide better facilities to the passengers.

Exhibition of artworks held at PAC

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Arts Council (PAC) on Thursday organized an exhibition titled "Islamic Calligraphy, Gardens, Mountains and Birds" by Sajida Malik and Shaista Haider. Director General Khana-e-Farhang Iran, Faramarz Rahmanzad was the chief guest of the event, according to a statement issued here.

Addressing the ceremony, Faramarz Rahmanzad said that Islamic art was based on monotheism, which draws man towards Allah. The artist is on the path of evolution and development towards Allah through his art.

Rahmanzad further said that calligraphy was an ancient art and a precious asset of Muslims, adding that Islamic art was a mirror of our civilization and culture. "An artist is a bearer of love and peace. The people of Pakistan and Iran are like one soul and two moulds, and the fragrance of peace will spread through art," he added. Director of Arts Council Waqar Ahmed while speaking on the occasion said that the friendship between Pakistan and Iran was universal and exemplary. "Iran is our neighbour and Islamic country. The friendship between Pakistan and Iran is ideal, and God willing, this friendship will become stronger," he added.

Tahir proposes provincial elections after 15th Shawwal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi proposed to hold the provincial elections after 15th of Shawwal-ul-Mukaram keeping in view sanctity of the holy month of Ramazan. Ashrafi, who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council in a video message on Thursday, said it would be difficult for the people to manage election affairs in the sacred month and above all, the Easter festivities of the Christian community would also fall in the following dates of elections given by the President.

Citing the example of former prime

minister Benazir Bhutto's martyrdom, he said the elections were postponed for a certain period in the past as well.

He urged the quarters concerned to consider his proposal in the light of religious perspective and announce new dates of elections for the convenience of the general public so that they could fully participate and perform their constitutional duty of the right to vote in an enabling and peaceful environment.

Ashrafi lamented that 75 years had passed and we could not bring 'reforms in the judicial system till this date'. He said that as per Islamic injunctions, justice was the most important and basic element in an Islamic society.

Baloch Culture Day helps promoting provincial and national harmony: Sanjrani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani on Thursday said that the Baloch Culture Day celebrations were aimed at promoting provincial and national harmony and disseminating a message that the Baloch nation was organized, conscious and peaceful.

In his Baloch Culture Day message being celebrated on Thursday, he said celebrating various cultures was aimed at spreading awareness, promoting cultural integration and making efforts to keep alive all customs, traditions, cultures and unique lifestyles

of the people of the province.

Emphasizing the importance of promoting provincial and national harmony through cultural integration, he said that Baloch culture was a culture of peace, love, traditions and unity and the day was being celebrated in a grand manner across the country, especially Balochistan.

He said the day was being celebrated with great fervour and enthusiasm as on the day Baloch youth, children, and elderly people show their love and solidarity with their culture by wearing their cultural clothes, Balochi cultural 'Dastar'.

Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani said that on the day, writers, and intellectuals highlight the history and culture of the Baloch nation and enlighten the new generation with their history and culture.

The Baloch Culture Day celebrations serve as a reminder that cultural diversity is an important aspect of national unity, and that promoting cultural integration can help to create a peaceful and harmonious society.

He further said that it was our first responsibility to keep our culture alive and to attract the young generation towards knowledge and awareness.

Rana Tanveer emphasizes on making JWG operational to coordinate Pak-Saudi collaboration

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training, Rana Tanveer Hussain here on Thursday emphasized on operationalization of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Education and Professional Training to oversee, pursue and coordinate the entire collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The operationalization of JWG will help enhance cooperation between the two countries, he said during a meeting with the Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki. Speaking on the occasion, the minister stated that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was extremely close to the hearts of the people of Pakistan. He emphasized the importance of the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The minister highlighted the brotherly relations between the two countries and

praised the hospitality shown to Pakistanis by the people of Saudi Arabia.

Rana Tanveer said that his ministry had submitted a comprehensive proposal for the uplift of National Skills University and establishment of another multifaceted skill entity in Pakistan with Saudi assistance as agreed between the two countries on his last visit to KSA. Rana Tanveer highlighted the issue of non-recognition of degrees of Virtual University and Allama Iqbal Open University by the Saudi Higher Education System. The minister was briefed that the Saudi authorities do not recognize distance learning but was assured that they will formulate a strategy to address this issue.

Hence, Saudi Arabia would consider revisiting the rules of non-recognition of degrees from Virtual University and Allama Iqbal Open University.

ANF recovers over 417 kg drugs; arrests 12

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in nine operations managed to recover over 417 kg drugs and arrested 12 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday.

He informed that ANF foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from 'Bara' to Punjab and recovered 312 kg charras in a raid conducted near Peshawar Ring Road Hayatabad Toll Plaza. Charras was concealed in a car while two accused residents of Mansehra were also rounded up.

In a joint operation, ANF

and FC recovered 10.8 kg charras from Karak area.

In third operation, another bid to smuggle drugs from 'Bara' to Punjab was also foiled. ANF and FC recovered 3.6 kg charras from the possession of an accused netted near Khyber Tirah check post. ANF managed to recover four heroin-filled capsules from the possession of a Bahrain-bound passenger resident of Muzaffargarh going on flight no GF-0771.

The spokesman informed that in two operations at International Mail Office Rawalpindi, ANF recovered over 5.9 kg Ice drug absorbed

in waistcoats, being sent to Doha and 250 intoxicated tablets being sent to Canada.

ANF while conducting a raid near Sheikhpura Toll Plaza seized 48 kg opium and 33.5 kg charras besides netting five accused.

In an operation ANF recovered over 3.5 kg Ice drug from a parcel booked at Sialkot International Mail Office for New Zealand. The spokesman informed that in ninth operation, ANF and Punjab Rangers recovered over 1.8 kg heroin from the possession of two accused arrested from Head Sulemanki area.

HEC to set up NAHE Regional Center in Sindh

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan has finalized the groundwork for establishing a regional center of National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) in Karachi, Sindh.

The HEC, under its Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project, aims to strengthen its NAHE, an academic wing of HEC launched in 2019 to improve the quality of teaching, research, and governance in higher education institutions (HEIs) across Pakistan. The establishment of four NAHE regional centers were envisioned during the life of HEDP project.

Addressing the immediate need for a lack of quality training facilities for academia in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, two chapters were notified in these two provinces last year while moving forward, two more are to be established in Punjab and Sindh.

In this regard, a two-day consultative workshop was held with the regional stakeholders of Sindh on the establishment of the NAHE regional center in Karachi here Thursday.

The workshop was chaired by Programme Coordinator, HEDP, Dr. Mahmood-ul-Hassan Butt, while more than 40 stakeholders, including Chairman Sindh HEC, Vice Chancellors, and Deans. Some Vice Chancellors mentioned that their universities have already developed human resource development activities and expressed their desire to collaborate with other universities. The participants

provided their valuable inputs on the envisioned role of the NAHE regional center and how it would build the capacities of faculty and administration in performing their roles more efficiently.

The universities in Sindh supported the establishment of the NAHE regional center, recognizing the importance of continuous learning and improvement in higher education. The participants suggested that the center should also be replicated in other regions of the province to meet their needs. The implementation of the revised Undergraduate Education Policy (UEP) was also discussed in length, and HEIs extended their support to HEC for its implementation. They were also briefed on the upcoming HEC initiatives to further improve the higher education system in the country. They suggested involving universities in designing capacity building programmes for faculty and administration.

Dr. Salvador Malo, a World Bank consultant, was also engaged during the session via video conference.

He is assisting HEDP in assessment of learning outcomes through the use of an international test at national level in Pakistan. The international test has been contextualized for use in Pakistan with his help. Dr. Malo is assisting HEDP to develop and embed flexible integral education and promote relevant competencies and critical learning skills via revised UEP implementation.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani wearing traditional Balochi Turban to celebrate Baloch Culture Day at Parliament House.

Two projects commenced

JALALABAD CITY (Agencies): Worth over 7 million Afghani two development projects was started Jalalabad capital city of Nangarhar. The mayor of Nangarhar Mullah Nematullah Akhund, said in the opening ceremony of the projects: that a road and a canal by financial support of "UNOPS" under the title of Social Support and Livelihood Program of Afghanistan with a cost of 7.5 million Afghani started in the province, and will be completed within two months.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 10, 1444 — Friday, March 03, 2023

Potable water provided

NANGARHAR (Agencies): Rural Rehabilitation and Development Department (RRDD) says that at least 500 find access to potable water in Nangarhar. Officials at RRDD of Nangarhar said that a potable water network put into exploitation in Khogyani district. The provincial head of RRDD, Mawlawi Qasemullah Mubarez, said that this 2,200 meter the project built with the financial support of the Children's Protection Fund organization, in 6 months.

Six terrorists killed in Khost IED blast

KABUL (Khaama Press): At least six fighters including a prominent commander were killed and 15 others injured in a blast that took place in Afghanistan's Khost province on Thursday.

Sources reported that six militants were killed and 15 others injured in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast in Khost province. The identities of the slain commanders were revealed to be Abdul Manan, Alam Khan Mudakhel, Kajir and three others unidentified.

The attack comes days after a senior Pakistani delegation traveled to Kabul and met with Mullah Abdul Ghani Bradar, the Action Deputy Prime Minister of

the Taliban and discussed key security concerns.

Later reports emerged that Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Asif had warned Afghan authorities if the Taliban regime does not take necessary measures against the terrorists hideouts, Pakistan does not have an option but to target the militant groups on Afghan soil.

During the meeting, Mullah Bradar reiterated the Islamic Emirate security forces will target militant groups wherever they hide in Afghanistan.

Also, he has assured Pakistani officials of enhancing security cooperation between the two countries in the future. Pakistan officials were

confident that the outcome of the visit would be visible in upcoming weeks as Pakistan expects certain actions by the Afghan Taliban against terrorist outfits operating out of Afghan soil.

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are suffering from growing threats of terrorism and militancy in recent months. Pakistan has experienced unprecedented terror attacks in the past couple of months. Since the banned group called off its unilateral ceasefire with the Pakistani government, the militant group has launched brutal attacks across Pakistan, resulting in the death in injury of hundreds of innocent civilians and army personnel.

DAB to auction \$16m next week to stabilize Afghani

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghanistan Central Bank will auction 16 million USD on Saturday, aimed at stabilizing Afghani against foreign currencies in the local markets.

The central bank auctioned \$17 million on March 1, and \$15 million on February 27, as part of the continuous efforts to keep the value of Afghani stable against foreign currencies.

Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) also known as the Central Bank of Afghanistan has asked qualified private banks and exchange companies to participate in the auction to be held

The winners of the auction are obliged to liquidate their accounts by the end of the day. As per the announcement, partial settlement of transactions is not allowed and the winners of the auction are obliged to transfer the payable amount to the central bank in cash within a certain time. The exchange rate of one USD is announced to 89 Afghani as of today, March 2, 2023.

Since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, the value of Afghani has remained relatively stable, which is considered a positive sign for the war-torn country with an economy mostly dependent on foreign aid.

On the contrary, Pakistani Rupee and Iranian Rial have depreciated against USD over the past couple of months. The crisis-hit Pakistan is currently suffering from serious economic issues and security challenges – which is directly affected the country's currency to lose its value against foreign currencies.

Despite the massive criticisms the ruling regime receives from the people of Afghanistan and the international community regarding gender-based policies, the de facto authorities have been able to manage the economy and keep the value of Afghani stable.

190 criminals arrested

JALALABAD CITY (Agencies): The Nangarhar police sharing a report with the media says that 190 criminals were arrested by police in a month.

The deputy police chief of the province, Mawlawi Muhammad Tahir, said last month people the police arrested these criminals on charges of murder, robbery, and many other crimes.

He said many different types of weapons were recovered from the detainees by police. In 3 different operations the counter-terrorism management center and districts, 25 weapons, 4 landmines also recovered he added.

He said two others accused of disrupting security arrested by police.

Among the detainees, 45 arrested on charges of dealing drugs, heroin, alcohol beverage, and hashish, recovered from the detainees by the counter-narcotic police, he said.

Passport distribution begins in Kabul, other provinces

KABUL (TOLONews): Following a five-month halt, the process of distributing passports resumed in Kabul and other provinces of the country.

According to the figures of the General Directorate of Passports, around 10 thousand people will receive passports every day across the country, and patients needing medical care and students will be prioritized.

Noorullah Patman, the spokesman of the General Directorate of Passports said that residents can submit their applications online to get a passport.

"The process has been resumed through the online system, and around 10,000 passports will be distributed to people in the capital and provinces every day," Patman added.

Some residents of Kabul expressed happiness over the resumption of passport directorate activities, saying that the date of their



online forms has passed and now they are facing problems. "The problem is that they have specified the date for us on the 10th of Mizan, when the distribution process stopped that time," said Abdul Jamil, a passport applicant.

"They should specify the date when we should come," said Mohammad Nawroz, a passport applicant. The spokesman noted that a specific date will be determined for these people. "We announced a certain date for those whose date

had arrived, but they did not come in line with the date and finish their work," Patman said. To avoid any corruption, the General Directorate of Passports requested that all applicants submit their passport applications online.

FM Muttaqi meets Europe representatives



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi met with Thomas Nicholson and the representatives of the European Union for Afghanistan, in Kabul.

Muttaqi said: "A lot of works should be done to bring Afghanistan and the European Union closer and European countries should

be encouraged to open their embassies in Afghanistan.

Thomas Nicholson and his accompanying delegation praised the complete security in Afghanistan and the strong fight against corruption with the arrival of the Islamic Emirate.

The EU delegations assured to convey a positive image of Afghanistan to the

international community.

Meanwhile, the deputy governor of Kandahar, Mawlawi Hayatullah Mubarak, who attended the meeting, asked the representatives of the European Union for cooperation in education and training, the construction of a treatment center for mental patients, dams, and the health sector.

If Al-Qaeda has a center, it would be Iran: Zalmay



KABUL (TOLONews): The former US special envoy for Afghanistan's reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, said that if there is any center of Al-Qaeda, it "would be Iran" and this will affect the relationship between Iran and the world.

Speaking in an interview with TOLONews, Khalilzad said that more than elsewhere, if there is any center for the group, it

would be Iran.

"Once Afghanistan was a center for Al-Qaeda, but Al-Qaeda has changed and its small groups have become a network that exists in various areas of the world. But if there is any center, it should be Iran," he said. He said that one of the reasons that the US pulled out of Afghanistan was the change in course of terrorism.

In response to questions asked about the claims of the regional countries that Daesh is formed by the US, Khalilzad said "Daesh" is a threat to the US and the world and that the US conducted several operations against Daesh in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.

"Iran and Russia benefited from the presence of Daesh. If someone thinks about who benefited from it, then it could be said that Russia and Iran are behind Daesh," Khalilzad said. He said that two groups that are significant for the security of the US are Daesh and Al-Qaeda, and that the Doha agreement focused on these two groups.

When asked about the handing over of Afghanistan's embassies to the Islamic Emirate in Iran and Turkey, Khalilzad said that the decision could be due to economic issues, but both countries denied recognition of the Taliban government.

Govt to reopen universities but only for male students

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Higher Education of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan says that the new academic year for male students will commence in Kabul and several other colder provinces on March 6 of this year.

The ministry of higher education in a statement on Wednesday said the new academic year for male students at public universities and educational institutions in colder regions will officially start on March 6.

According to a decision by the High Council for

Higher Education, "classes of the male students at governmental higher education institutions in the colder provinces will officially start from March 6."

However, the statement of the ministry of higher education has not highlighted the resumption of universities for female students, which has become a very controversial topic among the Taliban senior members as well.

This comes as the Taliban authorities have banned the education of female students across the

country until further notice. Previously, the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan's de facto regime had announced that the group is working on a plan, however, after more than a year and a half, there is no update on the plan or further directions in this regard.

The Taliban's latest decisions depriving Afghan women and girls of the rights to education and work prompted massive criticisms – the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and

several foreign governments including the US, the International Community, and aid organizations have emphasized the resumption of schools and universities for female students.

Meanwhile, Doctors Without Borders, a non-governmental aid organization criticized the latest restrictions by Taliban authorities barring women and girls from attending the final medical exams. The organization has called on the de facto authorities to set a new date for the final exam.

Views of Kabul residents regarding Doha deal

KABUL (TOLONews): On the third anniversary of the signing of the Doha Agreement, the residents of Kabul have diverse views on the matter.

Some of them believe that the country has benefited from this agreement, while others say that women's rights have been restricted as a result of signing this pact.

"It had a good aspect, that the country was freed from the occupation of other countries, but the problem it created for us is that universities closed, and many of our cadres fled the county," said Numan, another resident of Kabul.

"It does not mean that it brought peace, and everything is alright: people are dying of poverty," Shukurullah, another resident of Kabul told TOLONews.

According to other residents of the capital, following the reestablishment of the Islamic Emirate and the signing of the Doha Agreement, restrictions on women have increased.

"Following the signing of the Doha Agreement, women have been deprived of education and they cannot study, universities and schools are closed, people are facing many challenges, women face much more difficulty," said Husna Raufi, a student.

"The closure of schools and universities poses a very significant obstacle to women's educational and employment rights," said Rona, a capital resident.



Earthquake of magnitude 4.1 strikes Fayzabad

KABUL (Khaama Press): An earthquake with a Richter scale of 4.1 occurred in the Fayzabad province of Afghanistan on Thursday.

The earthquake's epicenter was 267 km northeast of Fayzabad at 2.35 am.

"Earthquake of Magnitude:4.1, Occurred on 02-03-2023, 02:35:57 IST, Lat: 37.73 & Long: 73.47, Depth: 245 Km,

Location: 267km ENE of Fayzabad, Afghanistan".

Among the provinces of Afghanistan, Badakhshan and Takhar are the two that are prone to hazards, notably earthquakes and landslides. Badakhshan province has recently had a lot of earthquakes; this is cause for serious alarm and caution.

Last week, two earthquakes hit Fayzabad of

Badakhshan province with the same magnitude; earlier, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck Afghanistan-Tajikistan by an aftershock measuring 5.0 magnitude and another earthquake measuring 4.6 magnitudes.

Two earthquakes shook the Afghan province of Badakhshan in January, and multiple avalanches happened within a month.

Rival Kandahar families reconcile after 12 years of enmity

KANDAHAR (Pajhwok): Mediation by tribal elders and religious scholars has ended a 12-year-old enmity between two families in the Dand district of southern Kandahar province.

First children of the two families clashed over a petty issue and then their elders jumped into the fight in Chapalani area 12 years ago during the month of Ramadan.

Dost Mohammad shot and injured Ahmad after their children clashed over something.

Ahmad survived and tribal elders and religious scholars at the time decided that Dost Mohammad should leave the village and should never return.

But after some months, Dost Mohammad returned to the village, which prompted Ahmad to kill Dost Mohammad and his maternal uncle Musa Khan.

The family of Ahmad then left the area (and all

their belongings) for 12 years until they returned after reconciliation.

Abdul Hai, Ahmad's brother, told Pajhwok Afghan News their enmity finally came to an end due to efforts of religious scholars, tribal elders and the district governor.

"We (both rival families) delegated authority to tribal elders, religious scholars to decide their fate and they discussed it multiple times among themselves before reaching a decision".

He said he was happy that their enmity had ended because their upcoming generations would inherit it.

Muhibullah, 18, the guardian of Dost Mohammad and Musa Khan families, also said his family was satisfied with the mediation and decision of the religious scholars and tribal elders.

"What is important is that the enmity has ended

now, in which our elders lost their lives", Muhibullah said.

Maulavi Abdul Razeq, representing the religious scholars who mediated in the dispute, told Pajhwok that after lengthy discussions, it was decided that the family of Ahmad should pay 4.5 million Pakistani rupees as compensation to the families of Dost Mohammad and Musa Khan (the victims).

It was also decided that Ahmad's family should be displaced to another village, Abdul Razeq said.

Such enmities stemmed from ignorance and existence of arms with people, Abdul Razeq said, stressing that such issues should be solved through dialogue.

Ismatullah Habibi, a representative of Chapalani village elders, said they considered all religious and cultural aspects of the issue in their decision.

"The plus point is this

that neither ulema (religious scholars) nor tribal elders allowed any girls to be given in baad mirage to end the enmity."

He said: "We made this decision in the light of Sharia Law and cultural and human rights laws, we would never allow our sisters and daughters to be given baad marriage."

Hafiz Mohammad Seddiq, the administrative head of Dand district said they struggled for about a year to reconcile the two families and put an end to their enmity.

"We consulted religious scholars and tribal elders to make a fair decision where the enmity will never raise its head again".

Seddiq said they retrieved guarantees from both sides that they would never create trouble for each other in future and many people were witness to this decision.

The residents of



Kandahar province say such decisions that turn enmities into good relations and friendship worth admiration.

Seddiquallah Mukhlis, a teacher, told Pajhwok: "It is a joyful moment when friendship replaces enmity

and decisions are made where enmities are buried and no girls are married in such issues".

Religious scholars and tribal elders have recently intensified their efforts and enmities and pave the way for peace in the society.

So far, since the last one year, eight such enmities have been turned into friendships.

Majority of the people believe religious scholars and tribal elders can play an important role in resolving feuds.

ANSA returned 21 tankers of low-quality fuel to Iran

KABUL (Agencies): The Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA) informed returning 21 tankers of low-quality oil to Iran.

Nine tankers of low-quality oil (diesel and petrol) were stored in Islam Qala port of Herat province and 12 tankers in Farah province, which did not comply with the standards the imported fuel returned back to Iran, officials of ANSA said.

Lately, ANSA has taken practical steps to prevent the imports of low-quality fuel to the country, hundreds of tankers of low-quality fuel returned back after assessment so far, added to statement released by the department.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador-designate to Ukraine, Major General (ret) Nadir Khan, called on President Dr. Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Pak expresses concern over regional instability

GENEVA (APP): Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar, has voiced concern over the "generous" supply of conventional and non-conventional weapons to India, saying it was severely straining South Asia's strategic stability, and threatening "our national security".

"The largest country in the region continues to be a beneficiary of nuclear exceptionalism, in violation of established non-proliferation norms and principles," she told a high-level UN panel — without naming India — by video-link from Islamabad. "This country also remains a net recipient of generous supplies of advanced conventional and non-conventional weapons, technologies and platforms," the minister added.

Ms. Khar was addressing the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, a 65-member forum established by the international community to negotiate arm control and disarmament agreements, which began its session on Thursday. The minister said that the favours being done to India were straining the security environment; heightening risks to peace and stability in the region; reinforcing a sense of impunity in the recipient state and freezing pathways to conflict resolution through peaceful means. "Even as we adhere to and call for restraint and responsibility, we cannot ignore threats to our security," she told delegates from around the world.

Emphasizing that a third of humanity that lives in South Asia deserves investments in sustainable peace and development, the minister said Pakistan had a clear vision and a policy for peaceful neighbourhood on the basis of universally agreed principles; sovereign equality and undiminished security for all States; no threat or use of force and pacific settle-

ment of disputes. "We will pursue the path of peace, development and strategic stability in South Asia and beyond, I can assure you of that."

Pakistan, she said, regards the Conference on Disarmament as an indispensable part of the global security architecture and the disarmament machinery. Noting with concerns the decades-long impasse in the Conference, Ms. Khar said it's ability to start negotiations on its agenda items remains contingent on the policy priorities of its members, their threat perceptions and their core national security concerns.

About some members' insistence on pursuing self-serving and cost-free proposals such as banning the future production of fissile materials, she said the subject should be discussed in all its dimensions. In this regard, Ms. Khar said Pakistan had proposed a 'Fissile Material Treaty' seeking to craft a new mandate for the treaty stipulating explicitly in its scope fissile material stocks, and applicable equally to all States.

The minister proposed that the Conference on Disarmament must contribute to and promote security at international and regional levels; play its role in creating conditions that were responsive to the principle of inalienable right to equal security by all States; adhere to disarmament measures in an equitable and balanced manner; its members refrain from grant of special exemptions and by fulfilling their longstanding disarmament obligations, and it must be enabled to overcome its decades-long impasse by patient and constructive engagement. Pakistan, she added, remained committed to the goal of a nuclear weapons free world that was achieved in a universal, verifiable and non-discriminatory manner.

Imran won't find place to hide anymore: Sanaullah

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Rana Sanaullah on Thursday said that Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan would be arrested soon and now he would not be able to find a place to hide anymore.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) had always respected the courts and its leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had attended dozens of court hearings, he said while talking to a private news channel. Imran had put political opponents in jails on false charges, but when he was found guilty in Toshakhana case, he started a "mantra of baseless allegations", adding, he will face a transparent probe for selling the expensive wristwatch.

He said Khan due to his involvement in the sale of the gifts would be presented in courts and made to answer the details. "The government will pursue to establish the rule of law", he added. He claimed Imran Khan was responsible to destroy the country for the sake of his personal ego. The interior minister called him 'fitna' and said his fake narratives were being exposed one after another.

Nepra refuses to accept hike in power charges by govt

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) on Thursday refused to accept the federal government's request for an increase in power surcharge.

The government had filed a petition requesting a surcharge of Rs3.82 for consumers, following the support of additional power prices during the ECC meeting. However, Nepra Chairman Tauseef H. Farooqi objected to the request, citing that consumers who had paid their bills were already being charged a surcharge of Rs3.39, while those who had not paid were still receiving relief.

He also expressed his frustration, questioning why the government sought approval from Nepra when it had the power to impose surcharges itself. The director general tariff clarified that Nepra had the authority to dismiss the surcharge.

ECP seeks ROs from judiciary in Punjab polls

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided to recruit returning officers from the judiciary for the elections in Punjab.

A private television reported on Thursday that the registrar Lahore High Court has agreed to provide judicial officers for the elections in Punjab. Sources privy to the ECP have said that the returning and assistant returning officers for the election will be from the subordinate judiciary.

Meanwhile, the Returning Officer for the elections will be the Additional District and Sessions Judges. Assistant Returning Officers will be Civil Judges and District Returning Officers will be District and Sessions Judges. Preparation of the list of judges for returning officers, and assistant returning officers will start on March 3, elections will be held on 297 general seats in Punjab and more than 150 district and session judges will be appointed across Punjab.

tempt plea against CEC and other: While declaring contempt pleas against Chief Election Commissioner inefructuous in wake of the recent verdict of the top court over general election, a single-member bench of the Lahore High Court Thursday comprising Justice Jawad Hassan disposed of the matter.

Invoking jurisdiction of the LHC a petitioner had filed a contempt petition against the Chief Election Commissioner on the grounds that the Commission failed to observe the High Court directives to announce date for Punjab Assembly elections date. Resuming the hearing of the matter on Thursday Justice Jawad Hassan observed saying the Supreme Court had ordered that elections must be held in 90 days positively. "Now, there is no valid reason for proceeding against ECP, others for contempt of court," Justice Jawad remarked.

Blinken, Lavrov speak amid war of words over Ukraine at G20 meet

NEW DELHI (Agencies): The United States and its European allies sparred with Russia over the war in Ukraine at a meeting of G20 foreign ministers in New Delhi on Thursday, with the rival sides each accusing the other of destabilising the world. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had a brief encounter on the meeting's sidelines during which Blinken urged Russia to reverse its decision on the New START nuclear treaty, a senior US official said.

Blinken also told Lavrov that Washington was prepared to support Ukraine to defend itself for as long as it takes, the official said. The two spoke for less than 10 minutes in what is believed to be their first one-on-one conversation in person since before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. "We always remain hopeful that the Russians will reverse their decision and be prepared to engage in a diplomatic process that can lead to a just and durable peace, but I wouldn't say that coming out of this encounter there was any expectation that things will change in the near term," the US official said.

Blinken, the official added, wanted to "disabuse the Russians of any notion that our support (for Ukraine) might be wavering or the support from our allies and partners might be wavering". The Russian foreign ministry said Lavrov and Blinken spoke "on the move" but did not hold negotiations or a meeting, Russian news agencies reported. News of the exchange came at the end of the day-long G20 meeting which was overshadowed by the Ukraine war.

The United States and its European allies urged the Group of 20 (G20) nations to keep up pressure on Moscow to end the conflict, now in its second year. Russia hit back,

accusing the West of turning work on the G20 agenda into a "farce" and said Western delegations wanted to shift responsibility for their economic failures onto Moscow. "We must continue to call on Russia to end its war of aggression and withdrawal from Ukraine for the sake of international peace and economic stability," Blinken said in remarks released after his address at the closed-door meeting.

"Unfortunately, this meeting has again been marred by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine," Blinken said. He was backed by his counterparts from Germany, France, and the Netherlands. "Unfortunately, one G20 member prevents all the other 19 from focusing all their efforts on these issues the G20 was created for," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told the meeting, according to the German delegation.

Baerbock, addressing Lavrov, urged the Kremlin to return to full implementation of the New START nuclear arms treaty and to resume dialogue with the United States. "The threat of nuclear weapons should be opposed," she said. President Vladimir Putin last week announced Russia's decision to suspend participation in the latest START treaty, after accusing the West — without providing evidence — of being directly involved in attempts to strike its strategic air bases.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, speaking at a UN conference in Geneva, said the United States had attempted "to probe the security of Russian strategic facilities declared under the New START Treaty by assisting the Kyiv regime in conducting armed attacks against them". French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said the war in

Ukraine had hurt "almost every country on the planet, in terms of food, energy, inflation". Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra told CNBC that Russia was solely responsible for the war and must continue to be sanctioned. Russia's Lavrov, however, blamed the West for the global political and economic crises.

"A number of Western delegations turned the work on the G20 agenda into a farce, wanting to shift the responsibility for their failures in the economy to the Russian Federation," Lavrov said, according to a Russian statement. He said the West had created obstacles to the export of Russian agricultural products. He accused it of "shamelessly burying" the Black Sea grain initiative that facilitates the export of Ukraine's agricultural products from its southern ports, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

The G20 includes the rich G7 nations as well as Russia, China, India, Brazil, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, among other countries. India, which holds the bloc's presidency this year, has sought to highlight the economic impact of the war as well as issues such as climate change and poorer countries' debt. But New Delhi's efforts to bridge differences and produce a joint statement or a communique stumbled due to differences over the war. The meeting produced an "outcome document" instead. India has declined to blame Russia for the war and has sought a diplomatic solution while boosting its purchases of Russian oil. "There were differences on the Ukraine issue which we could not reconcile between various parties who held differing positions," Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar told reporters at the end of the meeting.

'Sit down!', Maryam tells Imran in fresh Twitter spat

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In less than a week's time since Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senior Vice-President Maryam Nawaz and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan engaged in a war of words on Twitter, their battle on the microblogging site continued over rising dollar rates in the country on Thursday.

Last Saturday, the two leaders found themselves embroiled in a Twitter war and traded barbs with each other over the PML-N's concerns regarding the two top court judges being "biased" towards their party. The PTI chief mocked the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement

(PDM) and "spoilt brat" Maryam for what he termed as "shameless and calculated attacks on SC [Supreme Court] judges".

Today, however, Maryam — who is also the PML-N's chief organiser — called out Khan for criticising the federal government's economic decisions, which she mentioned were being taken to clean up the mess created by the PTI administration. Responding to Khan's censorious statement, the PML-N scion snapped back at him scorning his party's three-year-long "incompetence".

"Mighty audacious of u to criticize those who're undoing yr mess created through yr ruthless plunder, incompetence, misplaced

priorities, cruel deal that you struck with IMF & then its breach that plunged the country into economic turmoil," Maryam tweeted. Maryam then told Khan "So sit down!" in her tweet.

The politician didn't stop there and continued to school the PTI leader about his "facilitators" whom she said "handpicked" Khan and "fed" him for "four years". "And let's not forget to thank all those for this mayhem who handpicked and fed you for four years, as well as the remnants of their influence in the judiciary that you are now banking on," the PML-N chief organiser tweeted adding that it won't be allowed again. "Won't let that happen Insha'Allah," Maryam added.

Alvi urges bureaucracy to make fast decisions

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday underlined the need for inculcating the spirit of fast decision-making in bureaucracy to improve service delivery and achieve the desired goals well in time.

He said that the slow decision-making process by the bureaucracy resulted in poor governance as well as hampering the progress of the country. The President made these remarks while chairing a meeting of the Board of Governors of the National School of Public Policy (NSPP), at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The meeting was attended by the Special Secretary Finance Division Awaiz Manzoor Sumra, Special Secretary Establishment

Division, Asmat Tahira, Rector NSPP Dr Ijaz Munir, and Secretary of Executive Committee of BoG of NSPP Nadeem Mahbub. Members of BoG Javed Sadiq Malik, Muneer Kamal, Zaid bin Maqsood, Muhammad Hanif Channa, and Dr Hafeez Ahmad Jamali attended the meeting via video link.

Speaking on the occasion, the President underlined the need for imparting modern knowledge and techniques to civil servants to ensure good governance and efficient service delivery. He asked the Rector of NSPP to inculcate the spirit of fast decision-making among the civil servants getting training at NSPP, besides adopting best international training practices to improve the decision-

making process as well as enhance the efficiency of the civil servants.

The Board of Governors approved the proposal to allow NSPP to hire young professionals as interneers. The President advised that suitable and efficient interneers may be hired in order to enhance the capacity of young professionals. The meeting also approved the upgradation of Computer Operators from BPS-11 to BPS-16 with the change of nomenclatures as IT Officers in all National Institutes of Management in the country. The Board also accorded approval to the proposal for adopting special dispensation for the employees in BPS-1 to BPS-16 as per the Finance Division's Office Memorandum of 14 February 2023.

Judge orders release of ex-general Shoaib

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): An Additional Session Judge Islamabad didn't agree with prosecution story and ordered an immediate release of Lieutenant General (ret) Amjad Shoaib who was detained under sedition charges earlier this week.

According to police sources, a defense analyst Shoaib was arrested from his residence after a Magistrate Ovais Khan got First Information Report (FIR) registered at Ramna police station under Sections 153A and 505 of the Pakistan Penal Code. The Sections implicates a person who is involved in promoting enmity between various factions and statements inciting public mischief, respectively.

According to the contents

of the FIR during an interview with a private news channel, Shoaib made comments that "incited government officials and opposition from performing their government and legal duties". Police produced General retired Shoaib before the court after completing two days of physical remand. The Police turned up with Parcha' Remand seeking another two days' physical custody of the accused person under Section 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code. However, Additional Sessions judge Tahir Abbas Supra reserved the verdict after hearing arguments of the defense lawyer and prosecutor in the matter.

During the hearing, Shoaib's lawyer maintained

that the case against him did not fall under Section 505 of the Pakistan Penal Code (statements inciting public mischief).

He further contended that the fuss created was related to conducting provincial by-polls and the Supreme Court had given its decision in the matter. The counsel argued that if the decision was made earlier, the arrest would not have occurred. The defense lawyer requested that the former general be discharged from the case, however, the prosecutor opposed the move. After hearing arguments of both the parties counsels in the matter, the Additional District & Session Judge issued release order of Amjad Shoaib in the matter.

Rs115 per kg edible oil price increased in utility stores

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Utility Stores Corporation has increased Rs 115 per kg in the prices of subsidized ghee and cooking oil at all stores across the country with an immediate effect from March 2 for general public.

According to the official notification, The Utility Stores Corporation increased the price of subsidized ghee from Rs 375 to Rs 490 per kg. However, the beneficiaries of Benazir Income Sport Program will be exempted from the increase, for them the price of ghee per kg will remain Rs.300.

Under the Prime Minister's package, the price of general subsidized ghee has been increased for the second time in two months. Earlier on January 1, 2023, the price of edible oil was increased by Rs 75 per kg. Thus, in two months, under the Prime Minister's package, ghee became expensive by Rs. 190.

The Utility Stores Corporation sources said that in order to improve demand and supply and ensure uninterrupted supply of branded items, prices of certain branded items have been increased at all Utility Stores across the country. However, this increase is from branded companies, which is due to factors like market volatility/rising trend. Utility Stores Corporation does not manufacture or produce itself but purchases from reputed and certified branded companies of the country. When raw material prices increase, production charges increase and transportation charges increase, the product cost also increases due to which the prices have to be revised.

Commander of Royal Navy Oman visits Naval HQs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Commander of Royal Navy of Oman Rear Admiral Saif Bin Nasser Bin Mohsin Al Rabi Called-on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad.

Upon arrival at Naval Headquarters, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman was received by Naval Chief. During the meeting matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and scope of military cooperation including defence, training and security between the two countries were discussed.