

Khunjerab Pass to reopen

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Khunjerab Pass, a key land border crossing between Pakistan and China at Khunjerab, is being reopened for trade activities from April 1. The Pass was once closed to contain coronavirus transmission between the two countries. Right now relevant parties are making efforts to green-light customs clearance, hoping to drive up cross-border trade and business in the post COVID-19 era.



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PM orders withdrawal of curative reference against Justice Faez Isa

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday, calling it baseless and politically motivated, ordered the withdrawal of a curative reference against Justice Qazi Faez Isa, the senior most judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The prime minister instructed Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar to withdraw the reference saying that the government would not pursue the same for it being baseless and politically motivated, a PM Office statement said. The federal cabinet had already approved the withdrawal of the reference in a meeting chaired by the prime minister.

"This was not a reference rather a victimization by revengeful Imran Niazi against an impartial person pursuing the course of constitution and the law. This was a conspiracy to usurp the independence of judiciary and create a division within," the prime minister remarked. He said while being in opposition, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and other coalition parties had opposed this frivolous reference.

The prime minister said Imran

Niazi had also made the President of Pakistan "misuse" his office for this "criminal act" who became an accomplice in an attack on the judiciary. He said the lawyers' bodies including the Pakistan Bar Council had had also opposed the reference and the government valued their opinion.

Shehbaz, Fazl discuss political situation: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday held a meeting with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and discussed the prevailing political situation in the country.

During the meeting held here at the Prime Minister House, Maulana Fazlur Rehman congratulated the prime minister on the passage of Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill from the Parliament. He assured of complete cooperation of the allies to the prime minister.

PM hails passage of Supreme Court (Practice & Procedure) Bill 2023: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday hailed the passage of Supreme Court (Practice & Procedure) Bill 2023 by the

Parliament, expressing confidence that it would institutionally strengthen the apex court.

"It will help make the process of bench formation and exercise of Article 184 (3) transparent and inclusive, thus serving the cause of justice," he said in a tweet. Earlier in the day, the Senate passed the Bill aimed at restructuring the suo motu powers of the Chief Justice of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday extended felicitations to Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on his appointment as the vice president of the United Arab Emirates.

"May this new chapter be filled with success and prosperity for the UAE and its people," he said in a tweet. The prime minister also congratulated Sheikh Khaled Bin Mohamed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on his appointment as the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. "As a brotherly country, we look forward to continuing our strong partnership and working together towards a brighter future for our people and the region," he wrote on Twitter.



ISLAMABAD: JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Pak Navy conducts successful live weapons firing

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In an impressive Live Weapon Firing event, Pakistan Navy Ground Based Air Defence units demonstrated combat readiness and war fighting potential through successful firing of Surface to Air Missiles during night hours. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi witnessed the missile firing at the forward posts.

During the missile firing sequence, PN Air Defence units successfully engaged the intended targets and demonstrated real-time professionalism. The missile firing through newly acquired Short Range Air Defence System reassured PN formidable defence against any incoming air threat.

Speaking at the occasion, Chief of the Naval Staff expressed complete satisfaction on operational readiness of PN Air Defence setup and commended officers and men for their tireless commitment and professionalism. Naval Chief retreated that Pakistan Navy is fully prepared and capable to generate optimum response against any misadventure by the enemy.

Imran castigates govt, ECP

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has castigated the incumbent government and 'compromised' Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) over 'complete mockery of Constitution' following the postponement of elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Taking to Twitter, the former premier said that the strength of the Supreme Court (SC) bench does not matter, and all they want to know was if the elections will be held within 90 days as per the Constitution or not. "Whether it's a 5 [member] SC bench or Full Bench, it makes no difference to us [because] all we want to know is if elections will be held within the 90 days' constitutional provision," Imran Khan asked. The PTI chief said he had consulted his top legal experts before dissolving provincial assemblies in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P).

"..All of whom were absolutely clear that the 90-day Constitutional provision on holding of elections was inviolable. Now imported government of crooks, their handlers [and] a compromised ECP are making a complete mockery of Constitution," he added. Imran Khan further said the PDM government was "threatening the very foundation of Pakistan by cherry-picking which articles of Constitution they will abide by". "So petrified are they of elections [and] so desperate to whitewash their convicted [leaders] that they are prepared to destroy the Constitution and any semblance of Rule of Law," the PTI chief added.

DSP among four martyred in IED blast

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: A Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) district Lakki Marwat Iqbal Mohmand and three of his squad members embraced martyrdom while six police officials got injured in an apparently planned terrorists' attack on a police station followed by an IED blast on DSP's vehicle in District Lakki Marwat in the wee hours on Thursday.

According to police, the terrorists first attacked the Sadar police station with modern and heavy weapons but the police personnel who were already on alert gave a befitting response as a result of which the terrorists retreated and escaped while taking advantage of the darkness.

However, in exchange of firing five police personnel deployed at the police station including Head Constable Farooq Shah and Constables Amanatullah, Azghar Ali, Gul Tiaz and Arif were injured. As soon as the information went viral on police wireless system, DSP Iqbal Mohmand along with his squad rushed to the police station to rescue the injured police officials but himself fell prey to an IED blast at Peerwale Mor, which claimed the lives of DSP Iqbal Khan Mohmand and three of his gunners including Karamat, Waqar and Ali Marjan while driver of the vehicle Sardar Ali was injured in the deadly blast.

The other teams of police force also arrived at the scene, cordoned off the area and started a search



operation. Meanwhile Rescue 1122 teams reached on the spot and shifted injured and the dead bodies to the hospitals. DSP Iqbal Khan Mohmand had been serving in Lakki Marwat for a long time and had conducted several successful operations against terrorists and criminals.

KP police chief and District Police Officer (DPO) Lakki Marwat said that DSP Iqbal Mohmand's dedication and bravery would be remembered forever and expressed the resolve that the perpetrators of the cowardly attack would soon be brought to justice.

Meanwhile, the funeral prayer of DSP Iqbal Mohmand and other four police officials who embraced martyrdom in a deadly explosion on a police van was offered here at Police Line.

District Emergency Officer Engineer Faseehullah Khan, Emergency Officer Atif Sardar, RPO Syed Ashfaq Ahmed Bannu, DPO Lakki Marwat, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Hadi Sahib, ADC Lakki Marwat, officials of CTD, Special Branch, Pakistan Army and district

police and elders of the area attended the funeral prayer. On the occasion a police contingent presented salute to the martyrs. Later, the bodies of martyred police officials were shifted to their native towns in Rescue-1122 ambulances for burial with official protocol.

Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan on Thursday strongly condemned cowardly terrorists' attack on a police station followed by an IED blast on the vehicle of a DSP in Lakki Marwat. He said that KP police have made great sacrifices for peace and order in the province and such cowardly attacks could not shake the resolve of the police force in wiping out terrorism and militancy. He said that the provincial government and the people of the province highly acknowledge the sacrifices of the police martyrs.

The Chief Minister expressed his condolences on the martyrdom of four police personnel including a DSP in the incident and conveyed his heartfelt sympathy to the families of the martyrs.

Senate okays SC bill amid PTI opposition

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Senate on Thursday approved the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023 that would limit chief justice of Pakistan's discretionary powers to take suo motu notice. The bill was moved in the Senate on Thursday after it was approved by the National Assembly a day earlier. At least 60 senators approved the bill while 19 lawmakers voted against it.

Before the final vote on the bill, a motion was presented to send the bill to the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice for further debate but it was rejected. The motion for the urgent approval of the bill was then presented which was accepted by a majority of lawmakers. Once the bill was tabled in the Senate, Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar explained that the proposed law is providing the right to appeal in suo motu cases and to appoint a different lawyer in the appeals.

However, Leader of the Opposition Dr Shahzad Waseem slammed the bill saying that the government is unable to ensure a smooth distribution of wheat and planning to make rules for the Supreme Court. "Making rules for the Supreme Court is an indirect attack (on the judiciary). You are trying to create division in the Supreme Court," claimed Dr Waseem. He

added that the bill did not talk about the right of appeal before and later in the standing committee the right to appeal was also given on previous cases.

"Give the bill to the committee and let it bring its changes," said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senator and called for a vote on the matter. As the opposition leader was making his speech, the PTI senators hold a protest in the upper house. When PTI Senator Ali Zafar was given a chance to speak, he said that he had two objections to the bill.

"Only constitutional amendment can be made in 184/3. If you pass laws this way then it will be struck down within 15 days," warned the senator. He added that the right to appeal can only be given through the Constitution. Zafar said that the Senate's standing committee had sent a constitutional amendment for the right to appeal. He also warned that by opening past cases the Supreme Court will have to hear thousands of cases again.

"There is also a divide among the lawyers on this bill. Such amendments cannot be made without amending the Constitution," said Zafar. He added that some changes suggested by the bill are illegal. The senator also objected to the timing of the bill as that an election

suo motu was ongoing in the Supreme Court.

A day earlier, in a bid to bolster checks and balances in the higher judiciary, the National Assembly passed the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023, tabled to limit Pakistan's top judge's discretionary powers to take suo motu notice. The bill was passed hours after National Assembly Standing Committee on Law and Justice gave its consent.

The bill was moved by the government after two Supreme Court judges — Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail — raised questions over the powers of the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP), saying the apex court "cannot be dependent on the solitary decision of one man, the Chief Justice". The bill includes shifting the powers of taking suo motu notice from the chief justice to a three-member committee comprising senior judges.

Moreover, the bill also includes a clause regarding the right of challenging the decision which could be filed within 30 days and will then be fixed for a hearing in two weeks. According to the bill — every clause, appeal or matter before the Supreme Court shall be heard and disposed of by a bench constituted by the committee comprising the CJP and two senior judges, in order of seniority.

Eye specialist Dr Birbal gunned down

KARACHI (Agencies): Former Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) senior director of health and eye specialist Dr Birbal Genani was shot dead by unknown assailants in the port city on Thursday.

Dr Genani, according to police, along with his assistant lady doctor was heading to Gulshan-e-Iqbal from Ramswamy when unidentified armed men targeted their car near Garden interchange on the Lyari Expressway. The ex-KMC director of health died on the spot while his assistant sustained bullet injuries. After being informed, the police and the rescue officials swung into action and rushed to the scene and shifted the body and the injured to the hospital.

In a closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera footage of the incident, which surfaced on the internet, Dr Genani's car could be seen moving uncontrollably and smashing into a wall. Talking to journalists, SSP City Arif Aziz termed Dr Genani's murder as a "target killing", adding that the exact reason behind the murder is not known yet.

The lady doctor — who works with him — was aboard the vehicle when the unidentified assailants attacked the vehicle. "Firing started suddenly and I could not understand anything," the police officer said, citing the injured woman. Apparently, there was only one bullet mark on the vehicle, he added. The police officer further said that they are recording the statement of the lady doctor. The police have already launched an investigation into the murder, the police personnel added.

Meanwhile, Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori took notice of the incident and sought a report from the additional inspector general of Karachi police. He also expressed deep sorrow over the murder of the eye specialist.

ATC grants bail to Latif murder accused

PESHAWAR (INP): An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Thursday granted bail to an accused in Latif Afridi murder case. Seasoned lawyer and former president of Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) Latif Afridi was murdered at the Peshawar High Court bar room on Monday, January 16.

ATC granted bail to Adil advocate who was charged of facilitation in murder of Abdul Latif Afridi. The court ordered accused Adil to submit Rs. one lac surety bond for his release on bail. Three suspects Zakir, Fawad and Adil were accused of facilitating the murder.

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PSCA reunites missing boy with mother

LAHORE (APP): Lost and Found Centre of the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) reunited a eight-year-old child suffering from Autism with his mother here on Thursday.

According to a spokesman for the PSCA, Luqman had been missing from Kahna and her mother informed the 15 Helpline. The PSCA centre reviewed complaints and handed over the boy to his mother with the help of Dolphin Force and Kahna Police station. The PSCA Lost and Found centre so far contributed to finding 439 missing people and recovered 7,252 motorcycles, 134 cars, and 167 rickshaws which were handed over to owners.

‘PPP believes in supremacy of parliament’

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Central Punjab Acting President Rana Farooq Saeed has said the PPP is ready to contest elections and the party would win the polls with a thumping majority. He added that political and financial stability was not possible without understanding among constitutional institutions. He said this in a meeting with Faisal Mukhtar, son of former defence minister Ahmad Mukhtar, at the PPP secretariat here on Thursday. He said non-political elements could get advantage of the constitutional crisis, adding that the PPP believed in supremacy of parliament and the constitution.

KU declares results of LLB/BA LLB

KARACHI (APP): The University of Karachi has announced LLB 1st year and BA LLB (Hons) 1st year Annual Examinations 2021 results.

According to the Controller of Examinations University of Karachi Dr. Syed Zafar Hussain, the results of LLB 1st year and BA LLB (Hons) 1st year annual exams for 2021 have been announced, said a KU's spokesperson.

According to the results, 187 students participated in the LLB first year exams, out of them 124 students were declared successful while 63 students were declared failed. The success ratio was 66.31 percent. As many as 117 students participated in BA LLB (Hons) first year exams and 85 students were declared successful while 32 students were declared failed. The success ratio was 72.65 percent.

PU marks 'World Water Day'

LAHORE (APP): The speakers highlighted importance of water and shed light on the resources, problems and solutions for clean water during a seminar to mark the World Water Day at Punjab University here on Thursday.

The seminar was held by the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences PU in collaboration with Pepsi Cola International.

COURT NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF SANA AFZAL CIVIL JUDGE (V) KOHAT, Suit no.377/1 Date of hearing: 03-04-2023, Titled:- Malak Ahmed Khan Vs Abdul Rauf Notice against:- (Lrs Defendant no 3 Mehraban S/o Khanan Khan) Irfan S/o Mehraban R/o Tohg Bala District Kohat presently in Abroad Rayad Saudi Arabia contact no. 009665808930614 (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit of against you defendant in which date of hearing 03-04-2023 is fixed for your appearance. Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 03-04-2023 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on 29-03-2023. (Court of C.J, V Kohat)

CM visits free flour centres in Bahawalpur

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi is making continuous visits for the monitoring of historic free flour package initiated by the Prime Minister and the Punjab government as he visited free flour distribution centres at Bahawalpur on Thursday.

Mohsin Naqvi inspected centres established at Government College of Technology and Government Abbasia High School, said a handout issued here.

Mohsin Naqvi inquired from the visitors about arrangements made at the centres and provision of free flour. He talked with men and women standing in the queues and listened to their problems. He issued orders on the spot for quick resolution of their complaints.

Mohsin Naqvi urged the citizens to get themselves registered in the Benazir Income Support Programme.

The CM inspected flour distribution process among the deserving people and he himself made the verification of CNICs of few men and women with regard to their eligibility.

Mohsin Naqvi directed that there should not be any undue waiting for the citizens at the centers, adding that the elderly citizens should be provided flour on priority basis. The CM remarked that he felt pleased over seeing nice arrangements made at the centres in Bahawalpur where

male and female visitors are getting flour bags on their turns by standing in the queues. He underscored that the government is resolving the issues relating to the verification process jointly with NADRA and Benazir Income Support Programme.

CM Mohsin Naqvi stated that the people are getting relief through this historic package of the federal and the Punjab government, adding that situation has significantly improved owing to continuous monitoring process. Commissioner Bahawalpur division, RPO Bahawalpur, Deputy Commissioner and DPO Bahawalpur were also present on the occasion.

CM inspects facilities at Bahawal Victoria Hospital: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi made a surprise visit of Bahawal Victoria Hospital Bahawalpur on Thursday and inspected the emergency ward, cardiac centre and other wards. Mohsin Naqvi inquired after the patients and asked them about provision of free medicines in the hospital, said a handout issued here. He inquired from the patients and their attendants about treatment facilities being provided to them in the hospital. Few of them made complaints about non-provision of free medicines. Mohsin Naqvi ordered the administration to redress their complaints forthwith and asserted that the patients should be given free medicines and no negligence will be tolerated in this regard.

MD SSWMB briefs Sindh govt's spokesperson

KARACHI (APP): Managing Director Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB) Syed Imtiaz Ali Shah was called on Sindh Government's spokesperson Barrister Murtaza Wahab in his office here Thursday. He briefed him about the ongoing garbage collection and disposal operations in Sindh. He informed about SSWMB's ongoing cleaning operation and said that the operation is continued in Karachi, Hyderabad, Larkana and Sukkur. The garbage is being collected and disposed off under an integrated system, which is improving the environment, he told.

Syed Imtiaz Shah said that organic fertilizer is being produced from kitchen

waste and other products are being made from plastic waste.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab while appreciating the cleaning activities of SSWMB said that now, the people were observing cleaning of every road, street and lane.

He said that the staff of SSWMB was doing good job but we needed to perform more cleaning in some areas of Ibrahim Haideri and Korangi.

He assured his every possible assistance to the SSWMB in this regard.

Murtaza Wahab said that not only all institutions of the Sindh government but also the elected local representatives would actively support the door-to-door garbage collection campaign of SSWMB.

Space/nuclear technologies imperative in propelling human progress: Tariq Rafi

KARACHI (APP): Chairman of the Sindh Higher Education Commission Dr. Tariq Rafi has said that space and nuclear technologies were imperative in driving scientific advancements, pioneering inventions, and propelling human progress.

This was particularly significant as the 21st century had been dubbed the era of space and nuclear technology, he said this while speaking as the keynote speaker at Hamdard University. Dr. Rafi delivered a lecture on "The Role of Nuclear and Space Technologies for Sustainable Development," said a statement on Thursday.

The conference was presided over by the Executive Director of CISSS and former ambassador, Qazi M. Khalilullah. The Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh, in collaboration with Hamdard University, organized this conference. Registrar of Hamdard University Professor Kaleem Ahmad Ghiyas, delivered the opening remarks and extended a warm welcome to the participants.

The conference featured distinguished speakers, including Dr. Naeem Salik, Executive Director of the Strategic Vision Institute in Islamabad, Zafar Iqbal, a member of Space Application and Research at SUPARCO, Dr. Ansar Pervez, former Chairman of PAEC, Professor Dr. Tariq Javed of Hamdard University, and Dr. Mehboob Ali Sial, Director of the Nuclear

Institute of Agriculture in Tondo Jam, who shared their valuable insights through their lectures. Director CISSS, Dr. Mohid, and Assistant Director of ORIC, Aeliman Taj, were also in attendance.

In his presidential address, the Executive Director of CISSS, Qazi M. Khalilullah, emphasized the organization's commitment to conducting rigorous and fact-based research and analysis of contemporary strategic issues in nuclear strategy. During the conference, various speakers highlighted the pivotal role of space and nuclear technology in the modern era.

The speakers also recognized SUPARCO, the premier national space agency institution of Pakistan, as being committed to utilizing and promoting space technology for Pakistan's socioeconomic development. They further noted that nuclear applications had been utilized in the fields of energy, agriculture, health, industry, and the environment since the middle of the 20th century.

This has contributed significantly to Pakistan's socioeconomic development over the past five decades.

The speakers emphasized the need for experts to pay attention to climate change at the global level, particularly in Pakistan, to protect against its adverse effects in the future. The conference concluded with a question and answer session.



KARACHI: Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) beneficiaries standing in a queue to draw money from ATM at Korangi.



KARACHI: Governor of Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori addressing a press conference after 8th sehri of Ramzan ul Mubarak at Numaish Chowrangi.

Ombudsman Punjab presents annual report to governor

LAHORE (APP): Ombudsman Punjab Maj (ret'd) Azam Suleman Khan presented the annual performance report of the Office of the Ombudsman Punjab for 2022 to Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman at the Governor's House on Thursday. Advisers and consultants of the Ombudsman Office were also present on the occasion.

Ombudsman Azam Suleman explained various aspects of the annual performance report, stating that the ombudsman office successfully resolved 29,970 complaints, out of a total 31,149, resulting in an impressive 96% resolution rate. Of those, 26,511 complaints were addressed within 45 days, while 3,459 applications took longer than 45 days due to some administrative factors.

He highlighted that the effective handling of public complaints has resulted in a cumulative financial relief of Rs 13.842 billion for both plaintiffs and the government. This relief included the recovery of 29,363 kanals of state and private lands in various districts, valued at Rs 9.117 billion. The total financial assistance provided to the plaintiffs amounted to Rs 4.725 billion, he added.

The ombudsman also provided a breakdown of the top 10 departments against whom his office received the highest number of complaints in 2022. The revenue department had a total of 5,584 complaints, followed by the police with 4,324 complaints, the Local Government & Community Development with 3,681 complaints, school education with 1,791 complaints, Housing, Urban Development & Public Health Engineering with 1,690 complaints, Primary & Secondary Healthcare

with 1,461 complaints, higher education with 983 complaints, Communication & Works with 959 complaints, Accountant General Punjab with 946 complaints, and irrigation with 821 complaints.

In addition, the ombudsman reported that 150 eligible complainants were provided with regular employment in provincial government departments by his office under Rule 17-A of the Punjab Civil Servants (Appointment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 1974. Apart from this, the Home Department carried out the province-wide verification of 1,044,062 arms licences on the intervention of the ombudsman office, Khan mentioned.

Meanwhile, the Chief Provincial Commissioner for Children resolved 246 cases relating to violation of child rights and violence against them. It also constituted a working group of experts from the line departments to save children from online harassment or exploitation. This group advises the government about the protection of children's rights, he said. During the presentation, Azam Suleman provided a comparative review of the years 2021 and 2022. He mentioned that there was a 73% increase in the number of complaints received in 2022 compared to 2021, with 31,149 new complaints received, compared to 17,968 in the previous year. Also, the proportion of complaints handled in 2022 was over 70%, compared to 2021, where 17,654 complaints were processed. The ombudsman office also provided Rs 13.842 billion in relief to the government agencies and applicants in 2022, a significant increase from the Rs 1.452 billion provided in 2021, he added. The law allows complaints

against ombudsman decisions to the governor. In 2022, the governor accepted only 26 of 403 appeals, leaving a ratio of 99.12% of decisions remaining in force, he added.

The ombudsman also provided an overview of the 26-year term, indicating that out of the 380,206 complaints registered from 1996 to 2022, a staggering 99.24% were successfully addressed, with 377,339 complaints resolved. This exceptional rate of resolving public grievances attests to the effectiveness of the ombudsman's efforts, he stated and maintained that the role of the ombudsman office was critical in ensuring good governance, promoting public trust, and discouraging inefficiency and corrupt practices at the grassroots level.

The Ombudsman Punjab built five office buildings in 2022 and is acquiring land for eight more this year. It also established a research and analysis wing to study and recommend remedies for corrupt practices, he said.

Azam Suleman elaborated that the ombudsman office has undergone a complete digital transformation, with the implementation of a 24/7 digital helpline 1050 for complaint registration and public guidance. The bilingual OPMIS mobile app has also been launched for complaint registration and to update the plaintiff. Additionally, plaintiffs from anywhere, including international locations, can register their complaints through the official website www.ombudsmanpunjab.gov.pk, he concluded. Governor Balighur Rehman appreciated the performance of the ombudsman office in his address. Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, administrative secretaries and others were also present.

2.9 lakh citizens register through E-auction App to secure vehicle numbers

LAHORE (APP): The e-Auction App and Web Portal, developed by the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) in collaboration with the Punjab Excise and Taxation Department, has so far registered more than 2.9 lakh aspirants since August 2020 to obtain attractive vehicle numbers.

This emerged during a progress review meeting chaired by PITB Chairman Faisal Yousaf here on Thursday at Arfa Software

Technology Park (ASTP).

It was informed during the meeting that applications of more than 197,000 people had been approved while about 134,000 vehicle numbers had also been sold through the system to date.

In this regard, PITB Chairman Faisal Yousaf said that the system had also been linked to e-Pay Punjab for the payment of fees and the department had so far collected more than Rs. 790 million in revenue.

The chair further stated that the e-Auction App and Web Portal had enabled people to secure attractive car numbers online from the comfort of their homes.

The system encompasses auctions of cars, motorcycles, commercial vehicle number plates and details of the winning bidders can also be viewed on the system. The facility of tax calculator and vehicle verification had also been provided as part of the online system.

Blood, fecal samples of elephant 'Noor Jahan' sent for further analysis

KARACHI (APP): Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman Thursday said the team of Punjab University of Animal Sciences visited Karachi Zoo on March 29 and collected the blood and faecal samples of an elephant 'Noor Jahan' and sent them for further analysis. He said this while presiding over a meeting on the progress of the treatment of Noor Jahan in his office, said a statement.

The team of experts was in constant contact with Four Paws, an international organization. The doctors of Four Paws have directed them to continue the prescribed medicines for the elephant through a video link until their arrival in Karachi.

According to the instructions of the University of Animal Sciences and the experts of Four Paws, there will be rapid progress in the treatment of the elephant. The zoo management and local experts will also help in treatment and relocation of the elephant. Director of Zoo Khalid Hashmi and other officers were also present on this occasion.

Workshop on 'Media training for effective reporting on water governance' held

LAHORE (APP): The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Pakistan on Thursday organized a capacity building workshop titled "Media training for effective reporting on water governance" at a local hotel.

The aim of the workshop was to sensitize journalists on water governance and how better management of water resources can help to ensure availability of water for different sectors, especially agriculture and industry, among others.

The workshop aimed to

help journalists understand the complex water issues in Punjab for effective reporting and also discussed the significance of Punjab Water Act 2019 and the challenges in its implementation.

The speakers highlighted risks of climate change being faced by Pakistan in the form of recent flood resulting in USD 30 billion, 1,700 deaths, affecting 33 million people, they stressed the need of small and local water reservoirs to meet challenges.

Pakistan has been listed in top 14 countries which

were facing water scarcity, 80 per cent of total available water was being used to irrigate two major crops wheat and rice, to save water and avoid scarcity, modern techniques of irrigation would have to be used.

The speakers said that about 1.2 million tube wells in Punjab were extracting water which badly disturbed ground water level and this level rapidly downed in Lahore, Multan, Lodhran, Minchanabad, Vehari and some other areas in last 10 years.

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Full court reference in honor of Chief Justice Qaiser held

PESHAWAR (APP): A full court reference held in the honor of Peshawar High Court Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid Khan, who has been retiring on Thursday.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed Khan always worked for the rule of law, Advocate General Aamir Javed said in his address to the full court reference held at Peshawar High Court premises by paying glowing tributes to him.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed Khan always kept his oath, and he is an example for all Advocate Generals, he said in his remarks.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed Khan played an important role for justice, said Deputy Attorney General Sanaullah.

He said Justice Qaiser Rashid would always be missed.

Spent 20 years, Justice Qaiser Rasheed in great honor and kept intact the rule

of law, which is an example for all to come, President High Court Bar Association Rehmanullah said.

He said Justice Qaiser Rasheed Khan had never compromised on justice.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed had the potential to become a judge of the Supreme Court, but unfortunately, he was not made, Rahmanullah said.

"I congratulate Justice Qaiser Rasheed on his brilliant career," Justice Rohul Amin said in his address to the full court reference.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed worked as a protector for the supremacy of the constitution and independent judiciary, Justice Rohul Amin added.

Justice Qaiser Rasheed dealt with many important cases of public interest, he added.

Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid tried hard to fulfill

the constitutional responsibility, Justice Rohul Amin said.

"I joined the legal department on the request of my father. Because of him, I am here today," Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid said in address to the full court reference.

"I am proud of the struggle of lawyers during the emergency, I became the first prisoner of the province at that time," Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid said.

Today, late Justice Waqar Seth is being remembered. He was a very brave person, Justice Qaiser Rashid said while paying rich tribute to late Justice Waqar Seth.

There are political and economic crises and security challenges in the country, but with the grace of Almighty Allah, these problems would end soon, Qaiser Rashid said.

Aimal Wali condemns Lakki Marwat terrorist attack

PESHAWAR (APP): Awami National Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President Aimal Wali Khan on Thursday condemned the terrorists' attack on a police station and IED blast on a DSP's vehicle in Lakki Marwat district and termed it a cowardly attack by anti-state elements.

He deplored the unabated target killing of police in the province and said that it was very unfortunate that innocent people and police officials were being martyred in KP, whereas a certain group of people was demanding elections.

He further said that ANP strongly believes that the terrorists had no affiliation with any religion or race but rather were just terrorists.

Aimal said that ANP once again demands the implementation of the National Action Plan in letter and spirit to eliminate terrorists and indiscriminate action against all those who are responsible for terrorism in the province.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan talking to media.

Crackdown on criminals, six arrested

PESHAWAR (APP): The Police during a successful operation arrested 6 alleges suspects involved in various crimes on Thursday.

The arrested suspects belong to different areas of Peshawar, including drug dealers, illegal weapons possession, Afghan refugees, and other crimes.

The alleged accused, arrested on secret information, have confessed to their crimes during the initial investigation, an official of the Police Station Mathra told media men.

Among the arrested alleged accused identified as Akhtaram, Muhammad Ibrahim, Naem, Waqas, Nahar Ali, and Masood.

During the operation, five pistols, dozens of cartridges and drugs, were also recovered from the possession of the accused.

Investigation has been started from the arrested accused from different angles.

Mayor announces long awaited facilities for girls' college

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar, Zubair Ali on Thursday announced solar panels, pick and drop facility for lecturers, new buses for the college students, new furniture for the hall and promotions for the lectures and teachers of City Degree Government College for Girls, working under the Capital Metropolitan Government.

He said the long-awaited demands of the college have been fulfilled to some extent today adding that in the next year's budget of Capital Metropolitan a record amount would be

allocated for the promotion of education. He said students and teachers, showing distinctive results will be highly encouraged.

Addressing the Annual Day function at City Degree Government College for Girls here as chief guest the Mayor congratulated the position holder students and best results showing professors and teachers besides the clerical staff and class four employees and presented them prizes.

On the demand of college administration, the Mayor announced modern

solar panels, pick and drop facility for teaching staff, new buses for students and furniture for the college hall. He also announced Rs 100000 on holding a successful exhibition by the Science and Home Economics Department.

On the occasion Mayor Zubair Ali also fulfilled the long-standing demand of teachers and professors and announced promotions for them.

During the function the college students also presented tableaux and national songs with regard to the Pakistan Day.

KP to fire media influencers

PESHAWAR (INP): Caretaker government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided on Thursday to fire twelve media influencers recruited during previous PTI government.

A summary for dismissal of these influencers has also been prepared which will be sent to the Chief Minister of KP for approval.

Caretaker provincial information minister Feroze Jamal Shah said that the media influencers recruited under the PTI government will be dismissed in the coming days.

Hoarded food items recovered

PESHAWAR (APP): District administration Peshawar during a raid on a godown has recovered hoarded food items worth millions, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

On a tip regarding the hoarding of essential food items in a godown in Chamkani locality, the Deputy Commissioner Peshawar directed the area magistrate to conduct raids on the place situated on the Grand Trunk Road.

During the inspection, Area Magistrate/Additional Assistant Commissioner, Tehreem Shah found food items including pulses, rice, beans and other food items that were hoarded illegally in the godown.

The team of the district administration sealed the godown to supply the recovered goods to market in the presence of a magistrate and action would also be taken against its owner.

DC Peshawar has directed all officers of the district administration to conduct inspection of godowns in their respective areas and take action against the hoarders.

Spring vacations from Apr 1

PESHAWAR (APP): The Elementary and Secondary Education Department on Thursday notified seven-day spring vacations in all the government educational institutions in the province from April 1 to 7.

A notification issued here said that all the concerned staff of the schools shall be present during the vacations for distribution of free textbooks and to continue the admission process of new children during the enrollment campaign.

15 milk sellers held

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as 15 milk sellers were arrested on charges of adulteration of water here on Thursday. The accused were arrested by officials of the district administration led by AC Syeda Zainab Naqvi during inspection conducted at University Road, Academy Town and Old Bara Road. The AC also disposed of 500 liter adulterated milk.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali addressing annual day function at City Degree Government College for Girls.

WHO to rehabilitate 50 hospitals: Dr. Babar Alam

PESHAWAR (APP): Head of World Health Organization (WHO) Sub-Office, Dr Babar Alam has said that instead of 36, the organization is taking the responsibility of rehabilitation and activation of 50 hospitals in the flood affected areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He was talking to Advisor to KP Caretaker CM on Health, Dr Abid Jameel during a meeting here on Thursday.

The meeting was held in the office of the Advisor to the CM.

During the meeting, the officials of WHO and Health Department Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa agreed on continuation of technical assistance, capacity building of the health department and bringing improvement in health facilities in far-flung areas and rehabilitation of hospitals in flood affected areas.

On this occasion, Advisor to KP CM on Health requested WHO in continuation of cooperation in bringing improvement in the health facilities in far-flung areas and formally thanked the international health agency for extending cooperation to the province in various natural disasters including flood and Corona pandemic.

The WHO official said that the organization is spending Rs.314 million on the rehabilitation of health centres in flood affected areas and beside reconstruction, they will also provide furniture and surgical instruments to these hospitals.

The Advisor also requested the WHO officials for provision of models for the operation theatres, Intensive Care Units (ICU) and constructions of hospitals.

He further requested for provision of technical assistance in arranging waste management and drainage systems in hospitals.

Sensitize media on water governance: IWMI holds workshop

PESHAWAR (APP): Speakers at a media workshop highlighted the importance of water measurement for effective water governance and how the improved water resource management can help to ensure availability of water for different sectors, especially agriculture and industry.

The workshop was organized by International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Pakistan with the objective of effective reporting on water governance, said a press release issued here on Thursday. The workshop aimed to sensitize print, electronic and digital media journalists on water governance in Pakistan.

Dr Mohsin Hafeez,

Country Representative Pakistan, IWMI, and team leader of the WRAP Programme Component I: CRS-IWaG said that IWMI Pakistan was working on various water-related reforms through the UK Aid-funded programme, such as water accounting and water resources assessment, Data as a Service (DaaS), water allocation systems, groundwater management information system and irrigation demand management, among others.

These reforms will improve water governance in the Indus Basin to support the implementation of national policies on water and climate change, as well as promote sustain-

able use of water in Punjab to support the implementation of Punjab Water Act 2019, he added.

Engr. Hafiz Qaisar Yasin, Director (HQs), On Farm Water Management (OFWM) informed the participants on the need to improve water governance for better agricultural productivity.

He emphasized on various policies on water governance and highlighted the need for good governance at the farm level. He also emphasized on undertaking water budgeting and accounting at the farm level to strengthen water governance and promote Irrigation Demand Management (IDM)/Nature-Based Solutions.

Govt provides free flour to over 1.2mn people in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has provided free of charge atta (flour) to over 1.2 million poor people in the province under the Prime Minister's package.

The spokesman of Food Department KP told APP that distribution of free flour continued in all districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and till March 29, the commodity was given to 1.272 million population under a transparent mechanism through NADRA and BISP.

He said distribution of flour was being extended to union councils and village councils in the province to facilitate a large number of people in remote areas.

The official said the quality and standard of free flour was being examined through the department's food inspectors besides district administration officials.

He said distribution mechanisms are simplified with preference to women, persons with disabilities and senior citizens at disbursement centres and ration points.

The spokesman advised people not to create stampedes as sufficient stock was available for the PM's package that would continue till Ramadan 25th.

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Punjab government has chalked out a program to establish a modern paraplegic hospital in Lahore on the pattern of Paraplegic Center Peshawar.

In this regard, Additional Secretary Punjab Health Care Department Dr. Muhammad Younis visited the paraplegic Center (PPC) at Hayatabad, Peshawar along with a team of medical experts and other senior officials of Punjab Health Care on Thursday to establish such an institution in Lahore as well.

Zia-ul-Rehman, Chairman PPC and Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, Chief Executive PPC, briefed the team on the background and performance of the center and apprised them of the medical services, procedures, various sections and the technology used therein at PPC.

The delegation also visited various PPC departments including Medical, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Clubfoot Home, Speech Language Pathology and Orthopedic Workshop established in Hayatabad Industrial Estate.

It may be noted that the Paraplegic Center Peshawar is the nationwide largest and most modern institution for the treatment and rehabilitation of handicapped patients with spinal cord injuries and polio affections.

Here not only the comprehensive physical rehabilitation of people affected by spinal cord injury and polio is done free of cost, but all the artificial supports and equipment are also provided to the patients free of charge.

The delegation of Punjab Health Department highly appreciated the performance of the BoD, management and staff of Paraplegic Center Peshawar and requested the head of the institution to cooperate in establishing such institutions in Punjab.

The Chairman and Chief Executive Paraplegic Center Peshawar assured the delegation of all possible support and termed this effort of the Punjab government as a positive step towards improving health care facilities.

It will not reduce pressure of patients on the Paraplegic Center Peshawar, but people across the country will be able to have treatment facilities of patients with spinal cord and polio disabilities. They will also have access to treatment and rehabilitation facilities near their cities.

196 shopkeepers arrested

PESHAWAR (APP): The District Administration Peshawar during a crackdown against profiteers and those not following the government rates in different localities and arrested 196 shopkeepers besides issuing warning to 95 others.

According to detail given by the official of the district administration to the media men, he said on the directives given by Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, Shah Fahad, the

officers of district administration carried out inspection of bazaars in various localities including interior city and inspected a total of 862 business centers and shops.

The shopkeepers have been arrested for profiteering, lack of official price-list, selling of under-weight roti and poor cleanliness conditions. The official disclosed that they inspected markets in Hayatabad, University Town,

Charsadda Road, Dalazak Road, Kohat Road, Warsak Road and other areas.

He said that 15 confectionery sellers were arrested from Old Bara Road, Canal Road and other areas and most of the bakers who were selling low weight bread, vegetable and fruit sellers, butchers, grocery store owners and other shopkeepers were arrested. He said legal action will be taken against the arrested shopkeeper.



PESHAWAR: Vendor displaying and selling different types of sweet and sour sauce during holy fasting month of Ramzan.



In brief

Journalist's daughter gets distinction F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Ms Kainat Anwar, daughter of senior journalist Syed Anwaruddin secured 899 marks in MSc Chemistry and got second position in Physical Group chemistry department university of Malakand. She attributed his success to the guidance and prayers of her university teachers and parents and his own hard work. Earlier, the student had got second position in her college in BSc as well. In future she plaintiffs to complete a PhD in Chemistry.

Release of salaries sought F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Local Government Employees Federation (LGEF) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa claimed that the workers are compelled for starvation due to non-availability of salaries since few months, on Thursday. This was claimed by LGEF leaders Shaukat Ali, Haji Anwar Kamal, Suleiman Khan, Raheel Ahmad and Mehboob Ullah Khan in their joint statement issued to media while demanded release of salaries and provision of arrears to employees during month of Ramadan. LGEF claimed that all tehsil municipal administrations are facing financial constraints which has deprived employees and pensioners for financial benefits while compelled for starvation. They claimed that workers are further impacted by unprecedented inflation and especially price-hike in edible items.

Free medical camp held F.P. Report

GHALANAI: Security forces organized a free medical camp in Regmena Village, Mohmand district to provide medical services to locals. The event saw a turnout of 337 patients, including 91 males, 113 females and 133 children, who received checkups from doctors. Moreover, 35 lab screening tests were also conducted to help diagnose potential illnesses in patients. Additionally, doctors also raised awareness about seasonal diseases and how to prevent them among the local community. Locals appreciated the efforts of Frontier Corps North and said that "Free medical camp is a great initiative to provide healthcare services to remote and underserved areas, and we hope that similar initiatives will be taken in the future to ensure the well-being of people in these areas".

Nine butchers charged F.P. Report

BARA: Local administration officials booked nine butchers for charging an additional price of beef in Bara Bazaar on Thursday. On the strict directions of the Deputy Commissioner, Khyber, Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC), Bara Aimal Khan raided various shops of edibles in the Bazaar and checked the price and quality of the food items. Nine butchers were found guilty for selling beef at between 800 rupees per sair (approximately 1200 gram) contrary to the official rate list of 750 rupees per sair, he added. Police officer Hameed Afridi said that all the nine violators were apprehended and directly sent to jail. The administrative officer said that extra-restrictions had been adopted in the markets to keep prices of goods especially the edibles in control and no one would permit to fleece the believers in the Holy month of Ramadan.

Dozen killed, 50 injured in road mishaps in last month

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Due to the negligence and carelessness of the administration, traffic accidents have increased in Dir Lower and a dozen people have died in various traffic accidents during one month while more than fifty people have been injured. And due to the negligence of the police, traffic accidents are increasing day by day in Dir lower and a dozen people have died and more than 50 people have been injured in one month due to improper use of motorcycles and speeding and not wearing helmets.

Most of the deaths and injuries were reported as the cause, while most of the accidents are seen to be caused by the driving of young boys. An order has been issued to take strict action against the people who do this, but despite this, most of the citizens are seen riding motorcycles without helmets and the police are not taking any action in this regard.

Police action is not visible in the areas, while at some places before and

after Iftar, youths are seen doing one-wheeling with great courage. The people of the area have demanded strict measures in this regard.

DPO visits Asbanr: District Police Officer Tariq Iqbal visited the police station Asbanar, inspected various departments of the police station while sharing iftar and Ramazan package with the soldiers of Police Outpost Sarbala. made a surprise visit, on this occasion he inspected the police station's Kot, Hawalat, Malkhana, offices of the Muharr and SHOs, resident barrack constable while checking all the records of the police station and issued instructions to the police officers on the spot.

DSP Adnizi Parvez Khan and SHO Police Station Asbanar Shahabuddin Khan gave a detailed briefing to the DPO about peace and security. Later, DPO Lowerdir visited the police post Sarbala at Dir Swat Sangam and broke the fast with the policemen.

On this occasion, he reviewed the security

arrangements of police station Sarbala and issued instructions to the policemen to be alert and perform vigilant duty according to the situation. Referred the Ramadan package to the posted officials which consisted of various food items

Electricity to be available at Iftar & Sehri times: XEN WAPDA Lower Dir Mujahid Khan has said that electricity load shedding is not being done during Suhoor and Iftar in Ramadan and uninterrupted power supply continues during these times while talking to media representatives in his office.

Xen Wapda Dir Lower Mujahid Khan said that the citizens and government departments who are responsible for WAPDA arrears should immediately pay the arrears to those who do not pay the electricity will be cut off. A grand operation has been launched against electricity thieves, due to which electricity thieves have been surrounded. Electricity theft will not be tolerated under any circumstances. If there is a complaint, we take immediate action.

DBA hails Justice Rooh-ul-Amin as PHC CJ

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: District Bar Association (DBA) Charsadda general secretary Saifullah Khan Advocate has greeted appointment of Justice Rooh-ul-Amin as Acting Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) and paid tribute to his services for dissemination of justice, on Thursday.

DBA Chaarsadda gen-

eral secretary Saifullah Khan Advocate said that Justice Qaiser Rashid has Uphold Rule of Law and supremacy of constitution on priority. He claimed that Justice Qaiser Rashid has decided several public interest petitions/litigations which was beneficial for the welfare of marginalized segments.

DBA general secretary paid tribute to services of outgoing Chief Justice

PHC Justice Qaiser Rashid and prayed for his good health as well as provision of legal assistance to deprived people of society. He also welcomed Justice Rooh-ul-Amin as Chief Justice PHC while claimed that he is a good and efficient judge. He added that Justice Rooh-ul-Amin has provided extraordinary services to public during his legal practice.

RPO inspects flour distribution points

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Multan Muhammad Sohail along with Deputy Commissioner Multan Umar Jahangir visited various flour distribution centers Commerce College Qasimpur Colony, Jamia Uloom High School New Multan, Qadirpurran and Makhdoom Rashid, there they made security arrangements.

Also reviewed the situation of discipline. On this occasion, he said that Multan Region Police is taking steps to further improve the security of the

distribution centers. He also inquired about the security situation and arrangements from the people present there.

On which the people present there expressed their satisfaction on the best security arrangements. He has also appealed to the public that they can get free flour while staying within the scope of discipline.

RPO inquired and issued instructions to the women at the centers, and the security situation there, He further said that you may face difficulties due to violation of discipline.

Police thwart terrorist attack F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police on late Wednesday night thwarted a terrorist attack on a check post in the Dera Ismail Khan.

According to sources, more than six terrorists opened fire and also used rocket launchers in the attack on the check post. However, police officials present at the check post remained safe.



QUETTA: A view of rain in provincial capital.

Traders up prices to provide share for public servants F.P. Report

BARIKOT: The residents claimed that prices of edible items are unprecedented high while administration and competent authorities had turned blind eyes towards profiteers as well as hoarders, on Thursday.

According to details, the traders at Barikot bazaar is looting public with both hands while administration and food department as well other concerned authority receiving their shares from businessmen. The residents claimed that police, administration and other public servants receiving bribe and financial benefits from traders at the cost of public.

The residents argued Chief Justice of Pakistan and Prime Minister to take stern actions against both public servants involved in bribery as well as hoarders and profiteers in the holy month of Ramazan.

Khan wants to escape cases: Uzma

MULTAN (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Uzma Bukhari on Thursday said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan was trying to escape from his corruption cases.

Talking to a private news channel, she said that Imran Khan, a demander of high moral principles and rule of law, is hiding behind the public shield. "Political leaders should set high standards and never hide behind their workers", she added.

Apart from this, the leaders of Muslim League-N, who were subjected to the worst political revenge, appeared in the court hundreds of times, she added.

3 sentenced to death for killing policeman

LARKANA (INP): Additional Session Court awarded death sentence to three accused after finding them guilty of killing a police constable Nadeem Lashari over a land dispute.

According to media detail, The Additional Session Judge of Model Criminal Trial Court Larkana Irfan Ali Ujjan announced capital punishment to accused in murder Talib Sargani, Abid Sargani and Qurban Sargani and whisked away the convicts

to Larkana central prison. The victim's father said in the FIR that the convicts killed his son at Wadha Mori in the jurisdiction of Seharpolice station on Feb 2, 2020.

In another case, The Additional Sessions Judge Qambar Suhail Ahmed Jatoti sentenced a former Station House Officer (SHO) of A-Section police station in Shahdaddot and four police constables to seven years' rigorous imprisonment with fine of

Rs50,000 each after the prosecution proved them guilty of keeping a citizen in illegal confinement and robbing him of cash. The convicts, former SHO Anwer Ali Shah, head constable Ayaz Ali Bhand, constables Khalid Hussain Korai, Manzoor Ali Jalbani and Rashid Soomro were sent to jail while their co-accused constables Saeed Ahmed, Riaz Hussain, Qadir Bakhsh Soomro and Abdul Jabbar were acquitted of charges.

MCCI team meets Governor

F.P. Report

MARDAN: A five-member delegation led by President Mardan Chamber of Commerce & Industry Zahir Shah met Governor Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali at Governor House Peshawar. In the meeting, President Mardan Chamber and the Provincial General Secretary of the Central Organization of Traders Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Zahir Shah discussed the problems being faced by the business community.

Because at this time, while the country's economy is on the ventilator and due to which the poor people are in the grip of inflation and on the other hand, due to the sharp increase in the prices of gas, electricity, oil, petroleum products, the industry and businesses are also under severe pressure, the FBR has been issuing unnecessary notices in the form of income tax and sales tax and harassing business people because the addition of point of sales tax and forced sales tax are forcing businessmen to

close their businesses, due to which unrest and unemployment will increase.

To stabilize the national economy, it is necessary to expand small businesses and provide interest-free loans to them, it will be possible with the issuance of It should be done because without foreign investment the dream of improving the economy will be incomplete and for this an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood has to be established in the country. Governor Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam said that suggestions and meetings with representatives of all chambers and trade associations of the province are being held and In Sha Allah, the positive suggestions will be implemented.

Considering the difficulties of the poor people even in this difficult situation, the government has launched a huge relief in the form free flour scheme of Ramadan package which is continuing successfully, besides providing financial assistance to the deserving families through Benazir Income Support Program and I am

Seven outlaws held

FAISALABAD (INP): The police smashed two dacoits gangs and arrested their seven members during the last 24 hours. A police report said here Thursday that Nishatabad police conducted raids in Chak No 100-JB and Kalma Chowk near Small Industrial Estate.

Police arrested the accused Tahir Mahmood alias Mooda, Muhammad Imtiaz, Abdul Razaq, Irfan alias Katta and Bilal Asgar. Police recovered 5 pistols, 3 motorcycles, cash and cell phones and sent them behind bars.

Reopening of Gorsal and Nawa Pass will bring new life on Pakistan-Afghanistan border

Murad Khan

GHALANAI: Mohmand Tribal District has two important trade routes with neighbor Muslim country Afghanistan i-e Gorsaland Nawa Pass Border point, but the major trade route was Gorsal, which has been closed in the year 2011 due to tense law and order situation. The closer of this route badly affected the businesses and life of thousands of the people living on both sides of border, as before the closer, small medium enterprises (SME's) or business centers were established in different parts of Mohmand district, where billions of import and export were taking place on local and national stage between the two countries.

Lal Zada, a trader of Mian Mandi Bazaar, who were doing export and import business to Afghanistan, said that hundreds of drivers, helpers and laborers became unemployed due to the closure of trade routes with Afghanistan. Sharing his own experience, Lalzada said that usually we left early in the morning from Mohmand District and will reach at night to Kabul/Jalalabad and in summer season, we were come back on the same day from Afghanistan. "At that time the inflation rate was not so much high and the people were very happy as they could buy fruits, vegetables and other goods even in their low income and there were so many business opportunities that even a labor working on a hand trailer was earning 2-4 thousand per day." He added. He said that reopening the trade routes with Kabul will be a ray of hope and

the beginning of a new life for thousands of unemployed people living below the poverty line across the border.

A 36 years old driver Nusrat Khan belonging to Barokhel area of tehsil Haleemzai from Mohmand district, said that the Gorsal border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been closed since 2011. The closure of this road was a huge loss to the poor people of the tribal area, because the business communities closed their business due to which a huge number of drivers, shopkeepers and other workers were badly affected. He said that I was carrying agricultural commodities, fertilizers, and food and non-food items from Pakistan to Afghanistan and in return, I was coming back with the fresh fruits, dry fruits, vegetable oil, cosmetics, soap and so many other utensils made in UAE, Turkey, Iran and other countries.

Senator Hilal Rehman Mohmand said that we want to reopen the Gorsal Border, because the trade route is very much important for the business, transportation of people and goods between two countries, as the economic situation of that area gets better, but unfortunately Gorsal (the only business route in Mohmand) is also closed. "As this is an international issue between the two countries, so only Pakistan can't solve this issue, to reopen the Gorsal border, Pakistan and Afghanistan will have to set on table and formulate terms and conditions (TOR's)," he said.

HilalRehman said "after the general election in 2018, I wrote a letter to Prime Minister Imran

Khan in order to formulate a strategy for the opening of Gorsal border keeping on board all the stakeholders and solve the issue with Afghanistan government, but In a short and clear reply the Afghan Government demanded the alignment of Gorsal border and still the alignment issue persists, that's why the Afghan Govt. is not agree to reopen the border."

He added that, when I visited Afghanistan, I meet with foreign Minister of Afghanistan and discuss the Gorsal trade route issue, but as a result of regime change, the new Minister was not clear about the this issue, although he was of the view that we want to open all the international trade routes including Chitral Border, but as far as the Gorsal border reopening is concerned, they says if the alignment is not finalized, they can't open the trade route.

A 38 years old Siraj Khan, a shopkeeper of District Head quarter Ghallnani said that before the closure of the road, foreign made oil, soap, perfume, tea, electronic gadgets, generators, shampoo and other goods were brought across the border at a low price. But, now there is a shortage of these goods and the prices have also increased.

Ex-MNA from District Mohmand, Sajid Mohmand said "PTI has very clear stance over the reopening of Gorsal Border and in our tenure, the speaker of National Assembly made a special committee to talk with all the stakeholders on both sides and try to open all the trade routes including Khariachi border and all other routes with neighbor Muslim country

Afghanistan, I was also a member of that committee, when we reached Kabul, there was some security issues, due to which the meeting has been.

Sajid Mohmand added that the reopening of Gorsal trade route has immense benefits for our people, because it will create business and trade opportunity, which ultimately will bring happiness and prosperity, besides this border will provide a trade route towards other countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as well, therefore I demand the present government to try their best to reopen all the closed trade routes because this will bring development and happiness to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and all the country. Ex-MNA said that our neighbor countries are very beautiful and if these routes are kept open, a man can reach in hours from one country to another country and it will create countless opportunities in hoteling and tourism and so many other sectors.

Ex-member of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly Nisar Momand said that the reopening of all the trade routes with our Muslim brother country Afghanistan is the crystal clear policy of our party, Awami National Party manifesto is to serve Pashtun's rights and make Pashtun of both the countries stable and economically strong. About the benefits of Gorsal (Gosrray) and Nawapas trade route reopening he said that it will economically strong the whole district and the people working in other district of the country will come back to Mohmand and will start their own business, and the labor,

businessman, hotel owner and all sect of society will be benefited from these trade routes. He added that I have raised the voice for the reopening of Gorsal border on the Assembly floor and also Staged protests towards Goral border as well.

About the Gorsal border the Ex-Senate Member of Pakistan Hafiz Rasheed Ahmad says this is the most important border with Afghanistan and it should be open for the people of both countries because it will increase business opportunities. He said JUI stance is to keep open this border in the favor of Pakistan and Afghanistan. He added that in the year 2011, in my tenure one and a half year this border was open, but due to law and order situation it has been closed, which is still not open.

A 38 years old MBA graduate HazratUllah, belonging to Barokheel area of Tehsil Haleemzai in Mohmand District says that this border was very much beneficial for every one because the people of this area were doing business with Afghanistan on grass root level, they were doing business from both the side of border, they were exporting Pakistani made utensils and in return they were imported foreign made utensils, soap, cosmetics, fruits and so many other products. He says "When this route was closed, these people were affected badly, some of them have shifted their business to other cities, but majority of them have been shifted to foreign countries for job and employment purposes". He added, if the Gorsal Trade route reopens, these peo-

ple will come back to his country and will establish his own business, in which they will compensate more people and ultimately there will be financial prosperity. Besides this, it was a beautiful visiting spot as well and the people of this area were used to traveling on weekends.

Businessmen in Bajaur and Mohmand districts are of the view that trade routes should be reopened after the establishment of the Taliban government in Afghanistan because the Taliban government has a friendly relationship with the government of Pakistan.

Representatives of the cross-border business community believe that a deal could be reached if governments on both sides resume talks for the alignment of border issues and reopening of all the trade routes including Nawa Pass and Gorsal Border points with neighbor country Afghanistan and due to the reopening of these trade routes, countless business opportunities will available not only for the people on both sides of the border, but it will also help the business community to boost their business internationally which will ultimately bring peace, happiness and economic prosperity to the war-on-terror affected province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Beside this the economic scientist believes that after the reopening of these trade routes a chain of business will be established between south Asianand central Asian countries.

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UN seeks court opinion on climate in win for island states

NEW YORK (AP): The countries of the United Nations led by the island state of Vanuatu adopted what they called a historic resolution calling for the UN's highest court to strengthen countries' obligations to curb warming and protect communities from climate disaster. The resolution was adopted by consensus and Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau called it "a win for climate justice of epic proportions." He reeled off a string of recent disasters including back-to-back Category 4 cyclones in his own country and record-breaking Cyclone Freddy that refused to leave southeastern Africa in recent weeks. "Catastrophic and compound effects like this are growing in number," he said.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said he hoped the opinion, when issued, would encourage nations "to take the bolder and stronger climate action that our world so desperately needs." Saudi Arabia and Iraq sought to soften the resolution, which was co-sponsored by some 132 countries, saying it would increase the workload of the international court. Like many Pacific Island nations Vanuatu is at risk of rising seas engulfing swathes of the islands. Scientists say both extreme weather and sea levels have worsened because of climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels. The resolution asks the court to pay particular attention to the harm endured by small island states.

Youth groups bolstered the effort, citing the need to protect the planet for current and future generations. "I don't want to show a picture to my child one day of my island. I want my child to be able to experience the same environment and the same culture that I grew up in," said Cynthia Houniuh of the Solomon Islands, who is president of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, a group involved in getting the resolution to the General Assembly. "The environment that sustains us is disintegrating before our eyes." The group's Solomon Yeo said "young people across the world will recall the day when we were able to get the world's highest court, the International Court of Justice, to bring its voice to the climate justice fight."

While the opinion from the International court of justice would not be binding, it would encourage states "to actually go back and look at what they haven't been doing and what they need to do" to address the climate emergency, said Nilufer Oral, director at the Center for International Law at the University of Singapore.

The court has other power it can bring to bear, Christopher Bartlett, climate diplomacy manager for the government of Vanuatu, explained. The court can reference other international legal instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and those do have the force of law for the countries that have ratified them. "The International Court of Justice is the only legal authority that has a mandate to look at all of international law. While the advisory opinion itself is not binding, the laws upon which the advisory opinion will be speaking absolutely are legally binding and immediately applicable to states," said Bartlett. Bartlett said that some of the questions the ICJ will ask are: What harm to the climate has been done? Should states be forced to take certain actions? And is financial support a legal consequence of causing harm?

The resolution now goes to the court. Countries have agreed to aim to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) with an upper limit of 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F) back in 2015 as part of the Paris Agreement. The agreement asks countries to submit their plans to curb greenhouse gases to the United Nations and regularly revise and update those plans. Clarifying those obligations for states, as well as other promises to protect biodiversity and strengthen domestic policies are the main aims of the advisory opinion, said Ralph Regenvanu, Vanuatu's climate change minister. "We are also clear eyed that existing international frameworks have significant gaps," he said, adding that the opinion could push for stronger legal measures like negotiating a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty or criminalizing "climate destroying activities."

'India's warm weather plans can't take the heat'

NEW DELHI (AP): With temperatures set to soar next month, Indian authorities need more resources and better preparation to deal with searing heat particularly for the most vulnerable communities around the country, a New Delhi-based think tank said. Analyzing 37 regional and federal heat action plans, the Centre for Policy Research found this week that the plans are not updated regularly, don't have separate budgets in most cases, have no legal support to implement them and the most vulnerable populations in any given region are not identified in the plans.

Heat plans started springing up around the nation after blistering heat waves surpassing 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) in 2010 killed over 800 people in the northwestern city of Ahmedabad. City authorities and other organizations swiftly pulled together South Asia's first-ever response plan to protect communities through initiatives like awareness programs, specialized training for health care professionals and installing roofs made of cooling materials like coconut husks and

paper waste. Several other heat plans have been drawn up since at the state and federal levels. "India has made considerable progress by creating several dozen heat action plans in the last decade. But our assessment reveals several gaps that must be filled in future plans," said Aditya Pillai, an associate fellow at CPR and co-author of the report. Unlike with other disasters like cyclones, it is still unclear who should fund and implement heat action plans, said Abhiyant Tiwari, lead of the climate resilience and health program in India for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Funding for heat plans is the elephant in the room," he said. "While the Indian government is cognizant of the threat of extreme heat, it will definitely help if the issues this report flags are also addressed," such as how vulnerable communities can be better protected.

At least 26,000 people have died due to heat in the last 30 year in India alone, according to a recent report. Residents of urban slums, people with longstanding health issues, older or pregnant people, workers in small, enclosed

spaces, farmers and construction workers are among the most vulnerable. Sizzling temperatures and heat waves are becoming more common as the planet warms up as humans pump more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, scientists say. Increasing humidity, another consequence of human-caused climate change, is particularly dangerous in southern India, where relatively lower temperatures can be fatal in moist air. A 2021 report found that India will also likely lose the most work hours in the world, greater than 100 billion hours every year, as a result of scorching heat. Most current heat plans do factor in economic and climate concerns. Pillai called for changes to the heat response, such as labelling heat waves as disasters, regularly monitoring and evaluating heat action plans, establishing laws that implement the plans and ensuring that they have enough funding. He said there is a "solid foundation" but changes need to happen immediately to prevent any more major loss of life. "A lot more needs to be done," said Pillai.

Senegalese police fire tear gas as Dakar braces for more protests

DAKAR (Reuters): Senegal's security forces fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse opposition supporters who attempted to gather in the capital Dakar for the first of three days of planned opposition protests over a libel trial of one of its leaders. Shops and banks closed as the West African nation braced for fresh protests over a court case that has fuelled tension and violence ahead of presidential elections next year.

Opposition leader Ousmane Sonko is due in court for a hearing in a libel case brought by the tourism minister, who alleged that Sonko had accused him of embezzlement without proof. Sonko's supporters have taken to the streets several times in past weeks to denounce a trial they say is an attempt by President Macky Sall's government to weaken his opponents ahead of the polls. The government denies this. If found guilty, Sonko, 48, who came third in the

2019 presidential election and has declared he will run in the February 2024 election, could be struck from the voter roll and disqualified as a candidate.

Violence broke out on the day of Sonko's last court appearance on March 16, as police fired tear gas at supporters accompanying his motorcade to the courthouse. Demonstrators burned tyres and set fire to buses and a supermarket. Sonko has called for more nationwide protests. Authorities have banned demonstrations in the capital Dakar and deployed security forces to block off the meeting point in front of the main university campus.

Police fired several rounds of tear gas and stun grenades forcing mostly student protesters to retreat into the campus from where they hurled rocks. Schools had been closed following a decision by the education ministry to bring forward school holidays by several days. Sonko's case was

postponed to March 30 after his lawyers said he was seeking medical treatment for inhaling a substance that impaired his breathing and eyesight during the last protests.

He is also on trial for allegedly raping a beauty salon employee in 2021 and making death threats against her. Sonko denies wrongdoing and says the accusations are politically motivated. The charismatic former tax inspector, who has won support among Senegal's disenfranchised urban youth, has become a focus for anger at Sall's failure to rule out running for a third term next year. Senegal's constitution only allows two terms, but some fear Sall will use a 2016 constitutional reform to reset his mandate, repeating a tactic used by other rulers to extend power elsewhere in the region. He has neither confirmed nor denied this. "[Sall] said he would speak when the time is right," ruling party spokesperson Amadou Sall told Reuters.

Palestinian teachers' strike grows

WEST BANK (AP): In schools across the world, children are halfway into their second semester. But in a Palestinian refugee camp south of Jerusalem, kids wake up at 1 p.m. They kick soccer balls, hang out in barbershops and aimlessly scroll through TikTok. They watch television until dawn, just to wake up late and laze around all over again. Palestinian public schools in the West Bank have been closed since Feb. 5 in one of the longest teachers' strikes in recent memory against the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

Teachers' demands for a pay raise have escalated into a protest movement that has vexed the increasingly autocratic Palestinian self-rule government as it plunges deeper into an economic crisis.

But the strike isn't just about money. As the largest group of government employees in the West Bank after security forces, teachers are also calling for a democratically elected union. The authority hasn't budged, fearing its rivals, like the Islamic militant group Hamas, could use their movement against the ruling Fatah party. "Everything is chaos," said Sherin al-Azza, a social worker and mother of five in a refugee camp called al-Azza, which has become a neighborhood of the West Bank city of Bethlehem. Determined that her children have an education, she cobbled together \$200 in savings to hire private tutors and send her eldest son to after-school classes during the strike - an impossibility for most of the refugee camp, she said. President Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority, which rules parts of the West Bank not controlled by Israel, accuses striking teachers of holding around a million schoolchildren hostage to their demands for better pay.

But teachers who have felt undervalued for decades say they have no choice but to walk out. "I feel terrible for the kids," said Mohammed Brijeah, a 44-year-old Arabic teacher for the past 23 years. "But the way (the Palestinian Authority) treats us is insulting. I want to live with some dignity." For years, teachers across the West Bank have struggled to make ends meet with salaries of some \$830 a month - considerably less than other professions requiring a comparable education. Now, a year and a half after the Palestinian Authority slashed the income of government employees by 20% to cope with a budget shortfall, teachers say they've had enough.

Mexico investigates 8 over fire

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP): Mexican authorities said that eight employees or officials are being investigated for possible misconduct at a migrant detention center where a fire killed 39 detained men. Anger and frustration in the northern border city of Ciudad Juarez boiled over as hundreds of migrants walked to a US border gate hoping to make a mass crossing.

Mexican officials appeared to place blame for the deaths in the fire largely on private, subcontracted security guards at the detention center in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, Texas. Video showed guards hurrying away from the smoky fire apparently without trying to free detainees. No charges were announced, but authorities said they would seek at least four arrest warrants later in the day, including one for a migrant who was part of what they described as a small group that started the fire. They said a migrant also damaged a security camera inside the cell where the fire occurred. Five of those under investigation for possible misconduct are private security guards, two are federal immigration agents and one is a Chihuahua state officer, federal Public Safety Secretary Rosa Icela Rodríguez said. The investigation has centered on the fact that guards appeared to make no effort to open cell doors for the detained men - almost all from Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela and El Salvador - before smoke filled the room in a matter of seconds.

Philippine ferry fire leaves 12 dead, 7 missing

MANILA (AP): A ferry carrying about 250 passengers and crew caught fire between Philippine islands and at least 12 people were killed with seven still missing, a provincial governor said. Many of those rescued had jumped off the ferry in panic at the height of the fire and were plucked from the sea by the coast guard, navy, another ferry and local fishermen, said Gov. Jim Hataman of the southern island province of Basilan. The search and rescue effort was continuing.

The governor said most of those onboard the MV Lady Mary Joy 3 were rescued overnight but authorities were double-checking the numbers from different rescue teams, suggesting the figures could change. The ferry was enroute to Jolo town in Sulu province from the southern port city of Zamboanga when it caught fire midway off Basilan close to midnight, he said. The dead included at least three children, who apparently were separated from their parents, and at least 23 passengers were injured and brought to hospitals, he said.

"Some of the passengers were roused from sleep due to the commotion caused by the fire. Some jumped off the ship," Hataman told The Associated Press by telephone. Most of those who died drowned and were recovered at sea, officials said. The burned ferry has been towed to Basilan's shoreline and an investigation was underway, Hataman said. Sea accidents are common in the Philippine archipelago because of frequent storms, badly maintained boats, overcrowding and spotty enforcement of safety regulations, especially in remote provinces.

In December 1987, the ferry Dona Paz sank after colliding with a fuel tanker, killing more than 4,300 people in the world's worst peacetime maritime disaster. Meanwhile, the Philippine police seized more than 500 kilograms (more than half a ton) of suspected methamphetamine concealed in tea bags and arrested a suspected Chinese drug dealer in a northern mountain resort city, police officials said.

The drug seizure in Baguio city had an estimated street value of 4 billion pesos (\$74 million) and was one



of the largest in recent years, officials said. A drug syndicate apparently hid the suspected drugs, locally known as shabu, in Baguio, a popular tourism destination known for its mountain scenery and pine trees, and not in metropolitan Manila due to an ongoing anti-drugs crackdown in the capital region, Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos and police officials said.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in June, has vowed to press on with his predecessor's crackdown against illegal drugs, which left thousands of mostly petty drug suspects dead, but said it would be done differently and focus more on rehabilitating drug dependents. Under former President Rodrigo Duterte, more than 6,000 mostly poor suspected drug dealers were killed in reported clashes with law enforcers. The widespread killings alarmed Western governments, including the United States, and sparked an International Criminal Court investigation as a possible crime against humanity. Duterte had denied condoning extrajudicial killings in his so-called war on drugs but had openly threatened to kill suspects until his final years in power.

Police say there have been considerably fewer killings of drug suspects under Marcos, but human rights groups have still expressed alarm

over the continued killings under the government crackdown and asked Marcos to cooperate with the ICC in investigating the killings that took place when Duterte was president and a longtime mayor of southern Davao city. After the ICC rejected a Philippine government appeal to stop investigating the Duterte-era killings, Marcos said that his administration would cut off contact with the Hague-based court. "That ends all our involvement with the ICC because we can no longer appeal," Marcos told reporters when asked to comment on the decision of the ICC appeals chamber. "At this point, we essentially are disengaging from any contact, from any communication, I guess, with the ICC."

When he was still president, Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the ICC's founding treaty in 2019 after the court launched a preliminary examination into the thousands of killings under his anti-drugs crackdown. Critics said then that Duterte's move was an attempt to evade accountability. The ICC prosecutor, however, said the court still has jurisdiction over crimes alleged while the Philippines was still a member of the ICC, a court of last resort for crimes that countries are unwilling or unable to prosecute themselves.

Russian forces advance in Ukraine's Bakhmut

LONDON (Reuters): Russian forces are moving forward in the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut despite fierce resistance and have almost taken full control of a metals plant there, a Russian-installed leader in the region said. His assertion ran counter to Ukrainian and Western descriptions of the situation in the city, which they have said is stabilising as a Russian offensive falters. Reuters has not been able to verify the battlefield situation.

The battle for Bakhmut, which Russia calls by its Soviet-era name of Artyomovsk, has for months been the grinding and bloody focal point of Moscow's war on Ukraine, which it calls a "special military operation". Denis Pushilin, the Russian-installed leader of the part of Ukraine's Donetsk region under Moscow's control, said the bulk of Ukrainian forces had been forced to pull back from the AZOM

metals factory on the western side of the Bakhmutka river. "The important thing here was to clear out the industrial zone at the plant itself. You can practically say that has now been done, with the guys just finishing off (Ukrainian) fighters there who are only left in solitary groups," said Pushilin. Both sides say they are inflicting heavy casualties on each other in Bakhmut. Pushilin said fighters from Russia's Wagner mercenary force were continuing to spearhead the offensive in the city. "The (Wagner) guys are moving forward, of course they are moving forward, though it takes their hardest efforts to do that," Pushilin told state TV presenter Vladimir Solovoyv.

"They have created impossible conditions for the enemy to even carefully try to bring in combat equipment, bring in reserves, or take out even the wounded. For the enemy, all this is extremely

difficult because all the roads are under (Russian) fire control." Telegram channels associated with Wagner published images that they said had been taken inside the metallurgical plant. They said Wagner mercenaries were flushing out small groups of Ukrainian fighters, including one holed up in an administrative building. General Valery Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, said that Kyiv had managed to blunt Russia's offensive in and around Bakhmut, where he said the situation was stabilising.

British military intelligence has said that the Russian assault has stalled, mainly as a result of heavy troop losses. Ukrainian military commanders have said their own counter offensive - backed by newly-delivered Western hardware - is not far off, but have stressed the importance of holding Bakhmut in the meantime.

Top Venezuela oil official pleads guilty to taking bribes

MIAMI (AP): The former general counsel for Venezuela's state-owned oil company pleaded guilty in Miami federal court on money laundering charges in connection to a conspiracy to siphon at least \$550 million from state coffers through corrupt currency deals. As part of his plea agreement, Alvaro Ledo Nass acknowledged taking \$11.5 million in bribes between 2012 and 2017, a period largely overlapping with his senior roles at Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA.

"I knew what I did," Nass said in proceedings before Judge Patricia Seitz, expressing remorse for his actions. "I came here to own up to my mistakes and to take responsibility before the US courts." Nass, 43, in February became the latest among several dozen former Venezuelan officials to be charged or convicted in the US as part of Operation Money Flight, a sprawling, multi-year investigation that seeks to untangle how Venezuelan insiders stole billions in oil wealth from their country. Many of the individuals involved in the massive graft scheme either relocated or plowed their stolen wealth into real estate in south Florida.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro this month ordered a crackdown on corruption inside PDVSA that has led to a number of arrests of top officials and businessmen accused of stealing oil shipments. The allegations prompted the resignation of the country's oil czar, Tarek El Aissami, a key figure in the government's efforts to evade US oil sanctions.

Nass' crimes predate the latest purge but are nonetheless symptomatic of the same graft that experts say has proliferated through Venezuela's state-run oil industry during more than two decades of socialist rule. As part of his plea deal, Nass admitted to taking bribes in exchange for greentighting a bogus currency transaction in 2014 by which several businessmen agreed to loan PDVSA 7.2 billion bolivars, or \$50 million at the widely used black market exchange rate in Venezuela. The oil company then settled the debt for the Euro equivalent of \$600 million a few months later at an artificially high official exchange rate, allowing the insiders to turn a huge profit of \$550 million, according to a six-page factual proffer accompanying Nass' plea agreement.

Among those he admitted to meeting with in Madrid to discuss ways to hide profits from the embezzlement scheme was Luis Fernando Vuteff, a financial manager who is the son-in-law of Caracas' former mayor, exiled opposition leader Antonio Ledezma.

Vuteff was arrested and extradited from Spain last year to the US and is awaiting trial on money laundering charges. Proceeds from the dirty deal were laundered through financial institutions in Spain, the Bahamas and New Jersey. Assistant US Attorney Kurt Lunkenheimer and Justice Department trial attorney Paul Hayden are overseeing the case, which started when Nass, who had been living in Spain, came to the US to cooperate with the law enforcement investigation. Nass, as secretary of PDVSA's board of directors and then general counsel, was able to influence decisions inside the oil giant. Nass' parents said they were devastated. "We trust he will get through this sad period and overcome the mistakes that have so affected him and our family," his parents said in a statement through Caracas-based attorney Jesus Loreto.

White House to China: Don't use Taiwan visit as 'pretext'

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The White House urged China not to use a "normal" stopover in the United States by Taiwan's president as a pretext to increase aggressive activity against Taiwan. John Kirby, the White House national security spokesperson, told reporters that Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's arrival soon in the United States is the latest in a series of routine transits.

"The Peoples Republic of China should not use this transit as a pretext to step up any activity around the Taiwan strait," he said. "We're mindful that things are tense right now" between the United States and China, Kirby said, but he urged Beijing to keep lines of communication open. China claims Taiwan as its own and has vowed to bring the democratically governed island under its control, by force if necessary. Speaking in Taipei, Taiwan National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Ming-yen said such transits had taken place for many years.

"Taiwan has the right to communicate with the international community during this process. I hope that the Chinese communists will not overreact," he told reporters. Kirby said Washington still wants to reschedule a trip to Beijing by Secretary of State Antony Blinken that was postponed when a suspected Chinese spy balloon passed over the United States and was shot down by a US fighter jet. Tsai is transiting through New York and Los Angeles as part of a trip to and from Guatemala and Belize, returning to Taipei on April 7. Tsai's first US transit since 2019 and her seventh since taking office in 2016 is expected to include a meeting with US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Los Angeles on her return from Central America next month. It would be the first meeting on US soil between a House speaker and a Taiwanese leader, and the prospect has angered Beijing. China responded to a visit last August to Taiwan by former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with large-scale war games around the island.

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Fact check, the legacy of Afghan interim rulers

RECENTLY, the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs has called on the United States to reopen its embassy in Kabul. During his visit to Afghan Consulate in Dubai, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai urged the United States to come and open its Embassy in Kabul while Afghan authorities would take care of its security needs. According to Stanikzai, many countries had expressed their readiness to reopen their diplomatic missions in Kabul if America restores its relations with Afghanistan, so let both sides fulfill their responsibilities.

The Taliban interim government in Kabul faces global restrictions including a travel ban on its top-ranking officials, freezing of assets worldwide, and no global recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan despite its over one-and-a-half-year rule in the country, mainly due to no abidance of its commitments with the global community regarding human and woman rights, inclusiveness of the government and no support for terrorism on Afghan land, as well as in the region and beyond. A few months back, the Taliban authorities had imposed a ban on girls' education, woman's travel, and jobs in particular sectors including media, INGOs, and the private sector which not only attracted a global uproar and criticism of Afghan authorities but also pushed the Taliban government into diplomatic isolation along with the trade and cultural disengagement with the rest of the world.

Interestingly, the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister has tried to cover up other issues concerning IEA relations with the global community including its neighbors in the garb of security and vowed to fulfill IEA's responsibilities by providing security to foreign missions in the country, whereas the Taliban government policies over the past one and a half years have estranged its long-standing friends and staunch foes equally. Under the Doha agreement, Afghan interim rulers agreed to protect the fundamental rights of Afghan citizens including women, guaranteed the inclusiveness of the political system, and delineation from terrorist groups were other important points of the agenda that pave the way for the peaceful withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. However, after coming to power, the Taliban authorities largely pursued the manifesto of their group instead of a national government representing over 40 million Afghans. Despite promising a soft rule, the Taliban ratcheted up restrictions against media, girls' higher education, and employment, along with banning females' movement in the country without a male escort. Although the Taliban regime stood up against the IS-K, yet other terror groups including the TTP, BLA, BLF, and ETIM enjoy the freedom of movement and save heavens inside Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, which not only created a rift between Islamabad and Kabul but also exposed the Afghan rulers in front of the world regarding their patronage of terror outfits.

Historically, the global community has utmost sympathizes with the people of war-hit Afghanistan due to persistent worst economic and humanitarian situations, coupled with natural calamities and tough seasons, therefore various nations across the globe remained engaged with the Taliban authorities despite political differences and massive economic assistance had been provided to Afghan people by the UN, the United States, the EU, and others. However, the Afghan rulers persistently pushed themselves into diplomatic isolation through their policies and governance, which surely hurt Kabul's efforts for global recognition and cooperation from the rest of the world. After the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, a majority of the world's nations shut down their diplomatic missions in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, several friendly countries such as Pakistan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia also reduced or relocated their missions in Kabul in recent months, which caused an alarming situation for the ruling regime in Afghanistan. In fact, the Taliban had lost the trust and support of their most trusted allies and faced historical public disapproval due to their repressive policies amid the dire prevailing humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

Realistically, the global community could not be engaged through mere press announcements and social media posts, the Islamic Emirate must not behave like an armed group/political fiction of society but represent itself as a representative government of the entire Afghanistan by honoring its obligations regarding human, woman and minorities rights, increasing its cooperation with the global community in all domains including counter-terrorism which will ultimately give it validity in the global community and will pave the way for its greater integration the world. As change can only come through actions not words, as early as Afghan authorities will grasp this reality, all internal and external issues would resolve accordingly, otherwise, the problems would multiply every other day.

We need decisive climate action, can COP28 deliver?

Karim Elgendy

ON March 20, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its synthesis report, a summary of seven years of climate science, that once again emphasised the grave threat humanity faces from climate change. The report concludes that even with the most ambitious greenhouse gas emission reductions, global warming is expected to overshoot the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit set by the Paris Agreement as early as 2030. Temperature increases are expected to reach 1.6C, before falling back below the critical threshold. For this "best case" scenario to take place global emissions must peak by 2025, drop by at least 43 percent by 2030, and reach net zero carbon by the middle of the century.

Yet, we cannot achieve this goal with the current policies we have in place at the national and international levels. In fact, if we do not radically change our approach to the climate crisis, we are on track for a 2.8C increase by the end of the century. On this trajectory, we will not only see increased frequency and severity of heatwaves,

droughts and other extreme weather events but will also risk dangerous runaway climate change. To avoid climate chaos, the world urgently needs to scale up climate action. The upcoming 28th United Nations Conference of Parties (COP28), which will take place in Dubai in December, offers perhaps one of the last opportunities to do that.

There are several issues on the agenda of the two-week summit, including a review of the Paris Agreement, an agreement on a global goal for climate adaptation, and the establishment of a finance facility for loss and damage due to climate change. But COP28 has the potential to achieve even more than that; it can become a watershed where COP meetings transition from multilateral negotiations to bold decision-making to advance climate action. This promise could only be fulfilled if COP28 avoids getting mired in a debate over the role of fossil fuels in the global energy transition that leads to another impasse over a phaseout.

As the COP28 host, the United Arab Emirates can play a major role in steering the outcome of the conference towards a break-

through that charts a new way forward. Some have questioned whether a major oil exporter can lead the way in climate negotiations with the urgency they deserve. But a quick look at the Emirati climate policies can perhaps provide more context and clarity.

The UAE has pursued an unorthodox approach of fully decarbonising and diversifying its economy while exporting every drop of oil it can. It has also aimed to shift its domestic energy mix towards renewable and nuclear energy sources, which conveniently releases more oil for export. Export revenues, in turn, are to be channelled towards funding the economic transition, including investments in renewable energy projects around the world. The UAE is voluntarily targeting carbon neutrality by 2050 ? in addition to making a modest carbon reduction commitment under the Paris Agreement. Yet simultaneously, its Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is working to increase its production capacity by another 19 percent by 2027. It argues that it should be one of the last-standing producers since its production has

one of the lowest costs and carbon footprints. This paradox is best captured by the UAE's choice of Sultan Al Jaber to preside over COP28. While being a bona fide climate pioneer and the chairman of the UAE's renewable energy investment company, Masdar, Dr Al Jaber is also the current head of ADNOC.

Yet, there is nothing in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to suggest that such an unorthodox approach is in breach of the UAE's responsibilities as a signatory. Despite their exceptionally high emissions per capita, the UAE and its regional neighbours are considered developing countries bearing little responsibility for historic emissions. The UNFCCC's recognition of different national responsibilities for climate change and capacities for action allows developing countries to make modest emission reduction commitments in recognition of their need for economic development. The fact that the UAE is a major oil producer makes little difference, as fossil fuels are considered traded goods and their emissions are

accounted for where they are burned. In approaching its COP presidency, however, the UAE can go beyond its responsibilities as a UNFCCC signatory and demonstrate that it is a climate pioneer. Implementing the goals of the Paris Agreement requires leadership that addresses challenges impartially and delivers breakthroughs to unlock climate action.

The UAE can and must use its growing diplomacy and financial firepower to drive decarbonisation and strengthen emissions reduction targets globally ahead of the summit. It can also leverage its influence in the Middle East not just to raise awareness of climate change impacts but also to catalyse regional climate collaboration. It should also not shy away from tackling the issue of fossil fuel phaseouts. The latest IPCC Assessment Report concludes that 47 percent of human-related CO2 emissions are caused by oil and gas. The Synthesis Report notes that future emissions from existing fossil fuel infrastructure already exceed the remaining carbon budget for limiting warming to 1.5C and casts doubt on emerging technologies, such as carbon

capture and storage, being able to reduce CO2 levels. At COP27, 80 nations called for phasing out fossil fuels. If these demands are repeated in Dubai, they must be considered for the summit's final decision. The COP hosts could use their convening power to lead a voluntary coalition on halting new oil and gas explorations in line with the IPCC's and the International Energy Agency's recommendations.

The UAE and COP28 participants must also avoid repeating the mistakes of previous COPs. The last thing the climate crisis needs is another round of negotiations where climate ambitions are dragged down by narrow national interests. The time left to halt dangerous climate change is rapidly running out. The decisions we make this decade will determine the future of humanity. Our response to this historic responsibility demands that we rise to the occasion with a bolder energy transition and redoubled efforts, not half measures and promises of future technologies. COP28 can be the venue where the world decides to follow the science and accelerate climate action.

Aljazeera

Finland's the world's happiest country. Here's how we do it

Marja Heinenon

ACCORDING to the latest World Happiness Report, my country of Finland has the happiest people on Earth, a designation it has held for six consecutive years. I imagine that news might rankle some Americans, some of whom are fond of touting the American Dream and describing their country as the greatest in the world.

Since 2002, the World Happiness Report has tabulated the relative happiness of people around the globe, using statistical analysis to take into account factors such as gross domestic product per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make one's own life choices, generosity of the general population and perceptions of the level of corruption in the society. The US came in 15th out of the 149 countries on the survey. Was that an anomaly? No, America has not cracked the top dozen, at least not in recent years. Last year it was number 16. In 2021, it came in 14th place. The previous year, 2020, it was 18th.

Queried over the years about their own level of satisfaction with their lives, Americans consistently provide answers that land the United States in the double digit rankings behind numerous other countries. Like other Nordic countries, Finland has well-functioning and democratic institutions that provide their citizens with extensive benefits and security. The citizens of our countries trust our institutions, something that

certainly cannot be said of the United States at present, which according to some assessments is at risk of losing the very democracy which has long been its calling card on the global stage. (Incidentally, among the other Nordic countries, Denmark was in 2nd place; Iceland was 4th; Norway was 6th.)

Of course, each country has a unique history and has charted a singular path to its present level of national contentment - or lack thereof. Finland and other Nordic countries don't have the deep class divides and economic inequality experienced by some other countries - including the United States. Our economic systems are not built on haves and have-nots, a Darwinian model of survival of the fittest that actually encourages class divisions and strife by rewarding winners who often seem to succeed by taking advantage of the less fortunate. For those of us who live outside of the United States, obviously some of what we know about America is based on generalities - some might even call them stereotypes - that are shared the world over. And still, I would guess that most of those truisms hold more than a kernel of truth.

Political scientist Ronald Inglehart offered an explanation of why inhabitants of Nordic countries so consistently are the most content with their lot in life. In a 2020 report titled "Nordic Exceptionalism" - part of that year's World Happiness Report - he said that our countries consti-

tute "the leading example of successful modernization, maximizing prosperity, social solidarity, and political and personal freedom." Another feature of life in America as viewed from abroad is its exaggerated focus on money - earning it, getting more of it and holding onto it once you have it. I used to wonder why my American friends spent so much of their mental energy thinking about making money. I have come to realize they had no option: In the US, the future depends very much on how much money you possess. If you cannot afford school tuition or to cover your health care costs or to set aside funds for your senior years, life can be miserable indeed.

How does the Nordic system lead to overall national happiness? Let me use my own experience as an example. My father was a construction worker and my mother worked in a factory. Thanks to an exemplary education system, I was able to earn a doctorate practically for free. My two daughters have had access to one of the world's finest educations - practically free of cost again. As a single mom, I can't overstate how important it was that I didn't have to dig deep into my own pocket to pay for a quality education for them. Day care fees are subsidized for all families in Finland. Before going to school, my girls were able to attend a wonderful, highly professional public day care at an extremely reasonable cost, which

allowed me to work.

Then there is the issue of medical expenses - a huge financial hardship for many American families. One of my daughters had a chronic skeletal disease from the time she was little, and medical treatment lasted more than a decade. I'm grateful to live in a country where my daughter's medical expenses were affordable and didn't ruin our lives. The bulk of the expenses were taken care of by the public health system. In fact, I paid less than \$1,000 for her hospital stays, doctor visits and 10 custom braces that she had to wear over the course of a decade to help correct the curvature of her spine. Our taxpayer-funded universal health care is high in quality, but without piles of confusing paperwork or huge bills borne by the patient. All this is part of our welfare state, which the Nordic countries are famous for. I realize that "welfare" is a dirty word for many in the United States. But several studies confirm that welfare state generosity has a tremendous positive impact on life satisfaction. Finnish journalist and author Anu Partanen, who has lived for years in the US, shared with me the view that Americans are far more enmeshed in unhealthy dependencies than they realize. She writes about this in her book "The Nordic Theory of Everything."

Some in the US have said they want less government involvement, not more and criticize Finland

as a socialist "nanny state" where the government has too much say about the particulars of individuals' lives. In Finland, we have found that the government actually frees up business to focus on what they do best: business. And that's proven to be a boon not just for the economy but for society as a whole. Partanen says that while US companies struggle to administer health plans and find educated workers, Nordic governments provide high-quality public services for all citizens and give everyone quality education so that employers have no shortage of qualified job applicants. Survival at the most basic, existential level is at the heart of happiness, and in some societies like the US, earning enough money to live comfortably can be a tricky business. Beyond that however, more money doesn't necessarily create greater happiness, and might do just the opposite.

Economist Richard Easterlin made the observation years ago that income and happiness are not always linked. One often overlooked, but important ingredient that makes a huge difference in terms of increasing a nation's sense of contentment, is the level of income disparity within the society. A country with relatively small income differences generally has fewer disgruntled people - perhaps it's because there's less of a need to try to "keep up with the Joneses." In a country like mine, where there are no as great extremes of wealth or poverty as in the

US, the opportunity to be disenchanted with your lot in life is greatly diminished. And those unfortunate enough to fall below the poverty line in Finland know that there is a network of welfare services and public aid to help them back on their feet. Of course, all of this social spending comes at a cost and taxes on an average worker are considerably higher than the taxes paid in the US. We have one of the world's highest marginal tax rates - a level of taxation that I realize some countries would find unacceptable. Quite honestly, for us Finns, the overall national prosperity and relative lack of social turmoil seems well worth the additional taxes.

According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the average single worker in Finland faced a net average tax rate of 30.8% in 2021, compared with the OECD average of 24.6%. That's higher than most of other countries, but it's the price that we have decided to pay as a society to have quality schools, low-cost public infrastructure, public health care and the like. Yes it's true, there is no Finnish equivalent of the American Dream, promising eventual riches after a lifetime of toil. Instead, here in the Nordic countries we have realized that the secret of happiness is found in a kind of egalitarianism and trust in our institutions. It leads to a societal cohesiveness - and happiness - that money just can't buy.

CNN

Why Rahul's parliament expulsion could backfire on Modi

Apoorvanand

FOR the first time since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power nine years ago, India's opposition parties appear to be uniting in opposition to the existential threat that the country's democratic structure and norms face from the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The immediate reason for this sense of urgency is the expulsion of Rahul Gandhi, the biggest leader of the largest opposition party, the Indian National Congress, from parliament after a lower court in the state of Gujarat convicted him in a three-year-old defamation case. The court gave him a two-year jail sentence.

The manner of the hearing of the case, the conviction and the punishment have drawn severe criticism from many jurists. But the opposition's unity has also to do with its realisation that Gandhi's disqualification from parliament is an audacious signal by the government that it can go to any extent to cripple political forces who challenge it democratically. The message is clear: it is high time the opposition gets its act together. In India's multi-

party democracy, many of the opposition leaders and groups that have near-unanimously criticised the moves against Gandhi are otherwise rivals in different states. That they have come together is hugely significant. They can see that the action against Gandhi is the culmination of steps taken by the Modi government to humiliate and discredit a range of opposition leaders, by portraying them as criminals in the eyes of the people using the judiciary and investigative agencies. Before Gandhi, many leaders from his party and other political parties have been slapped with criminal charges and some of them have even been jailed. They have been made to appear before investigative agencies for days together. The readiness of the judiciary to largely play along with the government's crackdown has put further constraints on the opposition, and indeed on Indian democracy itself.

This moment marks the complete breakdown of all civil norms and bipartisanship that hold parliamentary politics together. In several instances, when Modi's BJP has lost elections in states, it has still grabbed power by toppling governments or

breaking rival political parties. It has cornered a giant chunk of election funding through an opaque electoral bonds scheme under which the identity of donors and who they give money to need not be disclosed. To be clear, democracy is not only about ruling and opposition parties. It is about the institutional balance that keeps state power in check. In India, this institutional mechanism has been captured by the BJP. The election commission, the judiciary and other institutions supposed to be autonomous have surrendered before the government or are largely acting on its behalf. The corporate world appears to mostly be behind the BJP. Other civil society organisations which previously kept vigil on the state apparatus have been broken using different laws.

Against this backdrop, Modi's government still had no answers to Gandhi's questions on the alleged patronage it had bestowed upon industrialist Gautam Adani whose wealth rose from \$7bn in 2014 to more than \$100bn at the start of this year. Gandhi's allegation that Modi and Adani

enjoy a special relationship got a boost from a January report by United States-based short-seller Hindenburg, which accused Adani of dubious and fraudulent practices, even calling it among the biggest con acts in recent history. Adani has denied the report's allegations, but the verdict of the markets has been clear: the value of the shares of his companies has plummeted, and his own wealth has crashed. Gandhi has since doubled down on his allegations that Modi has favoured Adani. He used the platform of parliament to attack the government. The government refused to accept the demand of the opposition to institute a parliamentary enquiry into the Adani affair, creating a stalemate in parliament.

Meanwhile, Gandhi went on a lecture tour of the United Kingdom, where, in his talks and interactions, he painted a dismal picture of contemporary India's political landscape. Calling Indian democracy a public good for the world at large, he said that its death would be a global loss. The BJP, helped by a pliant big media in India, portrayed these

remarks as an insult to India on foreign soil. Yet when Gandhi asked for permission to respond to these allegations in parliament, the presiding officer of the house refused to give him the chance to do so. And then came this conviction and expulsion. By rallying together, the opposition can make their voters realise the gravity of the threat that Indian democracy is facing. Their greatest obstacle is the big media of India, which has been acting as the mouthpiece of the ruling party and which keeps feeding misinformation to the public, defames opposition parties and creates hatred among Hindus against Muslims, Christians and intellectuals. The challenge before the opposition is to communicate to the people the facts, clear the cobweb of misinformation and disinformation created by the big media and bring India's myriad communities together. It won't be easy. The beginning of the holy month of Ramadan has seen attacks on Muslim religious rituals by the gangs affiliated with the ruling party. The prayers of Christians are routinely disrupted, their houses and churches attacked. The state of Maharashtra has seen

scores of rallies calling for violence against Muslims in the last three months. Indian society is in an unprecedented state of fragmentation. Yet the job of bringing Indian people together, while difficult, is not impossible. It requires an honest investment from leaders of opposition parties in the politics of togetherness, without which democracy becomes meaningless. After having traversed a length of nearly 4,000km (2,485 miles) with this message of unity through his recent Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi has acquired the moral authority to take on this task.

In some ways, his expulsion from the parliament could free him from parliamentary obligations and give him a chance to start a conversation with the people about the state of the country, on the streets. The government's relentless attack on him shows how much it fears Gandhi, who refuses to mince words while taking on Modi. But ultimately, this moment is not - and must not become - about Gandhi. The next step, a more challenging step, will be for Gandhi to shift focus from himself to the threat to the democratic rights of the people of India.

Israel at a crossroads as Netanyahu forced to wait

Ray Hanania

IN November 2019, when Benjamin Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges, including breach of trust, bribery and fraud, no one could have predicted that his legal troubles might ultimately bring the nation to its knees. Netanyahu has done everything possible to prevent the indictments from moving toward a conclusion. He even embraced the extreme right to win the 2022 election and form a new government, allowing himself to return as prime minister after 18 months in opposition. However, the wily Netanyahu, the longest-serving PM in Israel's history, had to cut a deal with the far-right extremists, giving radical religious party leaders and settler expansionists unprecedented power.

As long as Netanyahu remains as prime minister, Israel will remain in a constitutional crisis due to his criminal trials, which began in May 2020 and have been dragging through the court system ever since. Although he has been successful in delaying the process, the only way he can derail it altogether is to undermine Israel's judiciary. And that is exactly what Netanyahu is doing, provoking a massive backlash from Israelis.

Since his return to power in December, Netanyahu has given his allies wide-ranging powers to strengthen the settler movement and increase the oppression of Palestinians, while allowing key Cabinet members to fire up the anti-Palestinian rhetoric, includ-

ing calling for an entire town to be wiped out. He has strengthened the rights of the far-right religious movement by undermining the rights of secular Israeli Jews. In exchange, his right-wing Zionist and religious allies have backed his proposal to undermine the Israeli judicial system. Netanyahu has introduced a sweeping attempt to restructure the judicial system that essentially aims to change how judges are selected, limit their powers, allow a Knesset majority (i.e., Netanyahu's government) to overturn Israeli Supreme Court rulings and, more importantly, limit the powers of the judiciary to interfere with the so-called will of the people. Even if Netanyahu is convicted, another new law could allow him to remain in power, as it is now more difficult for a sitting prime minister to be declared unfit for office. Under the legislation that was approved last week, to be declared unfit for office, either only the prime minister himself or a two-thirds majority of the Cabinet would have to vote in favor. The Cabinet vote would then need to be ratified by a supermajority in the Knesset.

Netanyahu's intention is clear: To change the judicial system so as to undermine the corruption cases against him and prevent his removal from office. Even when he did finally make a concession to protesters on Monday, it was only to delay his planned reforms rather than to scrap them. His effort to reengineer Israel's judi-

cial system has not only provoked hundreds of thousands of Israelis to protest, but it has also raised ethical issues with some of his right-wing allies. On Sunday, Netanyahu fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant after he had urged the PM to pause his judicial overhaul. Several other ministers appointed from Netanyahu's Likud base have also urged him to bring the changes to a halt, with one saying that Israel's "house is on fire" and another warning that the issue could lead Israeli Jews into a political "civil war" that would tear the country apart. Former Prime Minister Yair Lapid called Gallant's dismissal a "new low" and wrote on Twitter that Netanyahu "cannot fire the people of Israel who are standing up to the insanity of the coalition." Benny Gantz, the former defense minister who is now leader of the opposition in the Knesset, tweeted: "We face a clear, immediate and tangible danger to Israel's security ... Tonight Netanyahu put politics and himself above security."

What is being alluded to by these politicians is that not only has Netanyahu's judicial overhaul deeply polarized the nation, but that it also portends further risks. Not being directly addressed, however, is the increasing tensions being stoked among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and inside Israel itself. Netanyahu has given a green light to the armed extremist settler movement to confront

Palestinians and expand their settlements. The government has also allowed the Israel Defense Forces to carry out more raids on Nablus, Jenin, East Jerusalem and Hebron, where Palestinian activists are targeted and killed on the false premise that they are engaged in terrorist activity. These extrajudicial killings have provoked Palestinians to resist the assaults by soldiers and also armed settlers, who are often protected by the army. During the first two months of this year, these actions and Palestinian resistance efforts resulted in the deaths of 63 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, in addition to one foreign national and an Israeli soldier. More than 2,000 Palestinians and 25 Israelis were also injured and the numbers have continued to rise this month.

The irony is that Israel is, in terms of Middle East peace, at a crossroads, as a handful of Arab states have agreed to normalize relations with Tel Aviv. If Israel wants to maintain these deals and potentially persuade other states to sign up, it must recognize Palestinian rights.

So, the Israelis are faced with a choice - either turn toward peace and justice or empower the far right to throw the entire nation into turmoil. It is possible that the current turmoil could explode into an even bigger crisis that would challenge Israel's continued ability to suppress Palestinian rights and block their statehood, resulting in even more violence and death.

Arab News



Refugees do not come to UK for hotels

Diane Taylor

DEPUTY prime minister Dominic Raab is not the first senior politician to say that hotels act as a pull factor for asylum seekers and he probably won't be the last. Doing the media rounds this morning ahead of Wednesday's government announcement that it plans to use military bases and floating structures as an alternative to hotels to accommodate asylum seekers, Raab said: "One pull factor is people thinking that if they come here illegally they'll be housed in a hotel. That will end."

Immigration minister Robert Jenrick told the Sunday Telegraph last November that "Hotel Britain" must end, and a year before that the then home secretary Priti Patel told an evidence session of the Lords justice and home affairs committee that hotels acted as a pull factor for some asylum seekers. Foreign minister James Cleverly recently trotted out the same line on Sky News. It's not known if any of these ministers have ever asked asylum seekers if their motivation for making dangerous journeys is all about bagging themselves a plush hotel room, nor whether any government research has been done to bolster these assertions. I have interviewed hundreds of asylum seekers since the hotel policy was rolled out in significant numbers at the start of the pandemic, and none has cited the opportunity to stay in a

hotel as a factor driving them to the UK. Refugees arrive in the UK for a variety of reasons. But these reasons can be summarised in two words: seeking safety. Hotels don't appear on any asylum seeker's wish-list and it's unlikely that many even know about them. In fact, asylum seekers hate being placed in hotels almost as much as the government hates putting them there. They feel isolated in hotel rooms and long to be able to cook their own food, as those in shared housing known as dispersal accommodation are able to do.

While the government has offered very limited safe and legal routes for those refugees they consider to be "deserving", they do not engage with the real reasons why asylum seekers who are unable to access these routes continue to arrive here. In its recently announced scheme to streamline asylum decisions for 12,000 asylum seekers from five countries where safe and legal routes are not available or are severely limited, the Home Office has acknowledged that people who have fled from certain countries - Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Libya and Yemen - are overwhelmingly likely to have bona fide refugee protection claims. While it is not (yet) illegal to claim asylum in the UK, the government now routinely refers to asylum seekers as illegal immigrants. This hostile and negative term

helps create a collective forgetting of who asylum seekers are and the circumstances they have escaped from.

This government-driven amnesia may assist with short-term political or electoral goals but it obscures the root of the challenge facing the UK and other governments in safe and stable countries. Large numbers of refugees are on the move. While the vast majority of them are not coming to the UK, the issue needs to be tackled internationally rather than unilaterally. Soundbites like "Stop the boats" or "End hotel use" won't fix things. Asylum seekers are not embarking on treacherous journeys and squeezing into overcrowded dinghies in northern France so they can bed down at the Ritz. In fact the reality of the hotels they are placed in is more likely to be rodents, mould and food so poor that children lose weight. But, for asylum seekers, safety trumps living conditions, however grim they might be, every time. If the government does not engage with the truth about who asylum seekers are and what propels them towards the UK they will never solve this issue. The plan to end hotel use is likely to be welcomed as much by asylum seekers as by the voters the government hopes will applaud Wednesday's announcement. But changing accommodation from hotels to military bases, ships or barges won't stop people faced with life or death decisions from arriving here.

When governments make immoral laws, it is our duty to disobey them

Dmitry Glukhovskiy

WE need the law to protect the weak from the strong, and to protect the strong from the temptation to target the weak. We need the law to hold criminals accountable and to prevent new crimes. To eradicate the worst in humans and to nurture the best. There is nothing more important and precious than your life. Your life belongs only to you, and to you alone. No one has the right to take it away from you. No one has the right to hurt those you love. And no one has the right to order you to kill an innocent person.

If a law is passed that forces me to kill the innocent, my duty is to break this law. If a law is passed that forces me to cover up the murder of the innocent, I must violate this law, too. If a law is passed that forbids me from telling the truth about others killing the innocent, I am not obligated to abide by it. It's irrelevant if the murderers are our own soldiers. It's irrelevant if they were following orders issued by their commanding officer or by the commander-in-chief. A soldier killing an innocent person is a criminal. In fact, he is worse than a regular criminal as he is backed by an enormous organized force that the victim is helpless against.

Cases of torture, rape and extrajudicial killings have all been documented in Ukraine. The bodies -

hands tied behind their backs with the white ribbons that Russian soldiers order Ukrainian civilians to wear - have been exhumed. These are facts. This has already happened. You cannot ban the truth. You can only try to conceal it in order to carry on with your killings, torture and rape with total impunity.

The war against Ukraine is the most destructive and dehumanizing thing that has happened to Russia in recent memory. Without reason or cause, my country invaded the territory of our neighbor that we used to consider a brotherly state. It sent out tanks to seize the Ukrainian capital. It sent planes to bomb Ukrainian cities. It ruined countless human lives. It razed dozens of cities and settlements to the ground. It occupied Ukrainian lands and called them its own with utter disregard for international law. This war has no justification. Its horror and senselessness are too obvious. But the people who ordered the invasion - Vladimir Putin and his close circle - cannot back down as they are the real criminals and they are afraid of being punished for their crime. Russia is now ruled by force alone. This breaks people's backs, bends the law and steamrolls the legal system to allow the authorities to continue breaking the backs of the weak and bending the law to their

will. This is why Russia is introducing anti-human laws. They forbid us from calling the war a war: we are told to say "special military operation" instead. This is done so that they won't have to be held accountable in front of their own citizens about how many Ukrainians have been killed for nothing; and how many Russians lost their lives in vain. To silence anyone who dares speak out. To send them to prison for 10 or 15 years. They forbid us from calling out the state's lies and from seeing the truth. There are even laws forcing us to say that proven facts are "deliberately false information." They have allowed the killings of the innocent. They ordered us to cover up their crimes, to free criminals. To encourage criminals to kill again. Those in power are giving us a crash course in how to believe that unimaginable evil is normal, even welcome. They are trying to force us to abandon our basic moral principles, which we have been taught from childhood by our parents. They are forcing us to get used to lies and murders. There is a reason for this ban on speaking the truth and this demand to proclaim lies in public. The reason is to rid a new generation of Russians of any self-respect. To break their dignity, to make them give up on themselves in fear of

unfair punishment, and to make them renounce their moral code.

The war against Ukraine is the most destructive and dehumanizing thing that has happened to Russia in recent memory. But, unable to dehumanize Ukrainians, the Russian government is dehumanizing its own citizens. The scale of destruction in Ukraine can be seen with the naked eye, even from space. While the destructive processes launched by a government obsessed with self-preservation in the soul of the Russian nation, in the very fabric of our society, are unseen for now, they threaten the very existence of Russia itself. In order to save themselves, the Russian government is destroying its once beautiful and prosperous neighbor. But it is also destroying Russia, my homeland. There is nothing I can do to stop it, but I cannot stay silent. I am confident that I am telling the truth by exposing the crimes of the Russian army in Ukraine. I am confident that the Defense Ministry and the Russian leadership are lying and have been lying for some time in an attempt to justify this terrible, senseless war. I am confident that I am not the one committing the crime against Russia and its future here - they are. There are certain laws that no one must ever abide by. And I won't adhere to them, either.

The Moscow Times

Red wall Brexiters will be the 'hero voters' of the next election

Rafael Behr

WHATEVER happens in the next general election, Britain will be governed by some kind of coalition. That can be said with confidence because all governments are coalitions of some kind, even when there is only one ruling party. There are Conservatives who see Rishi Sunak as their rightful leader and others who submit to his authority without enthusiasm. The factions must be balanced in cabinet. The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, is a Sunakian. The home secretary, Suella Braverman, was a rival leadership candidate for the party of perpetual Brexit.

The current Tory party chair, Greg Hands, is indigenous to pre-referendum conservatism, an urbane former remainder who served in George Osborne's Treasury. His deputy, Lee Anderson, is a fire-breathing "anti-woke" culture warrior who defected to the Tories from Labour in 2018. That is coalition politics. It also describes Downing Street's strategy for retaining some of the majority won in 2019. That means defending the "red wall" - former Labour seats in northern England and the Midlands, where craving for Brexit was the gateway drug to voting for Boris Johnson. But it also means wooing back moderate Tories who recoiled from Johnson's circus of disrepute and Liz Truss's pyrotechnic economic mismanagement. The plan is that one side of the Tory party wins back economic trust with a prolonged display of competence, while the other side slams doors in migrant faces to prove it is still the nemesis of European judges and their metropolitan liberal accomplices.

The two elements must then be combined in the image of a strong, dependable leader. Sunak is more popular than his party and in a presidential race against Keir Starmer

he would certainly be competitive. The opposition leader's allies concede that he has work to do with the many voters who are window shopping for an alternative government and need to be lured through Labour's door. But there isn't much evidence yet that the incumbent prime minister's personality is sturdy enough to hoist MPs out of danger in all the seats where the Conservative brand is toxic. There are notionally scores of seats in play at the next election, presaging a potentially seismic shift in the political landscape. But both of the main English parties have their sights set on a narrow slice of the population. Deborah Mattinson, Starmer's director of strategy, calls them "hero voters" - the ones who swing directly from Tory to Labour, effectively having double the impact of anyone who moves from a third party. The profile of these voters is Brexit-supporting, older (but not retired), economically precarious, socially conservative, white, not in big cities and without higher education.

The anxieties and prejudices of those people exert a magnetic pull on national debate to the exclusion of other voters. An election fought over the allegiance of red wall Brexiters is an away fixture for Starmer, whose remain-voting liberal lawyer CV is no secret. But the electoral system does give the Labour leader an advantage, too. He would prefer to win a majority, but the door to No 10 creaks open for him as soon as the Tories lose theirs, since no other party will prop up a minority, Sunak-led administration. The Liberal Democrats have signalled that they are in the business of replacing Tories. Their leader, Ed Davey, hasn't broadcast instructions to his members to vote tactically in places where a Labour candidate is better placed to unseat an incum-

bent Conservative, but the message is implicit in the choice of constituencies being targeted and the tone of campaign rhetoric. Starmer might not be a president-elect, but Britain has a parliamentary system and he is de facto leader of the GTTO coalition - Get The Tories Out. That can be a powerful alliance, although also a fragile one. It was fractured for many years by the Lib Dem decision to form an actual coalition with the Conservatives in 2010. It fell apart completely in 2019 because too many swing voters decided the prospect of Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister was the most repellent one on the ballot paper.

Starmer has worked hard to repair the damage done by his predecessor, to the point of forbidding him from running as a Labour candidate. That has disoriented the Corbynite left, which now faces an interesting choice. Loyalty to the exiled independent MP for Islington North means formal rupture from Labour and a future of paddling in the stagnant waters of Marxist protest politics. Rowing in behind Starmer (albeit with much grumbling about principles betrayed) offers a slipstream to future influence over a party in power. It is clear where the left's interests lie - and it isn't martyrdom to the lost Corbyn cause. That also means that even if Starmer wins a majority, he too will find himself governing a coalition. Old divisions are buried, but not deep. They will be disintegrated by the hard choices that any government has to make.

The disciplined line Labour is currently holding expresses the appetite for victory worked up after a steady diet of defeats, while patience is instilled by opinion poll leads. Those factors will not pertain once a Labour chancellor is rationing fund-

ing to cash-starved public services and a Labour home secretary is grappling with Kentish border control. Ask Labour MPs how they feel about that prospect and they say they will gladly take the problems of government over the grind of opposition. Also that they are not complacent because the mountain to climb after the crushing defeat in 2019 is so steep. And they are right. The road to Downing Street is narrow and goes by way of persuading Tory voters to switch sides. But it is a dispiriting prospect for those of us who happen not to live along that route; we, the unheroic, second-class voters, whose ballots will be made by imprecise tactical calculation or cast on to a heap in already safe seats. This is not a new foible of British democracy. For as long as elections have been settled by the first-past-the-post system, millions of voters have had their preferences marginalised. But the imbalance feels especially perverse when politics has been polarised on a range of issues, and the veto-wielding tranche of the electorate is clustered on one side of a partisan divide. If these super voters were swinging on a left-right axis, or a leave-remain one, the battle for their allegiance might at least be a meaningful microcosm of the nationwide competition. But they aren't.

So British politics must be bent out of shape to make some opinions prominent and fold others out of sight: the idea that leaving the EU was a mistake, for example, or that migration is good for the economy, or that mass indefinite detention of asylum seekers is not a practice for civilised democracies. Those views are widely held, but they will not be visible on a campaign trail mapped by Labour and Tory strategists. Anyone who believes such heresies must simply wait and see what kind of coalition we get next.

The Guardian

For real climate justice, it's time for a food revolution

Aditi Mukherji

AMONG the bleakest findings in the latest report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released last week, is the conclusion that climate resilient development will be increasingly out of reach in some regions if global temperatures increase above 2C. And this challenge will be even harder to overcome with every subsequent incremental increase in warming.

A warmer world would compound the climate injustice already playing out today in the least developed and vulnerable countries of the Global South. These countries and communities have historically contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions, which have already pushed temperatures up by 1.1C, yet they are on the front line of climate impacts. A 2C increase would mean that primary sectors like agriculture would be increasingly unable to cope with extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, undermining long-term food, nutrition and economic security in many parts of the world. The consequences could put 80 million people across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Central America at risk of hunger by 2050, thereby also increasing the risk of displacement.

The stark IPCC warning should, therefore, be an urgent invocation to accelerate agricultural innovation on two counts. Front-line countries simultaneously need more and better ways to adapt to new climate realities to keep food on the table and clean, sustainable solutions that limit emissions and ensure such adaptation remains possible. Both are critical for keeping alive the possibility of delivering climate justice and must be implemented through context-specific policies. The new report was released at a moment of global stocktaking both for climate action

and food systems. It is as much a status update as it is a warning for the future. Climate change is already affecting farmers worldwide with about half of the world's population facing severe water scarcity for at least some of the year, in part because of climatic factors.

But it is hitting those hardest who have emitted the least and who are least equipped to adapt - in particular, smallholder farmers in the Global South. As the most climate-exposed sector, agriculture, especially in developing countries, urgently needs integrated solutions that can minimise environmental impacts, support adaptation and reduce inequality. Yet only 1.7 per cent of climate finance in 2020 supported the world's hundreds of millions of smallholder farmers. If the international community does not ramp up climate finance for food systems to correct this imbalance, more people will go hungry. The good news is that governments, development donors and philanthropic foundations need not wait for breakthrough solutions to invest in this sector. Many either already exist or are in development.

Agricultural innovations offer opportunities to adapt to extremes such as droughts, floods and heatwaves while also delivering up to 30 per cent of the urgent emissions reductions needed to limit temperature rises to 1.5C, a threshold the world is likely to reach within the next decade. For example, scientists are testing climate-resilient varieties of staple crops like rice that can both thrive in extreme conditions and reduce agricultural emissions. Evidence suggests that direct seeded rice requires up to a third less water and emits up to 90 per cent less methane, all while providing the same yields. Similarly, research has found that an

improved variety of grass can increase soil carbon storage while reducing nitrous oxide emissions to offset the climate impact of livestock. Koronivia grass, native to Africa, can also grow on marginal land, meaning farmers can make use of degraded soils to maintain livestock production even where food crops cannot grow. And technologies such as solar-powered irrigation pumps that allow farmers to sell surplus solar energy back to the grid can replace high-emitting diesel pumps while disincentivising the overconsumption of groundwater. A vast and growing suite of agricultural innovations exists to give developing countries the best chance of preserving food security in the face of crippling climate extremes.

While such technological innovations are an important part of the solution, the IPCC report also emphasises the importance of inclusive institutions and policies to ensure the most impacted communities have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Technologies deployed without adequate understanding of local contexts and constraints can lead to counterproductive outcomes. The question now is how to scale up these innovations quickly enough to withstand the climate extremes that are already inevitable while holding even worse outcomes at bay by reducing emissions around the world. Without rapid, deep and sustained mitigation by the highest-emitting economies, adaptation alone will not suffice. The latest IPCC report should be the starting point for urgent, comprehensive action at a global level. Success in climate-proofing food systems would not only position all of humanity to cope with the impacts of rising temperatures but would also create the conditions for greater equality, delivering climate justice through climate resilience.

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



PSX loses 31.54 points, closing at 39,848.35

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) declined by 31.54 points on Thursday, showing a negative change of 0.08 percent, closing at 39,848.35 points against 39,879.89 points the previous day.

A total of 88,701,289 shares were traded during the day as compared to 108,795,600 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs. 3.988 billion against Rs. 3.212 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 329 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 147 of them recorded gains and 157 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 25 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were Telecard Limited with 6,211,500

shares at Rs.7.63 per share; Pak Elektron with 6,152,500 shares at Rs.10.58 per share and Engro Crop XD with 5,429,492 shares at Rs.279.99 per share.

Bata (Pak) witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.89.42 per share price, closing at Rs.1939.42, whereas the runner-up was Ismail Ind. with an Rs.36.15 rise in its per share price to Rs.518.26.

Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.126.10 per share closing at Rs.4977.40; followed by Unilever Foods with Rs.102.33 decline to close at Rs.17900.00.

Rupee gains 26 paises against dollar: Pakistan rupee got strengthened by 26 paises against the dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs 283.65 against the previous day's closing of Rs 283.91.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 283.8 and Rs 286.6 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 29 paises which closed at Rs 307.79 against the last day's closing of Rs 307.50, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen closed at Rs 2.14 with a 01 paise decrease; whereas a surge of 31 paises was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 350.20 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs 349.89.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham went down by 07 paises and Saudi Riyal by 04 paises to close at Rs 77.23 and Rs 75.56 respectively.

Gold prices increase by Rs.100 to Rs. 208,000 per tola:

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs100 and was sold at Rs. 208,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs. 207,900 the previous day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 85 to Rs 178,326 from Rs178,241, whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went up to Rs 163,466 from R. 163,387.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs 20 to close at Rs 2270 and that of ten-gram silver also surge by Rs 17.15 to close at Rs 1946.15.

The price of gold in the international market increased by US\$ 4 to \$1971 against its sale at \$1967, the association reported.



HYDERABAD: Brokers auctioning watermelons at a whole sale market from delivery truck at fruits market.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships, Cussler, MSC Fairfield, X-Press Bardsey and NorstarInvictus carrying Containers and Gas oil, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal and FOTCO Oil Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile two more ships, 'OOCL Le Havre and Delta Gas' carrying Containers and Chemicals also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during the last 24 hours.

A total of 09 ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, 'Sunflyte and X-Press Bardsey' left the Port on Thursday morning, while three more ships, 'Cussler, MSC Fairfield, and Oslo Eagle' are expected to sail on today.

Cargo throughput during the last 24 hours stood at 110,444 tones, comprising 66,732 tones imports Cargo and 43,712 tones export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 3,627 Containers (1,351 TEUs Imports and 2,276 TEUs export) was handled at the port.

There are seven ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them, a Container carrier OOCL Le Havre & another Container Carrier 'APL Southampton' are expected to take berths at QICT on Thursday, while other containers ship RDO Concord is due to arrive at Port Qasim on Friday.

Tokyo shares end lower

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo shares ended lower on Thursday as investors locked in profits after recent gains.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index fell 0.36 percent, or 100.85 points, to 27,782.93, while the broader Topix index slid 0.61 percent, or 12.16 points, to 1,983.32.

The dollar stood at 132.51 yen against 132.85 yen in New York on Wednesday.

Stocks faced selling pressure from the opening bell for technical reasons related to dividend payments, but the losses continued into the session, IwaiCosmo Securities noted.

Profit-taking dominated "after the Nikkei advanced around 500 points over the last three winning sessions", the brokerage said. Despite the falls in Tokyo, global investors' confidence is regarded as improving on receding worries that the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and two other regional US lenders could lead to other casualties.

Still, trading may stay unpredictable as investors look for new cues, said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management.

"Markets are getting into end-of-month rebalancing mode, which could make the price action somewhat random over the next 36 hours," he said.

Mizuho Financial Group tumbled 1.50 percent to 1,876 yen after the bank said it would abandon plans to jointly develop a smart-phone-based bank with messenger app LINE.

Honda, which announced the roll-out of electric scooters in India, slipped 0.12 percent to 3,468 yen.

POL import bill contracts by 8.28%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall petroleum group contracted by 8.28 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-February (2022-23) stood at \$11,876.711 million, as against the imports of \$12,948.503 million during the same period of last year, according to PBS data.

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 14.47 percent, from \$6,257.698 million

last year to \$5,352.506 million during the time period under review.

Likewise, the imports of liquefied natural gas declined by 17.19 percent and dropped from \$3,080.445 million last year to \$2,550.830 million this year.

On the other hand, the products that witnessed positive growth included petroleum crude, the imports of which grew by 10.32 percent, from \$3,157.646 million last year to \$3,483.619 million whereas imports of liquefied petroleum gas increased by 8.17 percent, from \$452.517 million to \$489.484 million.

The imports of all other petroleum products increased by 37.82 percent,

from \$ 0.197 million to \$0.271 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the petroleum group imports witnessed an increase of one percent during the month of February 2023 as compared to the same months of last year.

The petroleum imports during February 2023 were recorded as \$1,264.981 million against the imports of \$1,252.494 million during February 2022.

On a month-on-month basis, the petroleum imports into the country however declined by 4.62 percent during February 2023, as compared to the imports of \$1,326.208 million in January 2022, said the data.

CCP warns and caution general public

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) Thursday warned and cautioned the general public about the rising trend of mobile app-based micro-credit and nano-loan facilities. These applications, available on Google PlayStore and AppStore, offer short-term financing to borrowers but are currently facing numerous complaints and challenges in their track-and-trace process.

As a result, the CCP has initiated an enquiry against these applications, which are observed to constantly change their premises and companies/undertakings behind such applications, said a press release issued here.

Until the conclusion of the enquiry, the CCP deems it necessary to alert the general public about the many issues observed and how to avoid these issues.

The CCP has also intimated to SECP, FIA, and PTA in this regard.

Most of these applications operate without complying with Pakistan's regulatory framework.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that the applications from which consumers are borrowing are duly registered and are operating under a regulatory regime.

Moreover, these applications may tend to take complete control of the user's device by requiring the user to agree to standard access permissions for the app.

This may affect the privacy of the user as well as make the user vulnerable to the operator of such applications.

Therefore, users are cautioned to carefully read the terms and conditions displayed so that they can make an informed decision.

When applying for a loan through these mobile app-based micro-credit and nano-loan facilities, users are presented with various terms and conditions that outline the time period for which the loan is extended, the exact amount of loan disbursed, deductions made from the total loan requested, payment and repayment methods, and any hidden charges.

However, it has been observed that these terms and conditions are often at variance with what is advertised, resulting in deception or fraud.

The applications also require the user to fill in two or more emergency contacts, which are considered as collaterals/guarantors by the operators.

Recovery agents have

reportedly been known to harass and abuse borrowers and their contacts for the sake of repayment.

General public is made aware that these lenders will, on maturity, make calls to the consumer as well as the emergency contacts for recovery of the loan.

To avoid falling prey to fraudulent activities, it is important for the public to be aware that there have been instances where recovery agents have given their personal account details instead of the lender's valid account.

This can result in payments not being adjusted against the repayment and cause further inconvenience to borrowers.

Consumers need to be careful and only make payments on the registered accounts of the mobile app-based micro-credit and nano-loan facilities.

The CCP strongly advised the public to exercise caution and due diligence when using mobile app-based micro-credit and nano-loan facilities.

As per the initial findings, these applications have well over 10 million downloads by the general public, mostly the vulnerable consumers, belonging to the lower to middle income class.

Oil prices increase with higher demand in US

ANKARA (APP): Oil prices increased on Thursday amid higher demand for crude in the US.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$77.68 per barrel at 9.15 a.m. local time (0615 GMT), a 0.12% increase from the closing price of \$77.59 a barrel in the previous trading session.

At the same time, American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$73.17 per barrel, a 0.27% rise after the previous session closed at \$72.97 a barrel.

US commercial crude oil inventories decreased by 7.5 million barrels to 473.7 million barrels during the week ending March 24, according to data released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) late Wednesday.

Inventories fell against the American Petroleum

Institute's expectation of an increase of 187,000 barrels.

The unexpected drop in oil inventories indicates a surge in demand in the world's largest oil consumer.

Fear of supply disruptions continues to dominate the global oil market, pushing prices higher.

Supply concerns emerged following reports that claimed crude exports from Iraq's northern Kirkuk fields were halted after Iraq won an arbitration case against Türkiye.

Türkiye's Energy Ministry described the issue as "a reflection of a years-long dispute" between the central government in Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) over the share of oil revenues.

Meanwhile, a stronger US dollar limited price upticks.

The US dollar index, which measures the value of the American dollar against a basket of currencies, including the Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc, increased 0.11% to 102.75

SBP revokes 2 exchange companies' licenses

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Bank of Pakistan on Thursday revoked the foreign exchange licenses of M/s. Capital Exchange Company-B (Pvt.) Ltd. and M/s. Gohar Exchange Company-B (Pvt.) Ltd. These companies are not authorized to carry out foreign exchange business.

LCI, NCA collaborate for creative art competition and exhibition

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The National College of Arts (NCA), in collaboration with Lucky Core Industries Limited, hosted a creative art competition and exhibition on the occasion of World Recycling Day. The initiative, titled "Eco-Echoes," aimed to raise awareness about the reuse and recycling of post-consumer PET waste.

Supported by Terylene Clean, Lucky Core Industries' brand of 100% recycled polyester fiber, which is manufactured from post-consumer PET waste, the art competition challenged NCA students to find creative ways to

reuse PET waste and give it new life.

Over 350 students participated in the challenge, and the resulting art installations were exhibited at the College.

The competition and exhibition showcased the talent of NCA students and underscored the importance of collaborations between businesses and academia to help resolve environmental challenges.

Speaking at the event, the Vice-Chancellor of NCA, Prof. Dr. Murtaza Jafri, emphasized the role of responsible waste management in protecting the environment. "The artworks prepared by the students on the occasion of

World Recycling Day make us realize that we have to play a responsible role in protecting the environment around us and the environment of our country. Contamination must be avoided," he said.

"As a responsible manufacturing entity, for Lucky Core Industries, sustainability represents the future. We believe that we must pave a brighter and healthier future for generations to come. The company's mission of improving lives and its philosophy to create shared value and do better by doing good is ingrained not only in its sustainability agenda but also in how we choose to operate and

what we manufacture. Terylene Clean, our brand of 100% recycled polyester fiber, is one example of the company's commitment to sustainability and its pledge to utilize nature and science-based solutions to promote sustainability," said Nauman Afzal, Vice President of Lucky Core Industries Limited's Polyester business.

As part of the initiative, students with the best installations were awarded prizes by Lucky Core Industries Limited.

Furthermore, the company also awarded one-year merit-based scholarships to two talented students.

MMBL signs pact with Careem to offer subsidized travel services



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mobilink Microfinance Bank Limited (MMBL) has entered into a new partnership with Careem, Pakistan's largest ride-hailing service, to provide discounted and subsidized intra as well as inter-city travel services for its employees. The initiative is designed to bring ease and convenience for MMBL employees and their families, enabling them to commute safely and affordably with Careem across Pakistan.

The agreement was signed by President and CEO MMBL, Ghazanfar Azzam and General Manager Careem, Muhammad Imran Saleem at MMBL Headquarters in Islamabad, alongside senior officials from both organizations including Chief Operating Officer (COO) MMBL, Sardar Mohammad Abubakr and Acting Chief People

Officer, Muhammad Haroon Khan. The purpose of the signing is to bring relief to the bank staff, especially in light of the current economic downturn that has triggered a significant surge in the costs of fuel and car maintenance. Additionally, the lack of reliable public transportation in major cities has made commuting a major challenge for many, especially female employees who often face safety concerns, which are expected to be alleviated by the new arrangement.

Going forward, MMBL employees and their families will receive a 15% discount on individual rides all across Pakistan giving the flexibility to the Bank's employees to book rides for any city, any time. Additionally, female employees will have the option to avail pick-and-drop services to and from work and wherever they travel within the city. MMBL employees can also

benefit from subsidized inter-city travel, with the packages including car, driver, fuel, maintenance, toll tax, and in-car snacks.

"Our latest agreement with Careem is focused on the well-being of our people- our most valuable asset," said Ghazanfar Azzam, President and CEO of MMBL. "As the MMBL family continues to grow, so do our efforts for creating ease for them. We realize that many of our employees face challenges while commuting and this initiative will provide them with a hassle-free, comfortable, and safe mode of transportation, in addition to the already offered fuel and transport allowance. We hope that this partnership not only enhances the employee experience at MMBL but also reinforces our commitment to promoting greater empowerment for all team members."

Speaking at the partnership, Muhammad Imran Saleem, General Manager

Careem Pakistan stated, "We are honoured to extend our corporate services to MMBL. Careem for Business is an exclusive solution designed to meet the changing mobility needs of companies. Partnerships like these will certainly help businesses improve the mobility experience for their entire workforce by leveraging our platform- all while providing the highest standards of comfort, reliability, versatility, and cost savings."

In addition to individual services, the subsidized inter-city travel services will cover various destinations across Pakistan, including Islamabad, Lahore, Faisalabad, Jhelum, Abbottabad, Nathia Gali, Bhurban, Peshawar, Sialkot, Multan, Gujranwala, and Hyderabad, for corporate business engagements as well as airport pick & drop facility. MMBL employees can also book a half-day/full-day vehicle for themselves and their families at discounted rates.

This partnership between MMBL and Careem underlines the power of collaboration and innovation as it will create meaningful opportunities for both companies to work together and provide innovative solutions that meet the needs of their customers nationwide.

Asian markets mixed as traders weigh rates outlook

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets were mixed Thursday following a recent run-up, with banking sector worries easing and traders weighing central banks' interest rate plans in the wake of the recent turmoil.

Investors have taken heart from reassurances by authorities around the world that the fallout from the collapse of US regional banks and the takeover of Credit Suisse was contained.

But the flare-up has also fanned speculation the Federal Reserve will have to end its inflation-fighting rate hike campaign sooner than expected in order to avoid further destabilising the finance industry.

That has even led to bets on officials cutting borrowing costs by the end of the year -- some forecasts put the rate at just above four percent by 2024, compared with more than five prior to the recent upheaval.

That has focused eyes on the Fed's next policy meeting, with observers predicting that could mark the last increase, even though inflation is still much higher than its target. "The Fed remains in a very difficult position," said Wolfe Research's Chris Senyck.

"With banks stabilising, inflation still way above target, the labour market still historically strong, and the Fed desperately needing to rebuild credibility, our

sense is that the (policy board) will hike by 25 basis points on May 3."

There is a feeling the latest woes among banks, which have been blamed on recent sharp hikes in rates, will force them to tighten credit, reducing the need for the Fed to hike further.

SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes said: "The good news for stocks is that growth concerns have moved into the driver's seat after the recent banking shock, where investors are now positioning for the Fed to cut and instead rely on credit tightening to tame inflation. "Indeed, speculative money is now betting... (that) the disinflationary impulse from tighter credit

will reduce the need for monetary policymakers to slow the economy through rate hikes, which could potentially even cause the Fed to cut."

All three main indexes on Wall Street rose at least one percent, but Asia struggled to build on that.

Hong Kong dipped, even though Alibaba extended its gains after giving 12 percent Wednesday on news it intends to split into six units.

On Thursday, it said it would consider giving up control of some of its main businesses. The announcement this week lifted China's tech sector on hopes a long-running crackdown was nearing its endgame.



In brief

Shahid inspect sports facilities

LAHORE (APP): Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs Punjab Shahid Zaman visited several sports venues and inspected different available and under construction sports facilities in Gujranwala on Thursday. Divisional Sports Officer Gujranwala Manzar Fareed Shah, PMU officers and all district and tehsil sports officers of Gujranwala were also present on this occasion. Divisional Sports Officer Gujranwala Manzar Fareed Shah gave a thorough briefing on different sports facilities while PMU officers briefed Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs Punjab Shahid Zaman about the sports infrastructure of Gujranwala. First of all, Secretary Sports Punjab visited the ongoing ADP Scheme Wrestling Complex Gujranwala. He inspected different areas of the Wrestling Complex. After this, Shahid Zaman visited Mini Stadium Sheikhupura Road, Gujranwala and Jinnah Cricket Stadium, Gujranwala and inspected different parts of both sports venues.

KPT 6-red Snooker Tournament-2023

KARACHI (APP): The Sports department of Karachi Port Trust is organizing "KPT 6-Red Snooker Tournament-2023" at KPT Sports Complex from March 31 to April 13 at 8:30pm to 01am. Total 32 players will participate in the sports event, 16 from Sindh and 16 players from clubs of Karachi. The KPT's General Manager (A) Brigadier Tariq Bashir will be the chief guest at the opening ceremony on March 31, at 9 pm. The tournament will be held on a knock-out basis.

Marinica lashes out at home fans

LONDON (BBC): Malawi head coach Mario Marinica has lashed out at the country's fans for showing more support for visiting Egypt and their "superstars" than the home team during their Africa Cup of Nations (Acon) qualifier in Lilongwe. Malawi lost 4-0 to Egypt on Tuesday - a result which leaves the Flames on the verge of missing out on qualification for next year's finals in Ivory Coast. Marinica says Malawi's task against the seven-time Acon champions was made all the tougher because of an unpatriotic crowd. "Let's just say, I don't think Malawi loves Malawi, it's as simple as that," Marinica told reporters. "When we came out they cheered for Egypt - they didn't cheer for Malawi. The Malawi national team is Malawi against everyone, because they [the fans] didn't seem to like us." Malawi had already lost their Group D game in Egypt 2-0 on Friday night, with Liverpool star Mohamed Salah on the scoresheet. Salah was again on target in Malawi - much to the delight, it seems, of the Malawi fans, with Marinica saying the home crowd backed the wrong team. "When the players came out, and you have a home hero like Gabadinho [Mhangol], the fans didn't cheer. They cheered for Mo Salah and the others." The back-to-back defeats against Egypt leave Malawi third in Group D, six points adrift of joint leaders Egypt and Guinea with two rounds of Nations Cup qualifiers remaining. Marinica says it is now time to rebuild the national team after one of their worst home defeats in recent years.

Shaheen Shah to join Notts for T20 Blast



LONDON (Cricinfo): Nottinghamshire have signed Pakistan fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi for their 2023 Vitality Blast campaign. Afridi will join Colin Munro as one of the club's two T20 overseas players. Last season, Nottinghamshire missed out on qualification for the Blast for the first time since 2015, and head coach, Peter Moores, hailed Afridi as a "box-office player" who could help reinvigorate the club, T20 champions in 2017 and 2020. "In Shaheen, we've got a world class player - which is really exciting - and a player with a point of dif-

ference with the ball, which is crucial when we are looking to recruit," Moores said. "We are building from a strong platform, with a lot of very talented lads hungry to play T20, and Shaheen adds star quality and a different angle to that group. He has proven himself on big stages; he is fiercely passionate in the way he plays his cricket, and he'll be hugely engaging for everyone to watch for that reason." "We want to bounce back from last year's campaign, and this signing invigorates the club; he makes impacts in big games, and is a box office player. Alongside Munro, who is one of the top run-

scorers in the history of the format, we've got two very unique talents, both of whom will play a big role for us as we look to bring back silverware."

Afridi, 22, recently captained Lahore Qalandars to the second of back-to-back PSL titles. He has had previous spells in county cricket with Middlesex and Hampshire, and was signed last week by Welsh Fire to appear in the Hundred.

"Notts play an aggressive brand of cricket, which suits me well," Afridi said. "They've had great success in recent years and the likes of Alex Hales, Colin Munro and Joe Clarke are players I have faced up against in recent years and been impressed by. "The goal is obviously to influence games to make the team as successful as possible. Having played at Trent Bridge, I know it is a fast-scoring ground and as a bowler you need to get your line and lengths right, but you also get the rewards when you do that."

"It's definitely an exciting move for me, and one I'm looking forward to."

Murray, Norrie among British players at Cinch Championships

LONDON (BBC): Andy Murray and Cameron Norrie are among 10 British players named in the line-up for the Cinch Championships at Queen's Club this summer.

Five-time champion Murray, 2021 finalist Norrie, Dan Evans and Jack Draper are in the singles, while Neal Skupski, Joe Salisbury, Lloyd Glasspool and Jamie Murray will play doubles.

Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid will feature in the wheelchair draws.

The pre-Wimbledon tournament takes place from 19-25 June.

Men's singles world number one Carlos Alcaraz

will make his debut at Queen's while defending champion Matteo Berrettini, Taylor Fritz and Frances Tiafoe have also confirmed their participation. Berrettini defeated world number 12 Norrie in three sets in 2021, before defending his title against Serbia's Filip Krajinovic last year.

In Alcaraz, Skupski and Hewett, the line-up includes the current world number one in the singles, doubles and wheelchair rankings.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray, who is the only Briton to win the Queen's title in the Open era, said: "It's always a

great week at the Cinch Championships, playing at the Queen's Club with British fans.

"Obviously I have a lot of special memories there so I'm really looking forward to returning this year."

The Premier League has tightened its ownership rules to block anyone found to have committed human rights abuses from running a club. Human rights abuses, as determined by the UK's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations, is a new "disqualifying event" in the English top-flight's owners' and directors' test.

Individuals subject to UK government sanctions will also be banned.

Ramadan Squash Training Camp for different age groups begins in the city

PESHAWAR (APP): The Annual Ramadan Squash Training Camp got underway for different age groups here at PAF Hashim Khan Squash Complex on Thursday. President KP Squash Association Dawood Khan, Vice President Pakistan Squash Federation and former World Champion Qamar Zaman, Secretary Mansoor Zaman, qualified coaches including Munawar Zaman, Muhammad Waseem, players from different age groups, and officials were also present.

Ramadan training camp organized by Provincial Squash Association at Hashim Khan Squash

Complex in Peshawar, which includes players from U-8 to U-12 years of age and taught them the techniques in practice. Along with him, the Joint Secretary of the Provincial Squash Association and the referee Manoor Zaman, other squash coaches and officials were there during their training in two sessions in the morning and afternoon.

Squash legend Qamar Zaman while talking to the media men said that like every year, Ramadan squash training camp has been started in which qualified PAF coaches are providing training to the players while they themselves are supervising

this training camp and giving lectures to the players and also giving them practical training to master various strokes including modern techniques. PAF Director Sports and other officials are fully supporting the association during the training camp, Qamar Zaman said.

The players are being provided with all the best facilities, he added. Training will be given and they will be prepared for the competitions in future. He said that the training camp has been kept open for different age groups of players, but special focus has been given to the age group 8 years to 12 years.

Miami Open 2023 Sorana Cirstea stuns Aryna Sabalenka to reach semi-finals

MIAMI (BBC): World number two Aryna Sabalenka suffered a surprise straight-set defeat as Romania's Sorana Cirstea earned the biggest win of her career to reach the Miami Open semi-finals. Cirstea, 32, beat the Australian Open champion 6-4 6-4 to record her first win over a top-three ranked opponent.

The unseeded Cirstea will play Petra Kvitova or Ekaterina Alexandrova in her first last-four appearance at a WTA 1000 event for nearly 10 years.

"I'm a bit speechless," she said. Speaking in her on-court interview, the world number 74 added: "I came out knowing it would be a really tough match. Aryna hits so hard so I knew I had to hold my ground."

"I'm very happy with my performance today. It's a bit unexpected to be honest." Cirstea, the only unseeded player to make the last eight of the women's draw, is yet to drop a set in a five-match streak in Miami which has also seen her eliminate world number four Caroline Garcia.

She has shown impressive form at the Sunshine Double, losing out to world number one Iga Swiatek in her first Indian Wells quarter-final earlier this month.

Cirstea's latest statement success took her to a second WTA 1000 semi-final, having finished runner-up to Serena Williams at Toronto in 2013.

Sabalenka, 24, responded after Cirstea broke serve in the opening game of both sets.

But on both occasions it was the



Belarusian's opponent who was able to reset, before managing to overcome two break points as Cirstea served for the match - and inflicted just a third defeat on Sabalenka in 23 matches this year.

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, ranked seventh, will meet American world number three Jessica Pegula in the other semi-final, with a new women's champion guaranteed in Miami. Only Kazakh Rybakina, with 12, has won more WTA 1000 main-draw matches in 2023 than Cirstea. The Romanian is the first player ranked outside the top 50 to win as many as nine matches at the Sunshine Double in the same year.

In the men's draw, Italian 10th seed Jannik Sinner overcame a two-hour rain delay to advance to the semi-finals. Sinner, 21, is still yet to lose a

set in Miami and he was eventually able to earn a comfortable 6-3 6-1 victory to await either world number one Carlos Alcaraz or ninth seed Taylor Fritz in the last four.

Canada's Bianca Andreescu says she has torn two ligaments in her left ankle after withdrawing from her fourth-round match against Russia's Alexandrova on Monday.

The former US Open champion left the court in a wheelchair, in obvious pain after falling during the second set. "It's tough to say exactly how long it will take, but let's just say it could've been much worse!" she tweeted. "I'm going to take it day-by-day and I'm optimistic that with the right work, rehab and preparation I'll be back on court soon."

"Rehab process has already started and will continue to give updates."

Yorkshire signs Saud Shakeel for County C'ship Season

ISLAMABAD (APP): Yorkshire County Cricket Club has signed the talented Pakistan batsman, Saud Shakeel, as a replacement for the injured Neil Wagner for the early part of the County Championship season.

Wagner was ruled out of the competition due to a bulging disc in his back and a torn right hamstring that he sustained during New Zealand's Test duty earlier this month.

The 27-year-old, who made his Test debut last winter against England and New Zealand, had a stunning start to his international career by scoring 50s in each of his first five appearances and averaging 72.5 in the process.

Saud might make his debut for Yorkshire in their first Division Two fixture against Leicestershire at Headingley on Thursday. However, the player's availability was contingent on the processing of his visa, which may cause some delay. Yorkshire's top six would be bolstered by the inclusion of Saud, who brings additional strength to the team. However, there was a chance that the new club captain and Pakistan cricketer, Shan Masood, may not be available for the initial rounds of the Championship action.

Shan was a non-playing member of the Pakistan T20I squad that recently lost 2-1 to Afghanistan in Sharjah. He is also in contention for selection in Pakistan's upcoming five-match home series against New Zealand in T20 and one-day internationals from April 14. If Masood was not chosen for national duty, he would join the team in time for their first season outside of the top flight since 2012, quoted cricketpak-istan.com.pk.

New hockey stadium a beautiful masterpiece of architecture: Wahab Riaz

MULTAN (APP): Adviser to Punjab Chief Minister on Sports and Youth Affairs, Wahab Riaz, said the newly built Astroturf hockey stadium in the city was a beautiful masterpiece of architecture. He expressed these views while inspecting various projects during his visit to the city.

Wahab Riaz, who is also a former fast bowler said that various players from

Multan have always been prominent in the sports field and added that maximum sports facilities were being extended here.

Divisional Sports Officer Rana Nadeem Anjum while giving a briefing said that there was a lot of sports talent in the area adding that sports grounds with the best facilities are being prepared in the city. While appreciating the

ongoing uplift projects in Multan, Sports Advisor expressed hope that the players from this region would bring laurels to the country in future like in the past. Wahab Riaz also planted a sapling in the hockey stadium. On this occasion, Director Youth Affairs Punjab Umair Hassan, district sports officer Farooq Latif and Asif Nadeem from PMU were present.

Lewis says it 'could take a long time' for Mercedes to compete with Red Bull

LONDON (BBC): Lewis Hamilton says "it could take a long time" before Mercedes can compete again with Red Bull.

Mercedes have started a process of redesigning their car having started a second consecutive season off the pace. But the seven-time champion said: "It is going to take us the rest of the year to potentially close that gap."

His team-mate George Russell added: "I am not going to say we are terribly optimistic. We recognise Red Bull are a second down the road at the moment."

Red Bull have dominated the start of the season, taking two one-two finishes in the first two races, and are clear favourites again at this weekend's Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne.

Briton Hamilton said: "If you look at the Red Bull, it is just going to continue to

evolve most likely.

"Some cars do plateau in terms of performance. At some point it can't just keep going. But maybe it can."

"They have a great team around them and I am sure they will continue to add downforce. "We just have to make sure when we do make the change hopefully the drop isn't too far and hopefully it is going to take us the rest of the year for sure to potentially close that gap." Hamilton opened up on his struggles with the Mercedes car and how he feels uncomfortable with the positioning of the cockpit. He said: "I don't know if people know, but we sit closer to the front wheels than all the other drivers. Our cockpit is too close to the front."

"When you're driving, you feel like you're sitting on the front wheels, which is one of the worst feelings to feel when you're driving

a car. "If you were driving your car at home and you pulled the wheels right underneath your legs, you would not be happy when you're approaching the roundabout."

"What that does is it really changes the attitude of the car and how you perceive its movement. And it makes it harder to predict compared to when you're further back and sitting more centred. It is just something I have really struggled with."

The 38-year-old also expanded on comments he made after the first race of the season in which he said the engineers "didn't listen" to him with regard to the design of this year's car.

"I listened to the team and that was the direction they said we should go," he said. "Had I known the feeling I would have in it, it wouldn't have happened."

Is the ICC's pitch-rating system fit for purpose?

LONDON (Cricinfo): No other sport obsesses quite as much as cricket over the surfaces on which it is played. Pitches are not only a perennial object of fascination but also the subject of controversy. Take the preliminaries for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, with the usual dance of pre-emptive suspicion and defensiveness. A bullish Ravi Shastri called for pitches that turned from the outset, and Ian Healy talked up Australia's chances thus: "I think if they produce fair Indian wickets that are good batting wickets to begin with... we win. If they're unfair wickets ... then I think India play those conditions better than us."

Then the covers came off in Nagpur and it was apparent that the pitch had been selectively watered, mowed and rolled, and that this "differential preparation" - which left bare patches outside the left-handers' off stump on a spinner's length at both ends - had ostensibly been tailored to suit the home team, who had one leftie in the top seven to the visitors' four, and two left-arm spinners to the visitors' none. Australia's players

maintained a strategic silence, but was this pushing home advantage too far?

The match referee, Andy Pycroft, ultimately decided that the pitch was not worthy of sanction, yet questions around pitch preparation were nevertheless again brought into sharp focus. In the age of bilateral series, with World Test Championship points on the line, will pitch-doctoring become an ever greater temptation, as Rahul Dravid observed recently? And, more broadly, what is a "good" or "fair" pitch, and how is it determined?

The ICC's Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process was introduced in 2006 and updated in January 2018 in an effort, they say, to reflect the variety of conditions worldwide and make member boards more accountable for the pitches they produce, as well as to introduce greater transparency in the rating of pitches.

One of six potential ratings applies to both pitch and outfield for each game: very good, good, average, below average, poor and unfit, with the bottom three incurring demerit points (1, 3

and 5 respectively for the pitch, 0, 2 and 5 for the outfield). Pick up five demerit points in a rolling five-year period and your ICC ground accreditation is suspended for 12 months. Pick up ten and it is two years without international cricket. Hugely consequential for the local association, perhaps less so for the national board. In situations where a pitch underperforms, match referees must consult umpires and captains before assigning a rating.

A pitch is deemed to be "below average" if there is "either very little carry and/or bounce and/or more than occasional seam movement, or occasional variable (but not excessive or dangerous) bounce and/or occasional variable carry". Fine, but how do you determine this?

A pitch is deemed "poor" if it "does not allow an even contest between bat and ball", whether that favours batters or bowlers. The ICC's guidance goes on to invoke "excessive seam movement", "excessive unevenness of bounce", "excessive assistance to spin bowlers, especially early in the match" and "little or no

seam movement or turn at any stage in the match together with no significant bounce or carry" as well as "excessive dryness" and "excessive moistness". Fine, but how exactly do you determine all that?

The notes for "clarification" in Appendix A to the ICC's literature for the ratings tell us that "Excessive means 'too much'". Sure, but how exactly do you measure that?

Too much is left to interpretation in the pitch-marking process.

The truth is that it is rare for pitches to be given any of the bottom three marks. From the men's World Cup in July 2019 to the end of 2022, only six Test pitches out of 135 (and one outfield) were given a "below average" rating, five of them in 2022. Two of 2022's "below average" marks were for Rawalpindi. The first was given by Ranjan Madugalle when Australia's visit in March produced 14 wickets across the five days for 1187 runs. The second was given by Pycroft after England's visit last December, although this was subsequently overturned on appeal, which is heard by the chair of the ICC's Cricket Committee, currently Sourav Ganguly, and the ICC

general manager for cricket, currently Wasim Khan, the former CEO of the Pakistan Cricket Board. How did they arrive at this judgement? The official explanation was that, "having reviewed footage of the Test Match, the ICC appeal panel [...] were unanimous in their opinion that, while the guidelines had been followed by the Match Referee [...] there were several redeeming features - including the fact that a result was achieved following a compelling game, with 37 out of a possible 39 wickets being taken. As such, the appeal panel concluded that the wicket did not warrant the 'below average' rating."

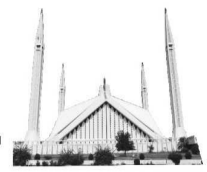
This is a curious logic. Ben Stokes' team scored at a historically unprecedented rate (921 runs at 6.73 runs per over) to "put time back into the game", thus drastically increasing the chance that wickets would be lost (every 43.2 balls to Pakistan's 75.6), and they won with just ten minutes' light remaining on the fifth evening. It is almost certain that England's strategy was devised after contemplating the Australia Test match in March. Is the ICC saying that such a pitch is ade-

quate provided the Bazball approach is adopted?

When approached, in the spirit of transparency, about exactly how much of the match footage was reviewed, the ICC would only refer to the press release.

According to the pitch-ratings guidelines, an "average" pitch "lacks carry, and/or bounce and/or occasional seam movement, but [is] consistent in carry and bounce". Fine, but consistency is a property determined by frequency, and adjudicating on this implies one would watch the whole game - that is, have the full data set, as would a match referee - to be able to assess how regularly deliveries misbehaved. Was this done by the appeal panel?

What emerges from all this is a sense that the process for marking pitches contains too much "interpretative latitude" in the criteria, and as such, lacks empirical robustness - borne out by how the judgement of a person who watched an entire game (and, presumably, consulted umpires and captains, as per ICC protocol) can be overturned by those who did not.



In brief

IRSA releases 62,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 62,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 43,500 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1425.80 feet and was 27.80 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 17,800 cusecs while outflow was 6,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1098.00 feet, which was 48.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded at 16,800 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur has been recorded at 21,700, 42,700, 36,300, and 7,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 15,600 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 4,400 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

Police arrest 15 gamblers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district Police arrested 15 gamblers and recovered Rs 90,650 stake money, 13 mobile phones, six quails, two motorcycles and valuables from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that Mandra police conducted a raid and arrested eight gamblers namely Younas, Bilal, Zumrad, Zahid, Hassan, Nadeem, Nawaz and Imran, who were allegedly involved in betting over quail fight. In another raid, Saddar Wah police rounded up seven namely Khurram, Sajid, Adnan, Mazhar, Mehfuz, Usama and Sudheer, allegedly involved in betting while playing cards and recovered Rs 75,800, six mobile phones, two motorcycles and cards. Separate cases have been registered against them while further investigations are under process. Divisional Superintendents of Police said that gambling is the root cause of other evils and those involved in such crimes do not deserve any concession.

Police arrest 20 anti-social elements

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police in their ongoing operations against anti-social elements managed to arrest 20 and recovered over five kg charras, 10 bottles of liquor, five 30 bore pistols, Rs 137,000 cash and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that Pirwadhai, Taxila and Kahuta police rounded up three accused namely Basit, Atta ur Rehman and Imran and recovered three 30 bore pistols and ammunition from their possession. Waris Khan police held Jawad for having 1760 grams charras while Airport police rounded up Adnan with 1360 grams charras, Taxila, Mandra, and Kahuta police arrested Ahsan with 300 grams charras, Abdul Latif for carrying 560 grams charras and Imran for possessing 1150 grams charras. Jatli and Kalar Syedan police nabbed Munir and Ali Akbar for having 10 bottles of liquor. Saddar Wah police busted a gang of street criminals and arrested three accused including ringleader namely Farooq Khan, Hayat and Atta ur Rehman. Police also recovered Rs 137,000 cash, weapons and other items from their possession. Naseerabad police nabbed two proclaimed offenders, Nazakat and Jahangir, wanted in a murder and attempt to murder case.



RAWALPINDI: A large number of people standing in queue to be registered for getting free flour bags under Ramadan package at Liaquat Bagh.

Federal hospitals asked to ensure dengue protection measures

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination has directed all federal hospitals and clinics to make all necessary arrangements to manage dengue cases.

According to an official of the ministry, a letter has been written to the heads of federal health establishments in this regard by the ministry and directed them to take special measures.

He said that all hospitals have been asked to ensure the allocation of a substantial number of beds in wards including isolated wards as per standard operating procedures.

Similarly, hospitals' heads have been directed to ensure the availability of all required staff and screening and testing facilities along with medicines and other required needs for dengue treatment and prevention.

Meanwhile, Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Abdul Qadir Patel directed to utilize all available resources to manage dengue cases in all four provinces along with Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

He said that these measures were necessary to protect citizens and ensure free treatment services for dengue patients.

Admin foils three bids to smuggle 2850 flour bags

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police here on Thursday foiled three bids to smuggle 2850 flour and fine flour (maida) bags.

According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the food department along with Mandra police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up three drivers namely Ali Saqib, Asadullah and Safian and recovered 2850 flour and fine flour bags from their possession.

He informed that the accused were trying to smuggle flour and fine flour bags out of Rawalpindi division.

The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi were strictly monitoring all the exit points of Rawalpindi district to foil wheat and flour smuggling bids, he added. He said, dozens of bids were foiled during last week and teams recovered thousands wheat, flour and fine flour (maida) bags from the possession of arrested accused.

People appreciate Radio Pakistan's special transmission

ISLAMABAD (APP): People across the country have appreciated Radio Pakistan's special Ramadan transmission 'Pegham-e-Ramazan' harmonized with modern trends of broadcasting apart from spreading information related to the ongoing holy month.

Hundreds of telephone calls from listeners are received daily in the transmission, said a press release issued here on Thursday. Taking part in the transmission, religious scholar Dr Muhammad Tayyab Nadeem called Ramadan a practical exercise of religious teachings.

Health expert Dr. Anila Rehman said Ramadan was the perfect time to ditch any bad habits, like smoking and sugary food.

Muhammad Waqas Qadri presented Naat Rasool Maqbool SAWW.

People can participate in the live transmission by calling 051-9208940 from 5 pm to 9 pm.

Shahida dispels impression of closing construction work

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Communication Shahida Akhtar Ali on Thursday dispelled the impression that construction work on important projects of Upper and Lower Chitral had been closed.

Responding to a calling attention notice regarding closure of construction work on important projects of Upper and Lower Chitral, she said, "The impression is totally wrong, construction work on the projects is slow due to harsh weather and non-availability of funds."

However, she said, her ministry was also worried and had written to the department concerned for the release of the funds for the projects.

About the Chitral-Shandur road infrastructure project, she said, it would be completed by December next year.

She said, for the project about Rs 1200 million had been allocated.

She regretted that the project was neglected by the previous government.

MNA Mohsin Dawar strongly condemned the attack on a police station in Lakki Marwat that resulted in the martyrdom of three personnel including a Deputy Superintendent of Police.

He paid tribute to DSP Headquarters Iqbal Mohmand, and Sepoys Waqar, Marjan and Karamat who laid down their lives in the line of duty. He said the police were playing a wonderful role as the first line of defence against terrorism. On the request of the Deputy Speaker Zahid Akram Durrani, the House offered Fatiha. The Fathiya was led by Moulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali. The speaker also sought the report of the incident.

Commissioner visits free flour distribution points

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Thursday visited the free flour distribution centres set up at Adiala Road, Naseerabad and Liaquat Bagh and checked the flour delivery process. During the visit, Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali was also with him. The Commissioner and RPO reviewed and checked the arrangements for the supply of flour to the citizens. They also checked the quality of the flour and the weight of the bags.

The Commissioner expressed satisfaction over the presence of the duty officers and the seating arrangements for men and women who came to get flour. The flour supply had been increased at all free flour points and flour was available in sufficient quantity, he said adding, the citizens should show patience and cooperate with the administration.

The Punjab government took the initiative to provide relief to the poor and deserving families, he added. "I am personally monitoring the flour delivery process and negligence on part of the officials will not be tolerated," he said.

The supply of free flour would continue till the 25th of Ramadan and no deserving family would be deprived of this facility of the government, he informed.

For the registration of all unregistered people in the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), a free shuttle service had also been started from all the free flour points to the office of the BISP, he said.

The shuttle service was a good initiative of the administration which had been started for the convenience of the people, he added. The Commissioner also encouraged the officials posted at the points and advised them to leave no stone unturned to ensure all possible help and services to deserving persons.

Pakistan can earn carbon credits through plantation, reforestation: Meher Kashif

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis Thursday said Pakistan can earn carbon credits through plantation, reforestation, various green covers, solar and wind power, controlling methane emissions from livestock and paddy fields and other activities that control Green House Gas (GHG) emissions.

Speaking at a workshop on "Pakistan And Greenhouse Gases" here today held under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, he said Carbon trading offers emerging and innovative trade and business opportunities to the developing countries including

Pakistan which can earn dollars for controlling the greenhouse gas emissions.

He said in addition, all the hydro, biogas, plantation and other such green businesses can bring dollars on a very fast track, provided the focal ministry is proactive and willing to facilitate and support such strategic initiatives. He said Pakistan has successfully completed a carbon credit earning project and the government of Sindh has already earned carbon credits for the mangrove forests and got the first tranche of \$14.75 million last year which may swell to \$24-25 million in the next five years and this increase will continue for the 60-year pledge period.

Expert calls for raising awareness on colorectal cancer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Health expert on Thursday called for awareness to avoid the 'western diet' for reducing increasing incidents of colorectal cancer.

He also urged all stakeholders to play their role in highlighting that the disease was entirely curable if diagnosed early. A senior consultant and gastroenterologist Dr Maaz Bin Badshah while talking to the PTV news channel explained that colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer often develops as abnormal growths in the colon or rectum. "Early screening can play an important role in detecting the disease," he

said, adding that people could lower their risk by increasing physical activity, avoiding tobacco, and incorporating fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains in their diets.

Screening should start earlier in individuals who have a history of colon cancer/polyps in the family or inflammatory bowel disease, Dr Maaz said, adding, there were a number of screening options available and a physician could advise best about the most suitable screening test for an individual. Poor nutrition profiles, ultra-processed foods which commonly contain food additives such

as dietary emulsifiers and artificial sweeteners were the main cause behind the growth of this cancer, he mentioned.

Replying to a question, he said every year, March was observed as Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, adding, "this cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer-related death in men and women respectively".

It was high time to aware our masses about this under-reported issue, Dr Maaz said, adding, regular screening could reduce the risk of developing malignancy, especially for those who had a family history of colorectal cancer.

HEC announces research award competition 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has invited Pakistani researchers/scholars to submit applications for HEC Research Awards competition. According to official sources from HEC, the objective of these awards was to recognise excellence in research, and contributions to intellectual development and for promoting high-impact publications.

As per award categories, the awards will be given in three categories i.e Best Researcher, Best Young Researcher and Best Publication (with special emphasis to submit research publications on the constitution of Pakistan in view of the Golden Jubilee of 1973 Constitution of Pakistan). Sharing the details of eligibility criteria, the sources said that the applicant had never been black-listed by HEC and had not received the same award earlier.

None of the publications on applicant/authors' credit was plagiarized as per HEC plagiarism policy.

Meanwhile, according to the Best Researcher category, the applicant must be a resident of Pakistan for at least three years on January 1, 2023. However, in the Best Young Researcher category, the applicant must be under 40 years of age on January 1, 2023, and be a resident of Pakistan for at least one year on January 1, 2023. HEC said that the publication must be a scholarly book or journal article published not more than three years before January

1, 2023, adding it must be written by no more than three authors, who have been residents of Pakistan for at least three years on January 1, 2023.

Research articles must only be published in a W-category journal in HEC Journal Recognition System (HJRS), with a minimum citation count of 100, the sources added.

However, publications (including an extended version of a paper) that were previously submitted for the same category of the award are not eligible for resubmission. Whereas, books must be published by a recognized academic press. The deadline to apply for the competition is April 26 (Wednesday), the sources informed, adding applications must be submitted via HEC online portal.

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10 held, huge amount of drugs recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in eight different operations against drug peddlers, arrested ten drug peddlers and recovered over 244 kg of drugs from their possession, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that ANF foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from Peshawar to Punjab and recovered 90 kg hashish, 33.6 kg opium, and 12 kg heroin from a car besides netting three accused.

In another operation at Islamabad International Airport, ANF recovered 508 grams of heroin from the possession of a Jeddah-bound passenger, a resident of Sargodha. Heroin was concealed in the laptop. In the third operation near Sahianwala Interchange Toll Plaza Faisalabad, ANF recovered 32.4 kg opium and 19.2 kg hashish from secret cavities of a car and arrested an accused, a resident of Khyber. Around 280 grams of heroin booked for London at the private courier company office, Lahore International

Airport was also seized.

In two different operations at Karachi International Airport, 1.2 kg heroin was recovered from the possession of a Dubai-bound passenger, a resident of Swat, and 128 grams of intoxicated tablet powder with 620 grams of suspicious material from the possession of a Sharjah-bound passenger, a resident of Rahim Yar Khan.

The spokesman said ANF while conducting a raid near Karachi Main Super Highway recovered 50.4 kg hashish and arrested an accused, a resident of Quetta.

In the eighth operation, ANF recovered over 4.1 kg of Ice drug from a parcel reached at Karachi M.A Jinnah Road Bus Stop from Rawalpindi. Two accused were also held during the operation.

The spokesman informed that both the accused were also involved in other drug smuggling cases.

He said, "Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are in process."

'Governments be enabled to adopt digitalization for effective governance'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Executive Director COMSATS, Ambassador Dr. Nafees Zakaria urged that governments should adopt digitalization as citizen centric national policy for efficient and effective governance.

He was addressing the 22nd Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), which is a technical advisory body of the UN responsible for supporting the work of its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) concerning the promotion and development of public administration and governance among Member States particularly in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in support of the implementation and review



progress of SDGs.

The Executive Director COMSATS was invited to share expert views on 'Stimulating public sector innovation through digital technology and measuring the impact of digital government. The thematic session, 'Urgently transforming institutions for a green, more inclusive and more resilient world at a time of multiple crises, was held yesterday at UN Headquarters, New York. Referring to the imminent

economic crisis, Ambassador Zakaria said that the real challenge would be how we use technology to lessen its impact. He suggested that digitalization should be pursued by the governments as a national policy initiative. He noted that digitalization helped a great deal during the Pandemic COVID19, and that it bridged the work gap created by mandatory social distancing and isolation by transforming remote working to put the

global economy back on track to a great extent.

Noting the widening technological gap and the capacity between the developed and developing countries, he suggested joint efforts to bridge knowledge, technology and resource gap. He remarked that COMSATS is pursuing the objective of self-reliance by way of exploiting the knowledge and scientific strengths of the COMSATS member states. He also informed the gathering that COMSATS has launched and executed successful transformation citizen-centric programs that enable and improve collaboration between citizens, government entities, and relevant private sector industry participants, and that COMSATS is open to partnership.

Drug factory destroyed

SAR-I-PUL (Agencies): The counter-narcotics officers have discovered and destroyed a drug factory in the capital of Sar-e-Pul province. The provincial police officials said that the provincial Counter-Narcotics Department officers have discovered and destroyed a drug lab in the Tark-Chen village in the capital of the province. According to the source, 1,800 kilograms of materials used in the production of narcotics and drug equipment have been seized and torched.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 09, 1444 — Friday, March 31, 2023

30 factories closed

TAKHAR (Agencies): 30 production factories, including "Salt Refining and Zaghar cooking Oil Production" factories were closed, for violations of laws in Takhar. 16 salt refining and 14 cooking oil production factories in Talaqhan the capital of Takhar closed for lack of operating permits, non-compliance with health laws and non-compliance with environmental sanitation, said Dr. Abdul Qahar Ahmadi, the head of public health in Takhar.

UN slams IEA govt over arrest of women's rights activist

KABUL (Khaama Press): The UN Human Rights Office, OHCHR, expressed deep concerns over the ongoing arbitrary arrests including the recent detention of girls' education activist, journalists and media workers by the Taliban.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on the de facto authorities of Afghanistan to immediately release the activists detained for advocating for women's rights.

OHCHR Spokesperson Jeremy Laurence said in a statement, "No one should be detained for speaking out in defense of their fundamental rights and the rights of others."

Since the start of 2023, the Taliban authorities have arrested several civil socie-

ty activists, journalists and women's rights advocates for speaking up about their fundamental rights and the rights of others.

On March 27, unidentified men arrested Matiullah Wesa, head of PenPath, a civil society organization campaigning to reopen girls' education, whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Following Wesa's detention, the UN Human Rights Office, and other rights groups have repeatedly called on the ruling regime to release the education activist, however, no progress has been seen in this regard so far.

"Other activists and journalists have also been detained with no clear information as to their whereabouts, well-being or any charges against

them. Among those held are Nargis Sadat, Zakaria Osuli, Sultan Ali Ziaee, Khairullah Parhar and Mortaza Behboudi," according to the OHCHR website.

Since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, the group has deepened restrictions on journalists, media and social activists, according to which individuals or groups are not allowed to criticize the ruling regime or speak against the Taliban members.

Afghanistan is a party to the international human rights treaties under which the de facto authorities are obliged to respect and ensure the rights to freedom of expression, opinion and freedom of peaceful assembly, as well as to provide access to education and work.

Campaign begins to destroy poppy fields

HERAT (TOLOnews): Local officials said that a campaign to destroy poppy fields has started in Herat that will be conducted in each village in the province by Islamic Emirate forces.

The campaign begins at a time when poppy fields' harvest season is approaching.

"Our operation is underway and hundreds of acres of land have been cleared of poppy in different districts," said Hayatullah Rouhani, head of the counter narcotics department of Herat.

Special Forces accompany the employees of the counter-narcotics office to ensure the security of the campaign to destroy poppy fields, officials said.

"We will accompany the employees of the counter-narcotics department in Herat province," said Mohammad Asif Mohammadi, head of the special force of the counter-narcotics office.

Meanwhile, farmers called on the government to help them by providing alternative crops for poppy cultivation.

Minister seeks justice against 'war crimes committed' in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): Countries that have committed war crimes in Afghanistan in the last four decades and have killed Afghans under various names should be sent to the International Criminal Court, said Khalil Rahman Haqqani, the Acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation.

Addressing an event of aid distribution in Pakia province, Haqqani said that some countries are still trying to create problems for Afghanistan.

"The former Soviet government and all its slaves, whether they are inside the country or outside, America's NATO, including the countries that destroyed Afghanistan, they are responsible for this today. They should respond to Afghans and should be brought before the international court," Haqqani stated.

Meanwhile, analysts said that an impartial investigation of war crimes in Afghanistan is essential.



"International courts can bring those countries that have committed war crimes to justice, but most of the countries that have intervened in Afghanistan and came to occupy have some

documentations that they have made some protocols with then governments and they have come on the basis

of those protocols," said political analyst Aziz Maarij.

"Sadly, during the past forty years, Afghanistan has been invaded by both regional and other countries. The International Criminal Court has the authority to look into war crime cases involving

countries that are United Nations members on a global scale," said Hamid Aziz Mujaddidi, an analyst in political affairs.

The acting minister of refugees and repatriation said he considers unity among the people essential to support the current government.

MoMP called for start work of Mes Aynak



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Mines and Petroleum Minister Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, in meeting with the Deputy Director of Mes Aynak Project (MJAM) contractor company, called for the start of practical work of the

project.

The two sides, discussed on the subjects related to the Mes Aynak project and the onset of the practical work of this project, according to the Ministry's statement.

Minister Delawar, called for the start of prac-

tical work of the Mes Aynak project, said that there is overall security in the country and the security of the M project has also been ensured.

He reminded saying, that the company should start conducting this project as soon as possible.

MoD repaired of different types of arms

KABUL (Agencies): A technical team of the Ministry of Defense repaired 1050 different types of weapons.

The technical team of the workshops of the 205th Army Corps repaired 1,050 rifles of different types of weapons, said the Ministry in a statement.

This weapon includes "Russian and American rockets, heavy weapons of different types, Kalashnikovs M4, M16", the statement added.

The process of repairing vehicles and weapons continues in the field through the central workshops of the Ministry of National Defense, according to the Ministry.

Human Rights violations increased exponentially in Afghanistan: AI

KABUL (Khaama Press): Amnesty International expressed concerns in its annual report about restrictions on women's rights, media freedom and freedom of expression in Afghanistan.

"Restrictions on women's rights, freedom of the media and freedom of expression increased exponentially," the report said. "Institutions designed to support human rights were severely limited or shut down completely. Peaceful protesters faced arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearance," the report highlighted.

The report added that women's rights were severely limited during the

interim government in Afghanistan.

"Women's rights continued to be attacked, and women's participation in public life was severely limited. Afghanistan was the only country where girls were banned from attending secondary school. Almost all institutions set up to address gender-based violence under the former government were shut down by the Taliban."

Moreover, the de facto government has banned women's work with Non-Governmental Organizations, which has affected the humanitarian aid in the country since most of their staff were female.

According to the UN

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 97% of Afghans lived in poverty, up from 47% in 2020. The report added that the lack of social protections led families to resort to measures including child marriage and selling organs.

However, the organization expressed concern over the lack of funds to cover the humanitarian crisis in the country. "The level of humanitarian assistance did not meet the population's needs."

The increasing humanitarian crisis was worsened by Drought, flash flooding, earthquakes, and other natural catastrophes, some of which were exacerbated

by climate change.

However, since the Taliban regime returned to power in the country, the group has intensified its repression of women's rights and freedom.

Recently, the Taliban authorities arrested Matiullah Wesa, an education and human rights activist and dispersed the women and girls peaceful demonstration in Kabul.

The current harsh and suppressive policy will further promote poverty, unemployment, and extremism, which will lead to harbouring terrorists and threatening global peace and security, according to the Center for a New American Security (CNAS).

Kabulis slam rising tomato and onion prices in Ramadan

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some residents of Kabul complain of skyrocketing onion and tomato prices during the holy month of Ramadan, saying they cannot afford to buy the basic kitchen items.

The hike in onion prices was triggered by unlimited exports to neighbour countries last year. Kabul-based vegetable sellers said.

Some green grocers in the Kabul Fruit and Vegetables Market said on Wednesday that per seven kilograms of red onion accounted for 450 afis and white onion for 550 afis. The same quantity of tomato sold for 350 afis.

A week ago, per 7 kilograms of red onions sold for 370 afis, the white variety for 450 afis and tomatoes accounted for 280 afis.

The citizens, resenting the escalating rates of onions and tomatoes, demanded remedial measures from the authorities concerned.

Zabihullah, a resident of the Kart-i Parwan locality of Kabul, said he purchased 7 kilograms of red onions for 400 afis and 3.5

kilograms of tomatoes for 150 afis.

He said: "During the holy month of Ramadan, prices of onion and tomato have gone up. No one can purchase white onions. I asked for its price, it was 600 afis per 7 kilograms." He urged the municipality to rein in prices.

Maryam, a resident of Fajnsad Family area, said she paid 140 afis for 1.75 kilogram of onions and 100 afis for the same quantity of tomato. The prices were not that high previously, she lamented.

Maryam alleged vegetable suppliers had enhanced prices with the advent of the fasting month and the government must move to control the situation.

Mohammad Raqib, a seller in the Kabul Vegetable and Fruit Market, confirmed having witnessed a rise in prices over the past one week.

Afghanistan exported its onions to Pakistan last autumn, he said, adding the country had been forced into imports.

He recalled: "Pakistan

purchased all our onion in the winter. We sold a 112 kilograms bag of onions for 12,240 afis at that time (306 afis per 7 kilograms). The onions that are currently being sold in the markets have been imported them from India or Uzbekistan."

Mohammad Nadir, a vegetable merchant in the 3rd police district of Kabul, put the price of per 7 kilograms of tomato at 400 afis — up from 280 afis a week ago.

The reason for the increase in prices of such items is the lack of domestic produce, forcing imports from other countries.

Haji Mirwais Hajizada, head of the whole-sellers' association, explained demand for onion and tomato had soared during Ramadan, but imports remained low.

Subsequently, there is a shortage of these items in the market faces and their prices have risen.

He claimed Afghanistan had exported a lot of onion to Pakistan last year and none of the daily-use veg-

etable was left in the country. As a result, he argued, its price had jumped.

Hajizada referred to Iran heightening the customs duty on tomato exports to Afghanistan.

He noted as imports of the commodities into the country had increased, their prices would fall over the next 10 days or so.

Abdul Salam Jawad Akhundzada, spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, told Pajhwok: "We imported three trucks of onions from Egypt, India and Turkey and supplied them to markets yesterday."

Given onion and tomato shortages in neighbouring countries, they are not exporting the items to Afghanistan, according to Akhundzada, who said they were to import the vegetables from other places.

He added onions would be harvested in western Farah province and tomatoes in eastern Nangarhar in the near future. The harvest would have a positive impact on the prices of these items, he predicted.

Amid poor economy, Kabul residents turn to carpet weaving

KABUL (TOLOnews): Due to the country's high unemployment rate, some Kabul residents have turned to carpet weaving in recent months.

They said that they need to find a means of support in order to survive.

Kabul resident Mustafa has been working with his young child to weave carpets for several months.

"The business has dropped. It is not dropped actually, it no longer exists. I used work on carpet weaving, so I thought to start it again during Ramadan to earn some money," Mustafa said.

"It has been 4 to 5 years that I worked in a bakery and the rest of the family was carpet weaving. Now as there is no good work at the bakery, I myself started working on carpets," said Mahdi, another resident of Kabul.

Owners of carpet factories said that during the past two years many people



have requested employment as carpet weavers in the nation.

In the meantime, the Afghanistan Carpet Producers and Exporters Union stated that as carpet production rises, so will its exports to other nations.

"When the product increases, the exports of carpets also surge. 95 percent of the carpets are being exported and only five percent are being used in Afghanistan," said Noor Ahmad Noori, deputy of the Afghanistan Carpet

Producers and Exporters Union.

Factory owners complained of difficulties importing raw materials into Afghanistan and the smuggling of Afghan carpets into other neighbouring nations.

Residents of Khost's Zamisa area: Our children growing up illiterate



KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): The residents of Zamisa area in Dowa Manda district of southeastern Khost province say about 2,000 families live in the area, but there is no school for their children.

They say no work was done in their area during 20 years of the previous governments and the current caretaker government has also not paid attention to it as required.

Zamisa area is located 80 kilometers away from Khost city, the provincial capital. Road leading to the area surrounded by mountains is in a bad condition.

Haji Kashmir Khan, a tribal elder of the area, told

Pajhwok Afghan News all residents wanted their children to get education, but there was no school and the children remained illiterate.

"I have admitted my children in a school in Dowa Manda district. I pay 100 afghanis daily in rent to the car that takes them to the school. There is no school here, those who have cars or can afford transport expense, they send their children to the far away school."

Another resident of the area, Yunus Zadrar, told Pajhwok Afghan News they had many times requested the previous governments to construct schools in their

area, but their calls fell on deaf ears.

He said that the government should listen to their demand as their children were growing up illiterate due to lack of schools.

He said the nearest school was 20 kilometers away and one should have a private car to take his children to the school.

A civil activist, Qazi Ahmad Babrakzai said there were some other remote areas in Khost besides Zamisa where no school existed.

He asked the provincial administration to pay serious attention to this problem so that the new generation was not deprived of

education.

"Remote areas should be surveyed and schools should be built where they are required and local people should take care of the schools for the sake of future generations."

Shabir Ahmad Osmani, Khost information and culture director, also acknowledged that Zamisa area lagged behind in every sphere.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News they were planning to start local classes in the area this year, so that the area could gradually develop in terms of education.

However, Syed Kabir Sangin, Khost Education Department spokesman,

blamed internal competition among Zamisa people for lack of school in the area. However, he did not elaborate.

In the current school year, Sangin said, they planned to set up literacy classes in the area with the help of some education supporting organizations.

According to the Department of Education, 29,110 students will be enrolled in government schools in Khost province in the current 1402 solar year, including 8,676 girls.

This year, more than 10,000 people will join the rural literacy classes and half of them will be girls.

FM asks world for joint action to overcome challenges

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Pakistan and Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing an Ifaar dinner hosted by him at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Islamabad-based Diplomatic Corps said that the holy month of Ramadan is one in which Muslims all over the globe observe fasting. These efforts as Muslims are supposed to encourage us towards feeling for those that are less fortunate, less privileged and who do not enjoy access to regular food and luxuries that are usually taken for granted.

Addressing representatives from around the world, FM Chairman Bilawal said that there are people in all our societies, not particularly in Pakistan who are facing incredibly difficult times. He further said that he is ready to accept that a lot of the difficulties are of 'our' own making, referring collectively to the economic policies adopted by the previous government. We are facing economic consequences of certain decisions that are not in our control.

The people are facing the devastating impact of a climate catastrophe in the face of floods, in the occurrence of which they played little to no role at all. The younger generation especially, is facing the consequences of decisions that they did not make. The economic quagmire that has been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is not only faced by Pakistan, but the entire world. The geopolitical situation in the world as well has added to the growing list of consequences faced by the globe.

In this particular month, we are reminded that it is probable that the consequences of our actions are faced by those who are perhaps not as empowered as we are. Therefore, we have the opportunity through which we can positively affect the lives of those who are less fortunate. It should be our collective effort that we make it a point to minimize to the utmost extent, the burden that is on the shoulders of the underprivileged.

Chairman Bilawal commended the



efforts of the federal minister for the Benazir Income Support Programme, Shazia Marri towards eradicating poverty as the head of the first and only safety net for the poorest of the poor, especially women in particular. We have witnessed the incredible services rendered as a result of the BISP's existence during the Covid-19 pandemic to bolster the dwindling hopes of the people. When the floods came, the most effective means of getting support to the vulnerable was through the BISP.

As we are persevering through the economic turmoil while the finance ministry is still in talks with the IMF as well as having the monumental task of rehabilitating flood victims ahead of us, this government is consistently trying within the space that it has, to provide the most benefits to those at the bottom of the pyramid, Foreign Minister Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said. FM Chairman Bilawal expressed his gratitude to the international community as well as the ambassadors in attendance for the support provided to the country within their personal and professional domains.

Toshakhana case: Court okays Imran's exemption plea

ISLAMABAD (INP): A district and sessions court in the federal capital on Thursday approved a plea filed by PTI Chairman Imran Khan seeking exemption from appearance in the Toshakhana case.

Additional Sessions Judge Zafar Iqbal announced the ruling after hearing arguments from former prime minister's legal team and prosecutor Amjad Parvez in the case. During the hearing, the PTI chief's lawyer filed the exemption plea for three days and argued that the Islamabad bar was holding protest for three days.

At which, Mr Parvez said if Imran Khan was also part of the protest, adding that it was must for the suspect to ensure his attendance in court during the trial. He said the PTI chief should have appeared before the court even his lawyers wanted to join the protest. In reply, Imran Khan's lawyer Khawaja Harris said his client was facing threats and the government had also withdrawn his security. "He [Imran Khan] is not present in the court due to security reasons," he said, adding that the PTI chairman could attend hearing via videolink if allowed. Mr Harris pleaded the court to accept the exemption plea.

The judge asked the both sides to help the court in fixing next hearing of the case with mutual consultation. At which, Faisal

Chaudhry suggested that case should be fixed for hearing after Ramadan. Mr Harris requested for adjournment of the hearing for two weeks. Later, Judge Zafar Iqbal accepted the exemption plea and adjourned the hearing till April 29.

Meanwhile, Imran Khan's lawyers also filed a petition, challenging the admissibility of the Toshakhana case. They would submit their arguments in this regarding during next hearing. In previous hearing, the court had suspended his arrest warrants after hear appeared before the judge in the case. Last year, a reference was filed against him by lawmakers from the ruling coalition accusing him of not sharing the details of gifts he retained from Toshakhana in his assets declarations and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had concluded in October last year that the PTI chief filed false statements regarding the gifts. The electoral watchdog subsequently, disqualified him for being dishonest and corrupt and approached the district and sessions court seeking criminal proceedings Imran Khan for allegedly misleading officials about the gifts.

PTI chief moves LHC for dismissal of all cases against him: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has filed a petition in the Lahore High Court (LHC)

seeking dismissal of all case registered against him, calling them politically motivated.

PTI Secretary General Asad Umar is also an applicant in the petition filed under Article 199 of the Constitution. The high court has also been pleaded to grant bail to the PTI chief in all the cases. The petition has been filed through Barrister Salman Safdar and Barrister Sameer Khosa. The defiant politician has been facing spate of cases, including terrorism and misdeclaration of assets, since his ouster from the prime minister's office through a no-confidence vote in April last.

The PTI has made the federation, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the prime minister, the interior minister, the caretaker chief minister, the Punjab IGP, the Anti-Corruption Department, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) respondents in the case. In a statement, Asad Umar said they had moved the high court against revengeful acts that were part of an organised campaign to bar Imran Khan from taking part in elections. He said factors regarding threats to Mr Khan's life and violation of human rights had also been laid forth before the court.

Sana calls for holding talks among all stakeholders

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has called for holding greater dialogue among all stakeholders including all the parties of opposition and treasury benches, establishment and judiciary to steer the country out of prevailing multiple crises and put it back on path of development and prosperity.

Talking to news men outside Supreme Court in Islamabad on Thursday, he said this greater dialogue will help in evolving a consensus agenda over charter of economy, charter of democracy and charter of peace. The Interior Minister said it will also help defuse boiling political temperature in the country and resolve the sufferings of the common man. He said the government respects and honours the opinion of the Chief Justice and other judges of the apex court. However, if the dialogue is to be held only for optic purpose, it will serve nothing.

Replying to a question, the Interior Minister expressed the resolve that terrorism is neither out of control neither it will be so in future. Our armed forces are fully competent and capable enough and carrying out intelligence-based operations against terrorists on daily basis. They are also rendering sacrifices for the defence of the motherland.

Rana Sanaullah said despite all these actions and operations, threats of terrorism still exist, but all the relevant authorities are in coordination and discharging their duties to root out this menace. Replying to a question, he said the stubbornness and obstinacy of Imran Khan is the main hurdle in initiation of dialogue.

Answering yet another question, he said talks should be held first to streamline the economy ruined by Imran Khan and cool down the heating political temperature. He said under the prevailing circumstance, elections will result in only disturbance and anarchy in the country, which is the main agenda of PTI and Imran Khan.

UAE president names son as crown prince

ABU DHABI (Agencies): The United Arab Emirates' president named his eldest son as crown prince of Abu Dhabi, making him the oil-rich Gulf monarchy's likely next leader and cementing his family's hold on power.

President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan tapped Sheikh Khaled, 41, his jiu-jitsu-loving son, as the crown prince of the UAE's richest emirate — a position traditionally held by the leader-in-waiting. It was part of the biggest political shake-up since Sheikh Mohamed, 62, sometimes known as "MBZ" and the UAE's long-time de facto ruler, became president last May following the death of his half-brother Sheikh Khalifa, who had been sidelined by ill health for years.

MBZ's brother Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed, the owner of Manchester City football club, became vice president, joining Dubai's ruler and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in the role. Two other brothers of the president — Tahnoun bin Zayed, the UAE's national security adviser and chairman of the ADQ sovereign wealth fund, and Hazza bin Zayed — became deputy rulers of Abu Dhabi, which controls the bulk of the country's oil reserves.

MBZ's ascension to the presidency last year prompted speculation over who would succeed him as Abu Dhabi crown prince, with Sheikh Khaled and Tahnoun both tipped for the honour. The UAE, one of the world's biggest oil producers and an ally of the United States, Russia and China alike, has become a major power in the Middle East as traditional heavyweights such as Egypt and Iraq fell back in recent years. Sheikh Khaled's appointment was welcomed by other Gulf rulers including fellow energy giants Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as leaders of the UAE's six other emirates.



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi along with senior Naval officers witnessing Surface to Air Missile firing by Pakistan Navy.

Demotion of SPs & cadets: PHC suspends IGP orders

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has suspended Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa orders on 12th March 2023 and stopped demotion of Cadets from their position while directed to submit comments in this regard before court, on Thursday.

This was suspended by PHC's divisional bench comprised of Justice Musrt Hilali and Justice Abdul Shakoor while hearing writ petition of 42 Cadets. Barrister Mudassir Emir argued that Rajab Ali and Shah Mumtaz along with 40 others petitioners are Cadets while promoted at different times on extraordinary performance. But on 12th March 2023 IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has issued order of demotion while directing Cadets to join their Ranks, the counsel argued.

The counsel argued that the issue was placed before provincial cabinet while the government has forwarded it to Standing Committee to settle the issue and to ensure that no one can deprive or demoralize in this regard. He added that Police Rules established in 1934 while NWFP Police Rules instated in 1937, however, standing order 11-87 was challenged before Supreme Court but it was

rejected by the apex court while it was implemented in 2005 under Act.

Barrister Mudassir Amir argued that such actions will undermine police officers while added that Supreme Court didn't applicable in this case because in Punjab and Sindh police, employees were brought on deputation from civil departments without uniform on nepotism while some personnel are also promoted on favoritism. He added that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police case is different while argued that Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Iqbal Mohmand who embraced martyrdom at last night in lane to his duty. The counsel further argued that if policemen were undermined at this stage then no officer will show bravery in future while requested to suspend IGP orders issued on 12th March and to stop demotion of cadets.

Meanwhile, the divisional bench of PHC comprised of Justice Musart Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad also suspended demotion orders of 12 Superintends of Police (SPs) including SP Malakand Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Amjad Ali while ordered IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to submit reply. The counsel Qazi Jawad Ihsan Ullah and Muhammad Waqas Advocates informed that the petitioners were

promoted at different interval of times but on 6th August 2013 IGP has demoted them. However, the petitioners approached PHC against IGP orders which was declared null and void by honorable high court.

Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) of has turnaround appeal against PHC's decision declaring IGP orders null and void while directed to submit report for filing appeal after stipulated timeframe, the counsel argued.

The counsel informed that IGP has submitted report before SCP regarding demotion of petitioner despite their pleas were upheld till apex court. They added that on 8th March 2023 in contempt of court proceedings, the court ordered to remove the petitioners from demotion list because their case separate in nature. The counsel Qazi Jawad and Waqas Advocates argued that despite removing from demotion list, an order was issued for demotion of petitioners which is liable for Contempt of Court proceedings. The divisional bench of PHC comprised of Justice Musart Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad suspended IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa issued on 15th March 2023 while ordered the petitioners to continue their services at own position and adjourned further hearing.

Distribution of flour: Violence erupts in Bisham

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Violence erupted in Shangla district's Bisham tehsil in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday as citizens protested against the "unjust" distribution of free flour. Bisham Assistant Commissioner (AC) Muhammad Jawad Asif said that the residents of Maira area of Bisham tehsil had blocked the Karakoram Highway while staging the protest, adding that police had been deployed in the area to deal with any untoward situation.

He said that at one point, the protesters attempted to loot trucks carrying free flour that were unable to proceed further due to the demonstration. The AC said the police party tried to stop the protesters which

resulted in them pelting officials with stones. As a result, a police constable was injured and a police vehicle was damaged. He said that three protesters were also injured after officials baton-charged them, adding that some were also arrested.

Asif further said that after clashing with police on the highway, the protesters followed officials to the police station in Dandai. He said that the protesters then proceeded to throw stones at the police station in the area but fled after officials resorted to aerial firing. He said that the protesters blocked the highway in Dandai for four hours during which the local administration tried to negotiate with them. He said that the administration addressed

their concerns regarding the flour distribution points, adding that the protesters had also demanded the transfer of the area station house officer (SHO).

He said the police had lodged a first information report (FIR) against the protesters who attacked the police van and the police station, and injured officials. Meanwhile, Shah Zenat, the chairman of the Maria village council who was leading the protest, said that the protesters were demonstrating against the "unjust" distribution of flour. He alleged that police baton-charged the protesters which left several injured. The government has launched the flour distribution programme to reach millions of families in need during Ramadan.

Alvi directs varsity to pay pension to retired professor

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has upheld the order of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing a university to pay the pension share to its former professor who had served the university for 14 years.

The president said that pension was a hard-earned right that accrued to an employee by dint of his long, continuous and faithful service, and the deprivation or delay in the grant of this right could not be permitted, except in accordance with the law. As per details, Professor Dr Ali Asghar Chishti (the complainant) had served at the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) from June 1985 to August 1999 as a faculty member and he joined Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) after applying through the proper channel.

After his retirement from AIOU in 2020, he made the request to IIUI for the transfer of pension shares but the same was not done despite the issuance of a letter of liability in his favour. Subsequently, he

approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib (WM) for relief, which passed the order in his favour as during the hearing, IIUI admitted his claim and assured him to redress his grievance. Later, IIUI chose to file a representation with the President against the orders of WM. The president upheld the order of Mohtasib directing IIUI to transfer the pension share of the complainant as per his request and based his order on a decision of the Supreme Court.

He stated that it was an admitted fact that pension was not a bounty but rather an employee earned it by dint of his long, continuous and faithful service. He added that the hard-earned right, that accrued to an employee, was in the nature of "property", and constituted a fundamental right to livelihood under Article 9 of the Constitution of Pakistan. He stressed that the deprivation, even a part of this amount, could not be permitted, except in accordance with the law. The president also cited another judgement of the Supreme Court, dated 21.02.2013, wherein

Government Departments, Agencies and Officers had been directed to not cause unnecessary hurdle or delay in finalizing the payment of pensionary/retirement benefits in future.

In its judgement, the Court had stated that any violation of these directions shall amount to criminal negligence and dereliction of duty, and if any delay in the finalization of pension benefits cases of government servants, widows or orphan children was brought to the notice of the Court, the head of the concerned department would also be held liable for the contempt of the Court and would be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law.

The president concluded that since IIUI had conceded the entitlement/claim of the complainant before the Wafaqi Mohtasib, therefore, it had no legal or moral justification to backtrack or seek reversal of the Mohtasib's orders. He directed IIUI to comply with the Ombudsman's order and rejected the representation.

Fawad all praise for LHC for striking down sedition law

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former minister Fawad Chaudhry has hailed the Lahore High Court (LHC) for striking down Section 124-A of the criminal law that pertains to sedition. Fawad took to twitter and retweeted Advocate Abuzar Salman Niazi's tweet, who moved the LHC against the colonial-era law.

"Congratulations, Salman Niazi, you have done a huge service to the nation. Shaheed Arshad Sharif must be smiling in the heavens. stay blessed," wrote Fawad in his tweet. He said "the Lahore High Court declared Section 124-A of the criminal law in conflict with the Constitution, whereby recognising the constitutional right to criticise state institutions. "This decision will end dozens of politically-motivated cases, including case against me. It is a very high decision that recognizes freedom," Fawad noted.

Earlier on Thursday, Justice Shahid Karim of the LHC pronounced the verdict that invalidated Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code, commonly known as sedition law, which pertains to the crime of sedition or inciting "disaffection" against the government.

Justice Karim pronounced the decision in response to identical petitions seeking annulment of the law. A written ruling will be issued later. The law states: "Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Federal or Provincial Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine."

The petitioners urged the court to declare Section 124-A of the PPC as "ultra-vires in terms of Article 8 of the Constitution being inconsistent with and in derogation of fundamental rights provided under Article 9, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, 19A of the Constitution".