

German MoS due today
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Germany's Minister of State (MoS) for Foreign Affairs Dr Tobias Lindner will arrive here in Islamabad today (Saturday) on a four day visit to Pakistan. During the meetings with Pakistan leadership, he will review bilateral relations between Pakistan and Germany besides discussions on economic cooperation, climate change, and regional matters of mutual interest.

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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Qatar, Sheikh Saoud Bin Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al Thani called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Alvi announces April 30 polls date in Punjab

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): President Dr Arif Alvi pronounced April 30 as the date for holding elections in Punjab after receiving possible poll dates from Election Commission of Pakistan on Friday.

The president announced the date after considering the dates proposed by the ECP. The electoral body had proposed a poll date between April 30 to May 7, 2023, for holding general elections of the provincial assembly of Punjab, and had further suggested holding elections preferably on a Sunday.

Earlier, the ECP formally began the process of holding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as it separately wrote letters to President Dr Arif Alvi and Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali, requesting them to decide dates for elections in the provinces in wake of recently announced verdict of the Supreme Court.

Through the letter to President Alvi, the ECP has suggested that the president may choose a date between April 30 to May 7, 2023 – right after Eid – saying the commission would be ready to perform its constitutional and legal duties when the poll date is finalised. It has been described in an official statement of the ECP that it has sent a letter to the president in the light of the decision of the Supreme Court in

which the dates for holding elections in Punjab province have been suggested from April 30 to May 7, 2023. After the president chooses a date, the letter read, "Election Commission is ready to perform its constitutional and legal duties."

The ECP has also sent a letter to governor KP. While referring to the top court's order, the national poll body has stated that "the Election Commission is waiting for your response". According to a statement the ECP took the decision to send letters to the president and governor KP during a meeting under the chair of Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja at the ECP on Friday. Members of the ECP and senior officers also attended the meeting.

It is pertinent to mention that during the past two weeks, the political stalemate had turned into a significant constitutional crisis, especially, when President Dr Alvi announced the date for elections in two provinces as his decision was called "unconstitutional" in the National Assembly within the next few hours. It has been reported that the hard stance taken by all the mainstream political parties on holding elections in the provinces had pushed the country into a constitutional crisis at a time when the country is already facing a high risk of default.

Zardari, Fazl & PM discuss political situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former president Asif Ali Zardari and chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Maulana Fazl ur Rehman called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif here on Friday.

In a meeting held here at the Prime Minister's House, political situation in the country came under discussion, the PM Office said.

People know 'criminals': Marriyum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Friday the people of Pakistan knew the "criminals" very well who had ruined the national economy. The minister shared the official data on her Twitter handle showing how the Pakistan Tereek-e-Insaf (PTI) government had ruined the economy.

According to the data, the Federal Bureau of Revenue collected Rs 3,843.8 billion during the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government from 2013-2018 and Rs 3,828.5 billion during the PTI regime, she said. Similarly, she said, the fiscal deficit stood at 4.1 percent during the PML-N government, and it rose to 7.9 percent during the PTI rule. Likewise, Pakistan's gross domestic product fell from \$ 356.8 billion during the PML-N tenure to \$ 300.8 billion during the PTI's four years rule, the minister added.

Kakar named Balochistan Governor

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday appointed Malik Abdul Wali Kakar as the governor of Balochistan.

The president made the appointment on the advice of the prime minister in accordance with Articles 48(1) and 101 of the Constitution. Mr Kakar belongs to BNP-Mengal. After the ouster of former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan, governors of KPK and Balochistan resigned from their positions. After a long 9 months wait the candidates are chosen for the important position. Earlier, Baluchistan Governor Zahoor Ahmed Agha tendered his resignation from his office.

The Frontier Post

Babar fears attack on Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): PTI leader Babar Awan said on Friday that there are chances of another attack on former prime minister Imran Khan, claiming that his party had received reports about preparations to assassinate PTI chief. Addressing a press conference in Islamabad flanked by other PTI leaders, Babar Awan alleged that a foreign agency is involved in planning to assassinate Imran Khan during his appearance in courts.

PM affirms fraternal ties with Qatar in diverse fields

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday affirmed the fraternal relations between Pakistan and Qatar in diverse fields, based on common values and aspirations for future.

The prime minister expressed these views in a meeting with Qatar's ambassador Sheikh Saoud Bin Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al Thani, who briefed him on various activities undertaken to enhance the brotherly relations between the two countries.

Shehbaz Sharif acknowledged the mutual commitment of both sides to translate the deep-rooted relations into mutually rewarding economic ties. He thanked Qatar for its humanitarian support to people of Pakistan in the aftermath of unprecedented floods in 2022.

He stressed the importance of further enhancing bilateral cooperation in all avenues of mutual interest and benefit. Qatari Ambassador thanked the prime minister for his stewardship in furthering the brotherly bilateral relations and assured reciprocity and support from the Qatari side in this regard. Qatar hosts around 250,000

Pakistani diaspora, playing an important role in the development of both the nations. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Qatar. Both sides are committed to celebrating this anniversary in a befitting manner.

Shehbaz orders inquiry into Bara Kahu flyover collapse: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Friday taking note of the collapse of under-construction flyover at Bara Kahu formed a committee to inquire into the incident.

The inquiry committee headed by former Interior Secretary Shahid Khan will examine every aspect of the incident that occurred on Thursday. The committee was directed to prepare an inquiry report on an emergency basis and submit it to the prime minister. PM Sharif said that no negligence would be tolerated in the construction of the Bara Kahu flyover project.

K-Electric's improved efficiency after privatisation, an example for power companies: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said Karachi Electric after privatisation, had witnessed an improvement in

efficiency including reduced line losses and increased revenue collection, which was an example for other power companies.

The prime minister expressed these views in a meeting with a four-member delegation of Karachi Electric. He urged the investors of K-Electric to also make investment in energy sector including the solar-powered electricity generation.

He said the local and foreign companies should explore the energy sector of the country by making investment. Shehbaz Sharif directed to resolve the problems faced by the Karachi Electric on priority basis.

He mentioned that the government was taking steps to install solar-powered panels at public buildings. The meeting was attended by former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, PM's Special Assistant Jahanzeb Khan and senior government officials.

The K-Electric delegation comprised Sheikh Abdul Aziz Hamd Aljomia, Non Executive Director K-Electric Shan Abbas, Chief Executive Director K-Electric Syed Moonis Abdullah Alvi and Chief Regulatory Officer Imran Hussain Qureshi.

PHC suspends by-polls on 24 NA seats

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Arshad Ali has suspended by-elections on 24 constituencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while ordered the respondents to submit reply and adjourned further hearing till 7th March, on Friday.

During hearing Justice Attique Shah remarked that you are playing with parliament if resignations accepted it is right if didn't then to return to the house for pressurizing the government while Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that why should you approached the court with delay?

Deputy Attorney General Sana Ullah and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawyer Barrister Gohar Khan appeared before PHC while the PTI counsel argued that Speaker National Assembly has accepted resignation without approval while party demanded to accept 123 resign as a whole.

PTI has decided to return to National Assembly following new developments on 14th January while Justice Arshad Ali inquired that is PTI members contacted Speaker for with-

drawal of their resigns.

The counsel informed that party's chairman Imran Khan has announced it on media which is enough while Justice SM Attique Shah remarked that is you are playing with parliament, if resigns are accepted it is right otherwise to return back to parliament.

PTI's lawyer argued that they didn't playing with parliament and requested to suspend by-polls scheduled on 16th and 19th March and added that it was tactic to pressurize the government for early elections. He added that on member of PTI approached Islamabad High Court while his notification was suspended but Speaker didn't allow him to participate in the National Assembly session.

However, the divisional bench inquired from Deputy Attorney General Sana Ullah how government dealing the case because it is related to Speaker National Assembly and he isn't the federation. Deputy Attorney General argued that all arrangements are concluded for the elections while the petitioners are candidates in the by-polls.

Although, the counsel for petitioners argued that economic crisis visible before everyone while

Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that it is another issue and parliament will loo into it while added that you should approached the court with delay.

Barrister Gohar Khan informed that all PTI's members had approached Lahore High Court while the court directed petitioners to approached the jurisdiction of this court. Justice Arshad Ali observed that the may the arguments convince the bench or not but other High Courts had suspended by-polls in the country.

Moreover, Justice Arshad Ali remarked that why shouldn't the expenses will charge from the petitioner and observed that is other parties are participating in the elections? Election Commission of Pakistan's lawyer informed that other parties had boycotted from the by-polls and only PTI's candidates are contesting in the election while PTI's lawyers argued that by-polls are both loss of time and money. The divisional bench of PHC comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Syed Arshad Ali has suspended by-polls scheduled on 16th and 19th March while directed respondents to submit comments in this regard.

ECP proposes holding polls in Punjab between April 30 and May 7

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said on Friday that it has written a letter to President Dr Arif Alvi suggesting possible dates between April 30 and May 7 for elections in Punjab. The decision was taken in the electoral body's meeting, which was presided by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja.

"The Election Commission has sent a letter to the president in light of the decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, in which the dates for holding the elections in Punjab have been suggested between April 30 and May 7, 2023," an ECP press release. It stated that the commission was prepared to fulfil its constitutional and legal duty once the date for elections was selected by the president. The press release further said that the ECP has written a letter to the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stating that the electoral body was waiting for his response regarding the date for polls in the province.

The announcement comes two days after the Supreme Court ruled that the elections to the Punjab and KP assemblies should be held within the stipulated period of 90 days. It, however, allowed the ECP to propose a poll date that deviates from the 90-day deadline by the "barest minimum", in case of any practical difficulty. It also held that President Alvi and the KP governor will fix dates for Punjab and KP assemblies, respectively, in consultation with the ECP. The Punjab and KP assemblies were dissolved on Jan 14 and 18, respectively. Under the law, the elections are to be held within 90 days after the dissolution of assemblies. That means April 14 and April 17 were the deadlines for holding general elections to Punjab and KP assemblies, but the two governors instead of setting dates for elections after receiving the proposal from the ECP had advised the commission to consult stakeholders.

Chief secretaries and inspectors-general of the two provinces during meetings with the ECP had said they were short of police force and talked of terrorism threats, making out a case for putting off elections. The finance division had also expressed its inability to provide funds and the interior ministry told the ECP that the army and civil armed forces will not be available.

Dar rejects rumors about Pakistan's possible default

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Friday said that though the country was passing through a precarious situation that there was no chance of default. He said the current economic situation was due to the "mismanagement and bad governance of the former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's government" spanning for forty-two months.

Addressing a press conference here, the minister said that Pakistan would never default. "Yes, we are in a precarious position as reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) depleted to \$2.8 billion. Although the total national reserves were still at \$9 billion as commercial banks were holding around \$5.5 billion," the minister sketched out the current economic situation which requires external inflows to make debt repayments.

He said the incumbent government would take the country out of the said quagmire, adding it had a road map as well as the policy to do it, arguing that if the country had not defaulted till now, he reasoned that there was something that government was working with a plan to ward off any possibility of economic default. He said it was strange that Imran Khan had been talking about default despite the fact that he himself was responsible for bringing the economy to this position during his 42-month govern-



ment.

"Imran Khan has left no stone unturned towards default, the minister blamed the PTI chief, also accusing that Imran was ready to sacrifice the country for his petty politics. He advised the PTI leader to show a sense of responsibility, adding that whenever the former premier tweeted or gave a statement, it had "damaged the country".

"At a time when the IMF is about to conclude its review, Imran Khan is giving such statements only to allegedly sabotage the IMF deal, reminiscent of when he forced his [former] provincial finance ministers to declare their respective provinces had no finances to meet," the minister alleged while recalling the audio-call leak when the former finance minister Shaukat Tarin was purportedly found giving aforementioned directions in an alleged attempt to sabotage the IMF deal, last year. "It was his finance minister who talked to the provincial finance ministers advising them not to cooperate with the federal government and let not the tranche due by International

Monetary Fund (IMF) to be released then," he said.

He said, in other parts of the world, when any country had faced an issue of national interest, the opposition joined hands with the government to resolve it, however, he regretted that in Pakistan it was totally contrary to the said situation. He said, instead of joining hands to think about how to steer through the crisis, Imran Khan only knew how to criticize the government and "inflict losses" on the country.

He said when the incumbent government assumed power, it was left with options either to save politics or the country, and it had chosen the latter one, which was an appreciable decision. Dar said that the economic situation of the country should not be viewed separately rather it should be analyzed keeping in view the eglobal inflation and catastrophic floods in the country. He regretted that Pakistan had to spend billion of dollars on importing wheat, fertilizer, and even pulses despite the fact Pakistan is an agricultural land.

On the other hand, the minister said the floods caused around \$30 billion in losses and hundred of billion of rupees were spent for immediate rescue and relief. He said the country needed around \$16 billion for the next three to four years, out of which Pakistan would manage half of the amount whereas the remaining would be given by donors.



KARACHI: Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah along with others cutting ribbon to inaugurate 18th "My Karachi-Oasis of Harmony" exhibition organized by Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry at Expo Center.

Promotion of peace, tolerance stressed

LAHORE (APP): Eminent scholars have emphasized on the promotion of peace and tolerance in the society during the 'message of peace conference' held under the auspices of the Auqaf Department at historical Badshahi Mosque, here on Friday.

Caretaker Minister for Auqaf Punjab Barrister Syed Azfar Ali Nasir was the chief guest on the occasion while Secretary Auqaf Punjab Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari, Director General Asif Ali Farrukh, Chairman Central Ruet-e Hilal Committee and Khatib Badshahi Masjid Maulana Abdul Khabeer Azad, Maulana Asif Qasmi and other scholars were also present during the conference.

Auqaf Minister Punjab Barrister Syed Azfar Ali Nasir said in his keynote address that there is a need to

promote peace in the society and Ulema and Mashaikh have an important role in this. "The holy month of Ramadan is approaching, so it is necessary to raise the voice of peace from the Mihrab and Mimbber", stressed the minister. He further said that the goals of peace could be achieved by following the philosophy of inter-faith harmony.

Barrister Syed Azfar Ali Nasir said that the Auqaf department would continue to play its role in promoting social peace. "Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has also given special instructions for taking steps to promote peace and tolerance in the society", he said.

Secretary Auqaf Tahir Raza Bukhari said that the Pegham-e-Amn Conference would send a positive

message to every class. "The Auqaf Department has always provided a platform for promoting harmony and national unity", said Bukhari.

On this occasion, Chairman Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee and Khatib Badshahi Masjid, Maulana Abdul Khabeer Azad, said that Ulema and Mashaikh emphasized the need to promote peace and stability at every opportunity. "Pakistan will be made a center of harmony and tolerance in every respect", he pledged.

In the conference, all the participants, including the provincial minister, joined hands and vowed to play their role in the promotion of national unity and tolerance. On this occasion, Barrister Syed Azfar Ali Nasir also offered a special prayer for peace and prosperity.

Commissioner announces spring festival from March 5

LAHORE (APP): Commissioner Lahore Division Muhammad Ali Randhawa announced on Friday that Jashan-e-Baharan [spring festival] celebrations would kick off in the provincial capital from March 5 and continue till March 12.

Talking to the media at Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Headquarters (Jilani Park) along with PHA Director General Zeeshan Javed, he said that the festival would be celebrated with the coordination of Information & Culture Department, district administration, PHA, Walled City Lahore Authority (WCLA), Lahore Development Authority (LDA) and Punjab Sports Board.

The district administration would supervise activities of the festival including security of different events, he said and added that Jashan-e-

Baharan was being celebrated at the divisional level, in which sports, cultural activities, tourism, music, bird and pet shows and fireworks would be organised. Canal bank and other main roads in the provincial capital would be illuminated tastefully, he added. The commissioner said that Punjabi folk music performances, Sufi festival, lights and sound show, ghazal festival, painting exhibition, women's mushaira, classical music programme, comedy mushaira, musical gala and mehfil-e-sama programmes will be held to provide an opportunity to people to enjoy healthy outdoor and indoor recreational activities. The citizen's entry to the shows of Jashan-e-Baharan would be free.

Randhawa encouraged citizens to fully enjoy the activities and said that

a marathon race and cycling competition would also be held. Children, women, differently-abled persons and athletes would participate in the marathon race. Famous singers would present music shows in Hockey Stadium Lahore from March 5 to 12 while food and cultural mela would be organized in Jilani Park during the same period.

Flower exhibition, mehfil-e-sama, Sufi musical festival, sports mela, painting competition, lucky Irani circus and other events would be held in Jilani Park, Greater Iqbal Park, national history museum, hockey stadium, Lahore Fort and other tourism points of the city. On March 8, there would be special events related to International Women's Day while a laser light and sound show will be arranged by the WCLA.

30mln saplings to be planted during spring plantation drive

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab chief secretary planted a sapling in the lawns of Civil Secretariat on Friday, in connection with the spring tree plantation campaign.

The authorities have set a target of planting 30 million saplings during the ongoing drive.

The chief secretary directed the departments concerned to make the

plantation campaign a success. He said that the main objective of the drive was to encourage people to plant more trees. He appealed to citizens to actively participate in the campaign. The CS also

issued orders to start a campaign to raise awareness among the public about the environmental and economic benefits of the trees.

The officials of the Forest Department briefed the chief secretary that the spring plantation drive was inaugurated by caretaker chief minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi on February 16 and about eight million saplings have been planted so far.

SUIT NOTICE
IN THE COURT OF MISS AMBAREEN NAVID JUDGE BANKING COURT-I
PESHAWAR Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar
Case No: 29/1 of 2023, Date of hearing: 03-04-2023
Suit for the recovery of Rs. 3,300,000/- Habib Metro Politian Bank Limited Branch at I-8, Markaz Islamabad /Vs/ Muhammad Sohail etc = through its Manager Mr. Ziad Ahmad. **Notice Versus:-** (1)- Muhammad Sohail (2)- Muhammad Khurshed son of Muhammad Rasheed R/O:- House No. 303, P.O. Khas Sherkot, Tehsil and District Kohat. Where as the plaintiff bank has instituted as suit for the recovery of Rs. 3,300,000/- Against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtained leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspapers. Failing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favour of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issued today on 27-02-2023 under my signature and seal of the Court

Registrar Banking Court, 1 Peshawar

Appearing in NAB court for crime of providing 100 MW electricity to city: CM

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that after two weeks, he has to appear before the NAB court in Islamabad for the crime of providing 100 MW of electricity from the Nooriabad Power Plant to Karachi.

This is how he has been penalized for serving the city and its people, but such cases would not stop him from serving the people of the province. This he said while speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the 18th My Karachi-Oasis of Harmony at Expo Center on Friday. He was accompanied by the provincial ministers, Sharjeel Memon, Saeed Ghani, Nasir Shah, and Ikram Dharejo.

The CM said that his government under PPP mode had established the Nooriabad Power plant, which provided Karachi with 100 MW of uninterrupted electricity. He said that a reference was made for this service, and he had been facing the case at NAB court for couple of years.

Shah said that the decision of the court was reserved for the last four months and would be announced soon. Talking about law and order,

CPWB rescues 522 child beggars during last month

LAHORE (APP): The Child Protection & Welfare Bureau (CPWB) Punjab, in an operation, rescued 522 child beggars from various parts of the provincial capital during the last month.

In a press statement issued here on Friday, CPWP Chairperson Sarah Ahmed said child rescue operations were being carried out in the city on daily basis and children would be produced in the Child Protection Court for legal custody. The chairperson said that rescue operations were underway in the limits of all district offices of the CPWB, adding that sincere efforts were being made to end child beggary.

The CPWB was lodging cases against people involved in beggary, she said and added that citizens could report child beggary on the helpline 1121 of the CPWB.

The operations were conducted at PU Campus Bridge, Main Market Gulberg, Johar Town, Akbar Chowk, Bhatta Chowk, Defence, Barkat Market, Kareem Block Market, Moon Market, MM Alam Road and other areas of the city.

the CM said that the Afghan war caused serious law and order in Karachi. "This is why Karachi was ranked 6th in the crime index as the most dangerous city in the world," he said and added that the law enforcement agencies with the support of the people of this city crushed the criminals and restored the law and order. He termed PSL matches and My Karachi festival as proof of improved law and order in the city.

CM Murad Shah while talking about the My Karachi - Oasis of Harmony Exhibition said that it was truly a historic occasion for the Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry which has organized the 18th exhibition. Shah also recognized the late Siraj Qasim Teli's services and contribu-

tion to his wonderful city. He said that it was a great initiative of the Late Siraj Teli that he organized an international trade fair in 2004 and made it a yearly event. The CM welcomed the participation of all the international and national exhibitors and the people of Karachi. He said that the exhibition was contributing to and promoting business activities and attracting foreign capital, which was the need of the hour.

The CM said that this exhibition has provided an opportunity for both local and international potential exhibitors to showcase their products, build partnerships, enhance their economic relationships, and expand bilateral trade. "Despite economic vulnerability, Karachi plays a significant role in

Pakistan's GDP, exports, and revenue and remains on the radars of savvy investors for bringing investments from around the world," he said.

Murad Shah said that his government has been making all efforts to create a conducive environment by reducing the cost of manufacturing and fixing all the irritants which were restricting this growth potential. "We are also working on improving the cost of doing business which is a prerequisite for economic growth and poverty reduction and economic development," he said and added that the role of exhibitions has become critical for any country and acts as a catalyst for boosting industrial growth, and stimulating economic growth, employment, and prosperity.

PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES ACADEMY Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Department of Health				
ADMISSION OPEN FOR TWO YEAR DIPLOMA COURSES				
SPRING SESSION 2023-25				
Applications are invited from suitable candidates for the Diploma Courses in the following Technologies for spring session 2023-25. Prospectus with Forms obtainable from concern institutes, i.e. ZAB-PGPI Peshawar, PIMT Swat, PIMT Abbottabad & PIMT D.I. Khan.				
TECHNOLOGIES OFFERED				
1. Anesthesia	2. Cardiology	3. Dental	4. Dialysis/Nephrology	5. Gastroenterology
6. Health	7. Ophthalmology/Otolaryngology	8. Pathology	9. Pharmacy	10. Physiotherapy
11. Pulmonology	12. Radiology	13. Surgical	14. Audiology	
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA				
Domicile	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged area.			
Upper Age limit	> 30 Years for fresh candidates. > Regular Civil Servant candidates' age limit Forty Five (45) Years with 50% Marks			
Qualification for In-service	Regular Govt. Health Department Service including in relevant field.			
Qualification for Fresh Candidate	Matric with science at least 50% marks and Biology as compulsory subject. 10% weight age will be given to F.Sc passed candidates in Pre-Medical Group.			
S/NO.	Name of Institute	Catchment areas	Display of Merit list	Date of Interview
1.	ZAB-PGPI Peshawar Total seats=241	Peshawar Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Kohat, Karak, Hangu, Khyber District, Mohmand District, Orakzai District, Kurram District, FR Peshawar and FR Kohat. 1. Female. 2. Reserve Seats. 3. In-Service.	24/03/2023	27/03/2023 28/03/2023
2.	PIMT SWAT Total seats=123	Swat, Shangila, Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Chitral, Bunir, Bajour & Malakand.	24/03/2023	29/03/2023
3.	PIMT ABBOTTABAD Total seats=113	Abbottabad, Haripur, Kala Daka, Kohistan, Balagram Mansehra & Torghar,	24/03/2023	30/03/2023
4.	PIMT D.I. KHAN Total seats=89	DIKhan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, South Waziristan, North Waziristan, FR Lakki & FR Tank.	24/03/2023	31/03/2023
Note: Merit list will be displayed on institution notice board. Interview will be conducted in concern institutes as per above schedule dates. > Further details will be determined as per criteria laid down in the Prospectus. > Left over vacant seats of In-Service & reserved quota will be filled from open merit from fresh candidates. > In-Service candidates should send the documents; through proper channel with an advance copy to the concern institute from concerned institute through proper channel but the recommendation/forwarding letter/NOC from the head of the institute should reach before the date of interviews otherwise their application shall not be entertained. > Decision of the admission committee shall be final; students must submit an affidavit on stamp paper for compliance of rules. > No selection order will be issued/sent to any selected candidate, the selection process will finalized on the date of interview, the candidate will deposit admission fee within three days after interview if selected. > The applicant should submit the admission form in their concerned catchment area of their institute. (No form will be accepted on non-concerned institute) > Only original form will be acceptable temper, overwritten, non-properly filled with properly not attested documents will not be entertained. > Merit list will be prepared on District wise quota seat distribution as mentioned in revised prospectus session 2023-25 & onward. > Only short listed candidates will be interviewed and no call letter will be issued to any candidates. > Last date of submission of admission form along with required documents is 20/03/2023.				
Director General (Health) PHSA Peshawar INF(P) 665/23				

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN PAKISTAN PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT No.CCDB/Tender NA-51/AB/502 Dated: 02/03/2023

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders on percentage rate basis (not on individual) are hereby invited for the works mentioned below from the approved PEC registered Contractors duly renewed for the current financial year 2022-23. Tender documents can be received from the office of the undersigned during office hours on any working day on payment of tender cost (Non-Refundable) up to 20/03/2023 with written request on letter pad accompanied with attested copy of CNIC. Income tax Registration Certificate as active taxpayer (filer Tenders will be issued to the proprietor of the Firm / Company or their legally authorized representatives having registered power of attorney (duly attested). The tenders in scaled cover should be received in the tender box kept in the office of Superintending Engineer, Central Civil Circle Pak. PWD. Peshawar on 21/03/2023 upto 12:00 PM and the respective tenders will be opened on the same day at 12:30 PM in the presence of contractors or their authorized representatives, having registered power of attorney.

The following instructions may be read and understood carefully in true letter and spirit, as in case of violation of any of these, the tender forms will not be issued. The documents under mentioned must be accompanied with the application, failing which no tender forms will be issued.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

- No tender will be sold / issued on the date of opening of tenders.
- No tender will be issued / received through post, telegraph or E-Mail.
- According to PPRA Rule-25, Bid Security as stated below against each work in the shape of CDR/Call deposit shall be furnished from any scheduled Bank in the name of the Executive Engineer, Central Civil Division, Pak PWD, Bannu. No tender will be entertained without bid security as stated against each work or less amount.
- Tenders can be purchased on the prescribed cost (Non-refundable) in Cash mentioned against the below noted works from the office of the undersigned during office hours upto 20/03/2023.
- All CDRs once received may be credited into the Government Account and will be refunded through Government Cheque.
- 1st, 2nd, 3rd, lowest bidders CDR may be retained till acceptance of tender.
- The documents provided by the bidders if found ambiguous will be verified and in case of fake one, the firm will face immediate / appropriate penal action as per rules and law.
- Tender Notice is also available at PPRA Website (www.ppra.org.pk)
- Under Rule 33(1) of public Procurement Rules, 2004, the competent authority reserves the right to reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of bid or proposal.
- The submission of tenders by the contractor implies that he is fully conversant with the site of work, scope of work and terms and conditions as laid down in the tender documents.

Note:-In case of any public holiday or surprise engagement etc of the undersigned the schedule of closing & opening will be on 22-03-2023 on same time.

S.No	Name of Work	N.I.T Amount	Earnest Money/Bid Security amount	Period of Completion	Cost of Tender
1	Establishment of Civil Dispensary (CD) at Kotka Aimal Khan Guli Khel Sub Division Bettani FR Lakki	6584456	2%	03 Months	2000/-
2	Establishment of Civil Dispensary (CD) at Kotka Sardar Baryam Khel Sub Division Bettani FR Lakki	6584456	2%	03 Months	2000/-

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
CENTRAL CIVIL DIVISION, PAK. PWD, BANNU

PID(P) 077/2023

Lost & Found

I have lost the booking form #TRP706200 of Bahria Town Karachi in the name of Zakir Hussain. Upon finding, Contact Muhammad Jan, 0333-9330119.

درنگ نام ولدت، تاریخ پیدائش
برسر والد کا نام نورجہاں شاہ، تاریخ
پیدائش 1950ء ہے غلطی کی نورجہاں خان، تاریخ
پیدائش 01-07-1946ء لکھا گیا ہے، والد کا نام
کی مرچانہ ہے، غلطی سے سرکاری کاغذات میں سلیم
مرچانہ لکھا گیا، تاریخ پیدائش 1963ء ہے غلطی
سے 01-07-1953ء درج ہے، لہذا درنگ کی
جائے قسمت اللہ ولد نورجہاں شاہ مکمل ہوگی غلطی
تحتقرنی خلیع کرک۔

PAKISTAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (PCAA)

TENDER NOTICE

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY AT SKARDU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

1. Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is inviting tenders from registered companies / firms / sole proprietors in accordance with the criteria for eligibility of bidders as described in detail in tender terms & conditions on a single stage / two-envelope basis, i.e. Technical & Financial offer for award of following concession at Skardu International Airport.

S. No.	CONCESSION NAME	RESERVE PRICE (in PKR P.M.)	LICENSE PERIOD	TIMINGS & CONTACT PERSON DETAILS	LAST DATE OF PURCHASE OF TENDER DOCUMENT	TENDER FEE (Non-refundable)	DATE, TIME & VENUE OF SUBMISSION	DATE, TIME & VENUE OF OPENING
i.	Establishment and Operation of Rent-a-Car Service	35,786/-	Five (05) years	0900 to 1700 hours on working days C.O.O. / APM Office Skardu 05815923090; 05815923005	17 th March, 2023	Rs. 5,000/- (Rupees Five Thousand only)	20 th March, 2023 at 1100 hrs C.O.O. / APM Office Skardu	20 th March, 2023 at 1130 hrs C.O.O. / APM Office Skardu

2. For detailed Tender Notice kindly visit: www.caapakistan.com.pk & www.ppra.org.pk.

Director Commercial & Estates

Headquarters, Civil Aviation Authority, Terminal - 1, Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, Pakistan
Telephone: +92 21-99242531, Fax: +92 21 99242532, E-mail: dce@caapakistan.com.pk, Website: www.caapakistan.com.pk
PID(K) #2543/22 www.caapakistan.com.pk



PESHAWAR: Activists of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan holding a protest rally against inflation and price hike. — F.P. photo

Khattak dance still alive in KP despite terrorism

PESHAWAR (APP): Known as the land of artists and musicians, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has kept alive the centuries-old traditional Khattak dance despite incidents of terrorism that negatively impacted cultural activities in the province.

Being the national dance of Pakistan, Khattak dance introduced by Pashtun's Khattak tribe in the 14th century, is still being performed mostly on the occasions of weddings, births and welcoming functions of VIPs in the province including merged tribal districts, leaving an indelible imprint on the minds of spectators. In spite of the passing of six centuries, Khattak dance is still able to withstand the change of times as its essence depicts an agility of a dancer, who performs at the thrilling beat of drums and from the core of his heart.

"The Khattak dance is as old as the history of the Khattak tribe in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which goes back to the fourteenth century. Khattak dance passed from one generation to another in Khattak tribe and gave birth to many dances including braghoni, shahdola, bangra, balballah, chatrali, tamseeli cana and charri dana that made deep inroads in our society," said Bakhtzada Khan, research officer, Archaeology and Museums department KP while talking to APP. "The Khattaks mostly lived in Karak, Nowshera and other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had used to dance on mesmerizing movement of swords as a warm-up exercise prior to taking on their rival tribes in a battlefield or achieving success against other warring tribes in wars," he said, adding Khattak tribe was mostly rigid in the past due to lack of education and felt proud of its traditions by carrying the legacy of their forefathers.

"The dance was also popular during Mughal and British eras, who recruited Khattaks in their respective armies for their heroic warfare skills on battlefields. The Mughals rulers were highly impressed with the bravery of Khattak tribesmen including freedom fighter Khushal Khan Khattak, who stood for the freedom and unity of Pakhtoons and highly praised their heroic battlefield performances." With the passage of time, he said the dance became a permanent feature of their funfairs, marriages, engagements, welcoming of guests and sports events that gave the tribe an additional emblem of their distinct identity in KP.

Khattak dance is performed in a bright and colourful traditional 'shalwar' and custom-made frock like 'Kamiz' in addition to a red embroidered waistcoat with a large decorative scarf tied around the waist. The dancers wave glittering swords in the air and swirl to drumbeats and tunes of the surnai. Expert in Khattak dance and musician of Nowshera district, Shahzaib Khan told APP that 100 percent fitness is required to perform Khattak dance. "The dancer performs the dance with high zeal like a hero and displays his supper fitness through speedy body movements while holding one or two and even three swords at a time," Shahzab who inherited the Khattak dance skills from his father late Khalil Khan told APP.

"The dance is a five-step routine involving spins, with the swords crossed over their backs and elbows outward or swords out to sides and typically attains half spin in place leading to a full spin. Depending on the rhythm of the beat, the spin was reversed in full synchronicity as the dance was being performed with musicians turning the beat to the technique of the performers. "Bhangarah is the first step where every member swirls while carrying swords as the prop followed by Derabi in which two youths at a time carrying one sword and handkerchief each in their hands start dance in front of a man with surnai and the rest of the troupe members wait for their turn."

He said Laila is the third step wherein a group of four performers were holding two swords each while performing stunts moving in a circle. Shahzeb said Braghoni was the fastest and the most adventurous of all steps, which a single dancer performs with three swords. "The performer very skillfully swings two swords in the air while holding the third in his mouth," he said, adding it required supper fitness and skills."

Bulbullah is the last of the twelve steps, which is staged without swords. "The dancers normally sing a love song at a high pitch and at the end of the song, the drumbeat slightly increases and the dance goes on. Ikhtair Wali Khan, PML-N KP spokesman and former member provincial assembly told APP that the tradition of cultural dances including the Khattak dance has continued in KP despite brutal incidents of terrorism.

"KP has produced international artists in the calibre of bollywood

superstars Yousaf Khan alias Dalipkumar, Raj Kapoor and Pakistani legends Qavi Khan, Javed Babar and Firdus Jamal. however, it is heartening that seven oldest cinemas out of 15 in Peshawar were closed and converted into trade and commercial centres in the last 10 years," he said. Ikhtair Wali said there was a need to improve storyline, replace outdated cinematography and discourage vulgarity to promote cinema culture and music industry in KP.

Besides introduction of medical insurance policy for artists community and exemption of taxes, he said five years tax holding for filmmakers, exemption of new cinemas and production houses from income tax, tax rebate on export of film and dramas for 10 years were announced by the federal government to promote art, culture and music industry in Pakistan. Besides establishment of a national film Institute and post-film production facility, he said a "national film studio was being set up at a cost of Rs 1 billion".

He said rebates would also be given to foreign filmmakers on joint film and drama projects locally, adding the condition of shooting 70 percent of film in the country would be applicable to them. Besides abolishment of eight percent withholding tax on distributors and producers, he said there was a five-year exemption from customs duty on import of machinery, equipment and supplies for films and dramas.

Ikhtair Wali said Finance Bill 2018 had been amended to exempt import of equipment for new films and dramas from sales tax and entertainment duty. Khayal Muhammad, renowned Pashto singer and pride of performance, said establishment of Rs 1 billion film fund, national film institute and studio besides post-production facility centre for artists and musicians by the federal government would immensely benefit artists' community and film industries in the country.

He said that KP's cultural and musical programs including Khattak dance have highly impressed the UK Queen Elizabeth-II who came along with high level delegation to Khyber tribal district in 1961. They said that promotion of art, cultural programs and traditional dances were imperative to counter the rising intolerance and change the mindset of society besides providing quality entertainment facilities to people.

PMC hosts ACRP formative meeting

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Nation-wide formative meetings of Association of Clinical Research Professionals (ACRP) held at various provincial locations. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa meeting held at Peshawar Medical College (PMC), Peshawar where all the constituent institutions of Prime Foundation (PF) and the leading clinical scientists of the local public sector participated.

Dr. Baber Saeed National Coordinator ACRP Pakistan Chapter led online the roundtable plenary from Dow University of Health Sciences Karachi, whereas Prof. Dr. Najib ul Haq (Patron and Adviser Health & Education of PF) led the local event. The roundtable meeting resolved to transform the research ecosystem in the country and its component provinces through an inclusive process of institutional engagement and development down the line and in this context, determination was expressed to benefit from each other's experiences.

It is worth mentioning that ACRP is an USA based global clinical research initiative with country offshoots that facilitates capacity for clinical trials in terms of institutional development, quality assurance, certified courses on a multitude of clinical research areas ethical conduct of research trials. The formation of Pakistan Chapter is expected to significantly contribute towards research knowledge economy given that Pakistan has a robust healthcare and pharmaceutical industry to the tune of billions.

USAID hands over ERP to KPRA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: USAID funded Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Mobilization (KPRM) activity handed over Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) here on Friday. A handing and taking over ceremony was held at the KPRA headquarters in which the Director General KPRA Mr. Raja Fazal Khaliq and KPRM Representative Amir Hadi signed the documents for the handing and taking over of the ERP.

KPRA has identified a total 13 modules for its ERP out of which 5 modules have been completed and deployed on KPRA Data Center. The ERP is being developed with the financial and technical support of KPRM.

The remaining 8 modules will be developed in the later phases. Presently, Finance, HR and Payroll, Court Cases Management, Notice Management and File Movement System have been completed and deployed. ERP is one of the steps taken by KPRA towards digital transformation. The Director General KPRA thanked USAID KPRM for assisting KPRA in different fields including its capacity building and digital transformation.

US Ambassador hails rich cultural heritage of KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: US Ambassador Donald Blome visited Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) from February 28 to March 2 to deepen the United States' partnership with the people of KP through initiatives related to economic growth, education, security, and cultural preservation.

To strengthen the US-Pakistan economic partnership in KP, the Ambassador and KP Planning and Development Secretary Shah Mahmood Khan inaugurated a new US-funded, \$24 million, five-year project to strengthen and modernize the agriculture sector and small and medium enterprises. Ambassador Blome also met with business leaders at FF Steel to talk about trade and commerce in the province, as well as environmental practices in business.

To highlight educational activities, Ambassador Blome visited Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan to inaugurate a new English Works! program. The United States is providing scholarships for 215 KP students to complete a six-month program in Mardan and Charsadda to improve their English language proficiency and other skills needed for professional success. Since 2019, the United States has provided more than \$3 million to support English language education in KP, benefiting more than 3,500 students and teachers in this province.

Ambassador Blome also inaugurated a reconstructed higher secondary school in Akbarpura that was damaged in the devastating 2010 floods. The United States invested \$1.5 million to rebuild the school, which employs over 50 teachers and is

educating more than 1,100 students. In addition, the Ambassador visited a government girls' primary school where a US-funded program increases school enrollment among Afghan refugee and Pakistani host community girls. This program is part of the US government's nearly \$60 million in assistance for refugees and their host communities in Pakistan in Fiscal Year 2022.

Ambassador Blome also visited the historic Fort Bala Hisar to meet the Frontier Corps KP-North Major General and inaugurated the construction of eight US-funded new joint check posts in the Newly Merged Districts. The following day, the Ambassador met the new Inspector General of KP Police, Akhtar Hayat Khan, to discuss US support for KP police and their facilities. The Ambassador shared condolences for the officers and citizens who lost their lives in the January 30 Peshawar Mosque attack while thanking him for the service and recognizing the bravery of the KP police.

The Ambassador concluded his trip to KP with cultural activities, including visiting the iconic Mahabat Khan Mosque in the heart of Peshawar. From 2002 to 2003, the United States provided more than \$14,000 to restore the Mughal-era decorations on the lower walls of the mosque. The Ambassador also enjoyed a traditional KP cuisine during a meeting with food and culture enthusiast Shah Jee at a local restaurant. He wrapped up his trip by welcoming a group of exchange alumnae to a movie screening at the Consulate to kickstart Women's History Month activities that will be arranged throughout the month of March.

ATP slates govt for its bad performance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Amun Taraqqi Party (ATP) chairman Muhammad Faiq Shah criticized the incumbent 11-party unity government over its poor performance and held it responsible for paralyzing the country economically and to make life of all and sundry a hell through flawed economic policies and wrong priorities.

In a statement issued here on Friday, the ATP chairman said the coalition government has been badly exposed as it failed to keep its promises and didn't come up with expectations of the masses. He said everyone wants to get rid of the present rulers, which has made their life miserable through imposing ill-conceived and 'flawed' policies. He said incompetent government has brought destruction everywhere in the country. Faiq

expressed displeasure over another increase in policy rate, jacking up at 300 basis points (bps) to 20 percent.

He added businesses, industries and the economy are completely shambles. The party leader said inflation in Pakistan is a cost push and it cannot be controlled through a tight monetary policy stance. He noted the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) had kept the high interest rate due to inflationary outlook. On the other hand, Shah added the US dollar decimated Pakistani rupee to historic low in the interbank market, a day after crushing the local currency amid standoff with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and downgrading by Moody's in its latest ratings.

The ATP chairman slammed the blame-game and verbal onslaught between PML-N, PTI leaders over rising inflation and

rapid depreciation of Pak rupees against USD, saying that blame game will lead to further political unrest and chaos in the country. Shah held responsible for both previous and present governments for current economic turmoil in the country. He noted that inflation has touched a new height, making the lives of people miserable.

Talking about the election in Punjab, KP after the directions of the apex court, he expressed that the verdict of the superior judiciary would bring positive results and would bring political and economic development in the country.

The ATP chairman said members and leaders of government and opposition are playing with flames. He emphasized that a national consensus is needed to be built up and to address all issues through holding a greater dialogue.



PESHAWAR: PTI leaders Shafiq Afridi and Iqbal Afridi addressing a press conference. — F.P. photo

KP serves base camp for Gandhara art lovers

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a unique province blessed with numerous archeological sites of Gandhara civilization and its promotion through digital platforms was imperative to attract huge foreign investment for the country.

While travelling on GT Road and Swat Motorway in northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a visitor can explore dozens of archaeological sites of Gandhara civilization including Lord Buddha's artifacts, statues and antiquities at different areas and state museums including Swat, Mardan, Dir and Peshawar to explore the unique ancient treasures besides taking tourists into the glorious history of the region.

The tourists, while entering Peshawar Museum where over 30,000 rare artifacts, statues, antiquities and sculptures were put on display along with ancient dresses of Wazirisan tribesmen, swords of freedom fighters and guns of the British army, could not remain unimpressed after seeing these treasures. The museums of Hund Swabi, Dir Timergara, Mingora Swat and Chitral also drew archeologists and monks from across the globe by exploring numerous precious antiquities and Gandhara's artifacts.

"These rare collections were excavated from various archaeological sites in KP, which spoke us the story of human evolution and their lifestyle besides the rise and fall of civilizations, spread of belief systems and stories encompassing lifespan of the Lord Buddha," said Bakhtzada Khan, research officer KP archeology and museums department while talking to APP on Thursday. Takht-i-Bahi, Barikot, Bazira, Shingerdara Stupa, Butkara I, II & III, Jahanabad as well as Ghaligay and Gokdara cave with prehistoric rock carvings take tourist to the past's glory of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "A climb up to the hilltop in Odigram Swat takes tourists to the birthplace of Padmasambhawa, the second Buddha who travelled across Asia to spread Buddhism."

Bakhtzada said KP was a home to around 2,000 heritage sites in addition to 30,000 relics of the Gandhara civilization where one can easily find sites, which are important as well as sacred for Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and others civilizations. "Despite a vast number of heritage sites, UNESCO has only included six sites in Pakistan in the World Heritage List including archaeological ruins at Moenjodaro Sindh,

Buddhist monastery of Takht-i-Bahi and neighboring city remains at Seri Bahlol Mardan, and archeological ruins of Taxila in 1980."

In 1981, he said two other sites, Lahore Fort Shalamar Gardens and historical monuments of Makli, near the city of Thatta, Sindh were declared world heritage sites by the UNESCO besides Rohtas Fort in 1997. He said another twenty-six Pakistani sites were on the tentative list for inclusion in the world heritage list. "Seri Bahlol Mardan and Taxila are a testimony to glorious past of the region," he said adding Taxila was the capital of Gandhara Kingdom with numerous ancient sites such as Dharmarajika Stupa, the ancient cities of Bhir, Sirkap and Sirsukh, Jandial Temple, Mohra Muradu, Badalpur Stupa, Bhallar Stupa, Julian Monastery and Bhamala Stupa.

"Taxila University is known to be the citadel of knowledge of ancient times even before the advent of Buddhism as Jivaka, the personal physician of Lord Buddha, who was a graduate in Ayurvedic medicine from Taxila University." "Today is an era of digital technology and social media. For sustainable religious tourism and development, we not

only need to preserve our own tangible and intangible cultural heritage but to build new infrastructure while upgrading and improving the existing ones for economic benefits and enhancing the country's image abroad," said Manzoorul Haq, former Ambassador while talking to APP.

"We should not only rely on the government departments for the protection, projection and preservation of ancient heritage sites, but it was also the responsibility of the general public and cultural activists to preserve these sites through sensitization of local population towards importance of culture and heritage for minorities in Pakistan and shared its clips videos on digital and social media." He said this could be done by employing digital documentation in photographic and videography form especially through social media. To promote these sites, he said 3D models of various sites can be created and augmented as well as virtual reality interventions can be made.

Ambassador Manzoor said storytelling sessions were crucial for preservation of traditional knowledge and folk wisdom and communal gathering places like chaupal and

hujras play a significant role of transferring local knowledge to next generation. "Our creative artists and writers can create fictional and feature stories to produce dramas and films on Gandhara civilization of ancient Pakistan as western world has created fictional stories around Egyptian civilization in various films such as Indiana Jones and The Mummy etc," Manzoorul Haq who served Pakistani ambassador at Egypt told APP.

Various events, exhibitions, talks, seminars and festivals could be arranged to sensitize local people, while highlighting the significance of these sites, which are sacred for minorities, especially people of Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and other Asian countries. These kinds of activities will help our local population understand that having foreign tourists visiting their sacred religious places would generate a lot of revenue for them.

"For sustainable religious tourism, we need to work hard on infrastructure development all across the country, where heritage sites are located; building quality hotels and guesthouses with updated websites having complete information about weather, rates and booking details." Manzoor

said our museums need up-gradation to offer an inclusive approach with good displays and descriptive seminars as per international standards for the visitors. Installation of lifts, building ramps, offering a range of souvenirs and different audio-visual programs can also increase the cash flow for museums and help them to improve their services besides promoting research on Gandhara civilization.

Bakhzada said Gandhara cultural heritage research centre at Islamabad has recently been inaugurated, adding the project 'development of cultural promotion and tourism resources of Gandhara heritage of Pakistan was funded by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Republic of Korea (CHA) and executed by Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation and Department of Archeology and Museum. He said it was a five years project 2021-2025 with four main tasks including establishment of Gandhara culture heritage research centre, capacity building of professionals and experts for heritage conservation, inventory and investigation of ghandhara sites for digital documentation and support for development of sites and museums of Gandhara civilization.



In brief

Gynae OPD inaugurated
F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division, Muhammad Ali Shah Friday visited Liaquat Memorial Hospital (LMH) and inaugurated Out Patient Department (OPD) of gynecology. He also visited emergency ward, children OPD, laboratory and pharmacy of the hospital. He also inquired about operational matters, healthcare delivery system and services being provided to patients in the health facility. He also distributed gifts among children that are having treatment in the hospital. He urged staff to work with dedication and further improve healthcare delivery system for facilitation of patients.

Another PTI activist arrested

JHELUM (INP): Police on Friday arrested a Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf activist for distributing hate pamphlets against Pakistan Army and government in Jhelum. Police arrested PTI former finance secretary Saleem Bhatti for distributing pamphlets against Pak Army and government. According to police, Bhatti was distributing hate material in a Jhelum bazar. They further said that the accused also shared hateful posts on social media to incite people against the state institutions. The sedition case was registered in the City Police station on the complaint of ASI Riaz.

Injured constable breathes his last
F.P. Report

MARDAN: A police official who was seriously injured in a terrorist attack in Mardan on Sunday last succumbed to his wounds at a hospital on Friday. Constable Fayyaz had received serious injuries in a terror attack on Dubai Adda checkpoint in Mardan on Sunday last. He had been under treatment at Mardan Medical Complex for the last five days but passed away on Friday morning. Martyred constable Fayyaz will be laid to rest at his ancestral town of Biezai in Tehsil Rustam.

One dead, two hurt in mishap

JHANG (APP): At least one person was killed and two others sustained critical injuries when their rickshaw was hit by a mini-truck near Ahmedpur Sial in Jhang District of Punjab on Friday. According to Rescue 1122, the accident took place in Pir Abdur Rehman area near Ahmedpur Sial where a speeding vehicle hit a rickshaw, killing a man on the spot and injuring two others, a private news channel reported. Upon receiving information, police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the body and injured to a nearby-hospital.

Crackdown against kite selling

MULTAN (APP): Regional Police Officer (RPO) Muhammad Sohail Chaudhry directed officers concerned to launch a comprehensive crackdown against kite selling and aerial firing across the region. Holding a meeting, the regional police officer said that death game in the name of kite selling and aerial firing would not be tolerated at any cost. He directed the district police officer of the region to launch a comprehensive crackdown against the criminals involved in such illegal activities. He said that many people have lost their lives by the chemical threat and aerial firing in the past. He said that police have imposed a ban on these activities adding that action would be taken against the citizens involved in proving the roof of their home for kite flying.

Pak-Afghan highway suspend on second day

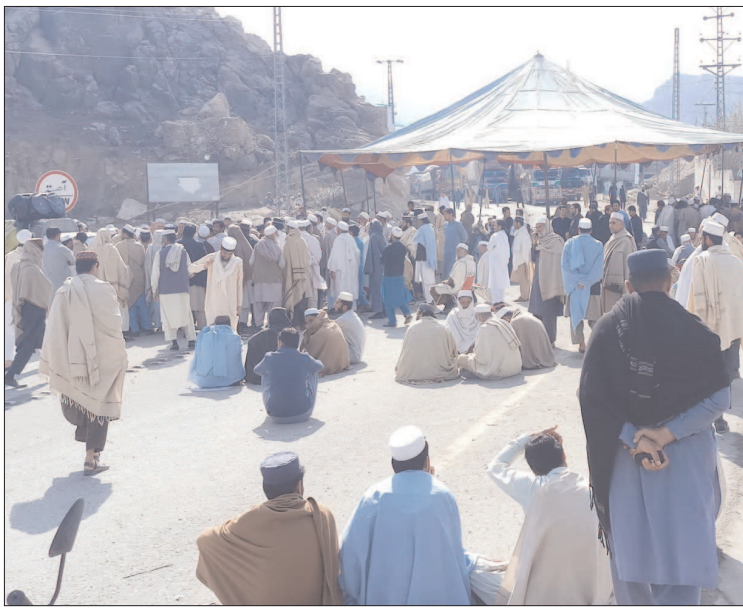
F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: The Pak-Afghan highway was still suspended for the second day in all three subdivisions i.e. Landi Kotal, Jamrud and Bara of Khyber on Friday. It is to be stated here that after circulation of TESCO order, directed the local grid stations crews across the merged tribal region to provide tribesmen only two hours power supply round the clock following withdrawal of the subsidy by the federal government.

As a result, the tribal in Khyber thronged to the streets against it and started indefinite protest demonstrations. The protestors closed down the road at Charwazghai area of Landi Kotal and in front of grid station, Jamrud, district Khyber.

In the same way, the tribesmen of Bara initiated a protest demo at Khyber square, Bara bazaar. Officials of local administration approached the protestors and on behalf of hiphup, offered them provision of four hours power supply in 24 hours however they declined it and said it could not meet their needs.

They established protest camps at the main road, closed the highway



for all kinds of movement. The activists warned that till resuming six hours of electricity, they would not give up their agitation and announced a boycott of the up-coming polio eradication campaign. Due to closing of the road, export and import was halted and long queues

of the merchandise commodities were witnessed at the side of the highway. On the other hand, as a precautionary measure, construction work on Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) electricity transmission project was temporarily suspended in district Khyber.

Technical orientation session arranged

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: The Planning and Development Department of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in collaboration with the sub-national governance (SNG) Programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) UK, organised a technical orientation session on planning and budgeting for the elected representatives of Bannu and North Waziristan districts on Friday.

The session held on the premises of deputy commissioner's office in Bannu was aimed to provide technical assistance to the local government representatives including women and minorities members on their role in the planning

and budget-making process and its execution. Along with Bannu additional deputy commissioner Islahuddin, the tehsil, village and neighbourhood councils' chairmen attended the session.

Divisional commissioner Parwez Sabathkhel, being the chief guest, opened the session and applauded the efforts of Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and SNG team for organizing the session. He said that such sessions would help to enhance the capacities of local bodies' members enabling them to discharge their duties and functions in public interest effectively.

He underlined the need for strengthening public sector organisations and focusing on improving governance and provision

of services to citizens. On the occasion, an official said the sub-national governance programme provides technical assistance and capacity building support to the government in implementing policies and reforms at the provincial and local levels.

"The support is aimed to strengthen democracy, promote economic growth and alleviate poverty in Pakistan through governance reforms and improved service delivery", he maintained. The official said that the technical orientation session was an important step towards achieving the objectives of the SNG programme and it would enable the elected representatives to perform their duties effectively under the new local government system.

Govt takes measures to promote snow sports

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Deputy Commissioner Swat, Irfanullah Khan Mehsud on Friday said that the provincial government has taken several measures to promote snow and adventure sports in Swat district.

He said snow sports events were organized at Gabin Jabba and Malamjabba to encourage snow and adventure sports in the district. Talking to a representative delegation of Kalam, the Deputy Commissioner said that Malam Jabba and Gabin Jabba sports events have attracted an influx of tourists to Swat valley.

He said that Swat was going to become the tourism capital of Pakistan due to its seven unique features including trout fish, snowfall, skiing, river rafting, lush green valleys, mountains and lakes. The Deputy Commissioner urged tourists to come in large numbers to Swat valley and explore its mesmerizing natural and mountainous beauty. Irfanullah said that tourism police were made operational in Kalam and other scenic areas to facilitate tourists.

Burnt body parts of missing youth recovered

JHELUM (INP): Police recovered the burnt severed parts of a body of a young man who went missing from Jhelum a couple of days ago on Friday. Deceased Shoaib Hassan who was 22-year-old went missing two days ago from Pind Sweka in Jhelum. Police found the burnt severed parts of his body from a ditch.

According to police, the youth was mercilessly burnt alive. Then the murderer cut his body into three parts with the help of a sharp-edged weapon. Police said that the head, torso and legs of the deceased were found from a ditch. The heirs of the slain person told the police that Shoaib while talking to someone on phone went outside the house on February 28. But after that, he did not return home. Police said that they handed over the body of the deceased to the heirs after its post mortem. The Chotala police after registering the case, have started investigation.

Two injured

GUJRANWALA (INP): Two youth received serious wounds as a kite string cut their throats in the precincts of Peoples Colony Police Station in Gujranwala on Friday morning.

According to police, both youths were taken to the hospital for medical assistance after suffering deep cuts to their hands and faces. The kite string incidents, which took place on Kashmir Road and Kacha Aimanabad Road, have exposed the negligence and false tall claims of Gujranwala police.

Bizenjo takes notice of Highways closure against power outage

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo took notice of the closure of the National Highway by protesters against the power outage and directed the concerned department to immediately review and resolve the problem.

A meeting of Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO) officials was held at the direction of the chief minister with the Zamindar Action Committee (ZAC). The meeting was also attended by MPAs of Balochistan Assembly Malik Naseer Shahwani and Asghar Khan Tareen, Chief Minister's Principal Secretary Imran

Gachki, Energy Secretary Bashir Khan Bazai and Chief of QESCO Abdul Karim Jamali.

In the meeting, the representatives of the Zamindar Action Committee informed about the losses caused to the agriculture sector and the farmers due to the non-availability of electricity. Addressing the meeting, the CM Principal Secretary Imran Gachki said the chief minister's directive was to address the electricity problem of the farmers on an immediate and long-term basis.

It was agreed in the meeting that for the solution of farmers' problems,

there was a need for coordination between the energy department QESCO and the farmers association. On this occasion, it was decided that QESCO would immediately restore electricity to the agricultural sector for 6 hours in respective areas of the province.

It was agreed that the Zamindar Action Committee would end their strike and road closures, while negotiations between the government and landlords would continue. Earlier, Zamindar Action Committee members blocked the National Highway in respective areas of the province against the prolonged load shedding.

Overseas role for resolution of IHK dispute demanded

MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, while referring to the dire situation in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), said it was high time that the overseas Kashmiris should play their due role to help resolve the lingering dispute that has been the main cause and consequence of bloodshed and violence in the region.

The president expressed these views while talking to Pamela Malik, Ghazala Khan and Kanwal Khan of the Jammu and Kashmir Right to Self-Determination Movement, UK. Hailing the Kashmiri diaspora community's significant role in promoting the Kashmir cause at the international level, the president said overseas

Kashmiris owed even a greater responsibility vis a vis resolving the Kashmir issue and highlighting the woeful plight of their Kashmiri brethren who have been terribly suffering under India's brutal suppression for the past several decades.

Briefing the visiting delegates about the prevailing political and human rights situation in the IIOJK, the president said that Kashmiris have been facing the brunt of India's prolonged military occupation with the utmost courage and resilience.

Referring to the massive troops' concentration in the disputed territory, The president said India had turned Kashmir into a military garrison by deploying over 900,000 military and paramilitary troops in the IIOJK. The massive troops'

concentration, he said, had made the life of Kashmiris miserable. "Under the given circumstances, the onus of responsibility to draw world attention towards Indian brutality and barbarism in IIOJK lies with the Kashmiri expatriate community", Barrister Chaudhry said, adding that it was a matter of serious concern that India's apartheid regime had intensified its efforts to bring material change aimed at converting Muslim majority state into a minority.

He said the Modi government had also changed the region's political landscape through bogus delimitation. In order to thwart India's nefarious designs in the region, the president said that concerted efforts were required to raise these issues effectively at the global level.

Modern weapons to provide police: Sindh IG

SUKKUR (APP): Inspector General (IG) Sindh Police, Ghulam Nabi Memon has said modern weapons and ammunition besides safety materials would be provided to Police doing their duties in hard areas and added the Police Stations of the Katcha areas would be reinforced.

He assured that it would not spare those found patronising or protecting criminals even if they were or connected to influential

individuals. Talking to Media outside the Sukkur High Court, the IG Sindh urged people to come forward with evidence against legislators involved with such gangs of dacoits.

The people who are being blamed for patronising dacoits provided us funds to fight against them," he said without disclosing the Names of the donors. Commenting on the deployment of the army to spearhead an operation against the dacoits, he said

the decision lies with the provincial government. In what seemed to be a misplaced reference, the IGP claimed that until some years ago, people couldn't travel beyond Hyderabad without a police escort.

According to him, the problem had now been confined to only three districts of Sindh. The police chief also chaired a meeting to discuss the operational strategy for the riverine forests at DIG Sukkur office on Saturday.

Punjab Culture Day to be observed on 14th

SARGODHA (APP): Commissioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti directed the deputy commissioners to ensure arrangements to celebrate 'Punjab Culture Day' on March 14 in the division. He issued these directions while chairing a meeting regarding Punjab Culture preparations at his office on Friday.

The commissioner said various programmes should be organized while ensuring participation of people from all walks of life in the events. It was briefed in the meeting that planning was being made to celebrate Jashn-e-Baharan in the district from March 14 to 20 while in Khushab district Jashn-e-Baharan would be celebrated from March 4 to 6.

DC Sargodha Capt (ret'd) Shoaib Ali, DC Khushab Shabbir Rana, DC Mianwali Sajjad Ahmed Khan, DC Bhakkar Dr Noor Muhammad Awan, DG PHA Tauqeer

Haider Kazmi, Director Information Shahzad Ahmed Virk, Director Colleges Sarfraz Gujjar, Assistant Director Arts Council Adnan KhaliqBhatti and other relevant officers were also present.

Farmers advised: The Agriculture department has advised the farmers to use nitrogen fertiliser (urea) carefully to obtain good quantity of wheat yield from per acre of land. According to Agriculture spokesman, here on Friday, farmers must use Urea for 50 to 55 days to achieve better production of wheat.

"Use of Urea more than required quantity leads to less production of wheat." Farmers should seek guidance from the staff of the Agriculture Extension Department before using nitrogen fertiliser (urea), he said.

ASI killed on road: An assistant sub inspector was killed when two motorcy-

cles collided with each other in Laxiaon Police limits on Friday. Police said ASI Muhammad Ashraf and Reader to Assistant Superintendent Police City circle Sargodha were travelling on a motorcycle when they collided with another bike. Resultantly, Ashraf died on the spot. Police and Rescue 1122 reached the spot and shifted the body to a local hospital.

Tea seller gunned down: Unidentified robbers killed a man during a dacoity at 127 SB at Fateh Khan, Draz Khail, in Sillanwali Police limits here on Friday. Police said the accused entered the office of a stone crashing plant and held Syed Ameer and others hostage. Meanwhile, Niaz Ali, a tea stall, 45, came the office to serve the staffers with tea when the dacoits opened firing at him who died on the spot while the accused managed to escape.

Chairman HEC assures all possible support To SABS University

HYDERABAD (APP): The Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed has assured all possible support for uplifting the overall standard of Shaheed Allah Buksh University of Art, Design and Heritage Jamshoro.

The university spokesman informed here on Friday that Chairman HEC Islamabad held out

such assurance to Vice Chancellor SABS University Prof. Dr. Arabella Bhutto who visited his office at Islamabad the other day. The Chairman HEC congratulated Dr. Arabella Bhutto on her appointment as Vice Chancellor SABS University and said all possible support would be extended for promotion of art, uplifting of education standards and grant of

scholarships so that the university could meet with financial deficit and other necessary requirements.

Dr. Mukhtar also assured to be in close contact with SABS University online or any other convenient medium, the university spokesman informed and added that Dr. Arabella Bhutto thanked the HEC Chairman for his support towards the university.

KP FS&HFA discards adulterated milk

F.P. Report

SWABI: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety & Halal Food Authority has discarded 50 kilograms of adulterated milk and 30 kilograms of rusted meat during operation against unhygienic food items in various districts on Friday.

On the directives of the Director General (DG)

Food Safety & Halal Food Authority, Shahrukh Ali Khan, a food safety collected samples of milk from milk supplying vehicle at Shaheed Babar Check Post, District Swabi and analyzed it through Food Testing Laboratory, which proved the mixing of water and prompted the discarding of 50 kilograms of milk.

In another operation,

30 kilograms of rusted meat was recovered from a vehicle and discarded on the spot. The authority has imposed heavy penalties in both cases. Similarly, the inspection teams of the authority have seized expired cold drinks and beverages during checking at Kohat and after discarding them imposed heavy fines on their owners.

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: The regional director of the Association For Academic Quality (Afaq) Majid Ali has said that no nation can progress and develop without quality education. He was addressing a prize distribution ceremony at Timergara press club as chief guest here on Friday. The Afaq area manager Azizul Hakim, prominent educationist Fazal Khaliq and others also spoke on the occasion.

The guests awarded shields and appreciation certificates to 40 male and female position holder students in the Encyclopedia test held here the other day. The speakers said that igno-

rance and lawlessness could only be defeated with the weapon of education. They asked the students to avoid unnecessary use of mobile phones as it was a waste of time and money. They said the parents had attached great expectations with their children so that they should also work hard and win their parents' hearts.

The students of IMS School Mian Banda got several positions in the test. Gul Afshan of this school stood third, Toba Khaliq got fourth, Sara Khaliq bagged 6th, Saad Nawaz remained 7th, Suhana Khaliq got 8th and Aamir Khan bagged 9th position in the test.

DC visits Taimargara Jail: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Lower Dir, Iftikhar Ahmad and

Additional Deputy Commissioner Relief, Tariq Hussain Friday visited Taimargara Jail and inspected its various sections. He visited hospital, kitchen and juvenile section of the jail and inquired about facilities being provided to inmates. During visit, DC was briefed about the facilities being provided to prisoners in jail.

He directed hospital staff to further improve healthcare service delivery in the hospital and ensure availability of needed medicines. He also directed steps to resolve issues confronted by jail staff and said that a meeting would be convened to discuss these issues with departments of social welfare and communication and works.



Greek train crash station master ‘devastated’, takes some blame

ATHENS (Reuters): The station master of Greece's Larissa city, who was charged over the country's worst train crash, assumes some responsibility for the disaster but other factors were also at play, his lawyer said. A passenger train with more than 350 people on board collided head-on with a freight train near the city of Larissa, some 220 miles north of the capital Athens. The trains were travelling in opposite directions on the same track.

The 59-year old station master was arrested hours later. Greek railway unions have long complained of slipping safety standards which place both passengers and workers at risk.

The detainee, who according to Greek state media reports was assigned his role about a month ago, appeared before a prosecutor. Felony charges were laid against him for disrupting transport and putting lives at risk, his lawyer Stefanos Pantartzidis said outside the courthouse. "He is literally devastated," Pantartzidis told reporters. "Since the first moment, he has assumed responsibility proportionate to him ... he is not in a position to say anything else." Pantartzidis said that his client followed the existing procedure partially and he could have been "possibly more careful, which he accepts and takes responsibility for, but until there". He added that "there has been convergent negligence by many other factors".

Pantartzidis did not specify which factors he believed were at play in the accident or give details about what procedures his client had not followed. Authorities have not made public the name of the accused. The man, who according to a police official had initially denied wrongdoing, attributing the incident to a technical



failure, was expected to respond to the charges. A retired train driver instructor, Nikos Tsouridis, told state TV that the station master was trained but inexperienced.

"They will pile everything on the station master. He was trained, but inexperienced. They should never have assigned him to a central station like Larissa, and on his own." "He had completed his training, but he had been there (in that position) for a month," Greece's railway is functional mainly because of the trained drivers and station masters, Tsouridis said.

"The railroad only works today because of the drivers, because they are well trained, and staff," he said. Pantartzidis did not say how long his client had been in the job in Larissa, one of the largest cities in Greece. A recording of the communication between the train driver and the station master which was published on

Proto Thema website suggested the latter told the driver to continue past a red signal. "Is Larissa listening?" the driver said referring to the station master, according to the recording.

"It is listening... pass the red signal at the exit until the entrance signal at Neoi Poroi (station)," the station master responded. But that order did not strike the driver as strange as the signalling system had been dysfunctional, Proto Thema reported. Station masters are hired by OSE, the Greek railway infrastructure operator, while train drivers are hired by Hellenic Train, a subsidiary of Italy's Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane.

Earlier, government spokesman Giannis Oikonomou said "the station master had confessed to negligence" and that the train crash was caused by a human error. But Greece, he said, also needs to examine what could have been done over the years to prevent this crash.

Firefighters battle blaze at HK building site

HONG KONG (Agencies): Firefighters in Hong Kong are battling a huge blaze at a high-rise building under construction in the Kowloon district, which has forced the evacuation of some nearby apartment blocks. Officials said the fire broke out at 11:11pm (15:11 GMT) in the heart of densely-populated Tsim Sha Tsui, a popular shopping and tourist district next to the harbour.

It eventually escalated to the fourth level of severity on a five-point scale and about 130 people living in three buildings nearby were evacuated early on Friday amid concerns the fire might spread. Multiple floors of the structure - including scaffolding - were on fire and burning debris floated in the air. Some fell to the ground. By about 8am (00:00 GMT), the government said that while the fire was under control, crews were still battling the blaze.

Police said six adjacent buildings, including the three where the evacuation took place and the Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers, also caught fire, but the blazes were extinguished. No casualties were reported. The fire, which was clearly visible across the harbour in the night sky, attracted crowds of onlookers. The 42-storey skyscraper that caught fire was close to completion and part of a 6 billion Hong Kong dollar (\$764 million) redevelopment project by the developer Empire Group.

Is North Korea fighting a food crisis?

SEOUL (Agencies): North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un has ordered agricultural improvements amid reports from outside the country of a worsening food crisis. South Korea has said its neighbour seems to be dealing with a "grave" food situation, while the Washington, DC-based think tank 38 North, which is part of the Stimson Center, has said the country is on the brink of famine. North Korea has long suffered from food insecurity with a devastating famine in the 1990s estimated to have killed somewhere between 240,000 and 3.5 million people.

Analysts have blamed extreme weather and border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic for the deterioration in the food situation, which was already fragile from decades of economic stagnation due to centralised planning, the diversion of resources to weapons development and international sanctions. "Food availability has likely fallen below the bare minimum with regard to human needs," a report from 38 North said in January. North Korea's economy shrank by an estimated 0.1 percent in 2021, the second straight year of decline, according to South Korea's central bank. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has urged officials to meet agricultural production targets declaring "nothing is impossible" under the leadership of the ruling Workers' Party.

He has also called for infrastructure improvements to increase food production, according to state media. North Korea relies on a collective agriculture system that has been in place since the 1950s. "[Its] agricultural system relies on farmers producing as much food as they can," Stimson Center Fellow and journalist, Martyn Williams, told Al Jazeera.

Most of the food goes into a central distribution system "and in the past, that provided North Koreans with an adequate supply of basic nutrition", he added. "But over the last sort of 10 years or more, it started to fall apart. And it's at the level now where most North Koreans can't survive on what, if anything, they get from the state." According to Williams, most of the collected food is delivered to "the capital cities where the elite lives... and also to army units, and the military units".

South Korea's Ministry of Unification has said there have been reports of deaths from starvation, while Seoul's rural development agency reported that the country's crop production fell by nearly 4 percent in 2022, citing heavy summer rains and economic conditions.

South Korea, US to go ahead with drills despite NK threat

SEOUL (AP): The South Korean and US militaries said Friday they'll go ahead with large-scale annual military drills later this month despite North Korea's threats to take "unprecedentedly" strong action against such training. It's likely that North Korea will respond to the upcoming South Korean-US exercises with provocative missile tests and belligerent rhetoric because it views them as an invasion rehearsal.

In a joint press conference, the South Korean and US militaries said they will conduct the Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, from March 13-23 to strengthen their defense and response capabilities. They said the training would focus on North Korean aggression, lessons learned from recent conflicts and the changing security environment. "The Korea-US alliance will prepare for the FS (Freedom Shield) training while maintaining a firm readiness against potential provocations by the North Korean military," said Col. Lee Sung Jun, a spokesperson at the South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Lee said the allies would respond to possible North

Korean provocations with "an overwhelming capability." During the exercises, the allies will also conduct a number of large-scale joint field training, called Warrior Shield FTX, to improve their operation execution capabilities, said Col. Isaac L. Taylor, a spokesperson for the US military. He said the field trainings will include a combined amphibious drill. "The Warrior Shield FTX stands for the ROK-US alliance's capability and resolution to ensure a combined defense posture to defend the ROK," Taylor said, using South Korea's official name, the Republic of Korea.

South Korea and the United States have been expanding their military exercises in the face of evolving North Korean nuclear threats. Emboldened by its advancing nuclear arsenal, North Korea test-fired more than 70 missiles last year, the most ever for a single year, and several more this year. Many of the missiles tested were nuclear-capable weapons designed to strike the US mainland and South Korea. North Korea has also threatened to use its nuclear weapons preemptively in potential conflicts with the United States and

South Korea. The US military has warned the North that the use of nuclear weapons "will result in the end of that regime." In January, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the US would also increase its deployment of advanced weapons such as fighter jets and bombers to the Korean Peninsula.

Last month, North Korea's Foreign Ministry warned the US and South Korea would face "unprecedentedly persistent and strong counteractions" if they carry out their planned military drills this year that the North regards as "preparations for an aggression war." Later, Senior North Korean Foreign Ministry official Kwon Jong Gun said that the only way to reduce military tensions on the Korean Peninsula is for the United States to withdraw its plans to deploy strategic assets in South Korea and halt joint drills with its Asian ally. He said if the United States continues its "hostile and provocative practices" against North Korea, that can be regarded as a declaration of war against it. North Korea has previously issued similar rhetoric in times of animosities with the United States and South Korea.

Angry Ohio residents confront railroad over health fears

OHIO (AP): Residents who say they're still suffering from illnesses nearly a month after a train carrying toxic chemicals derailed in Ohio confronted the railroad's operator at a town forum, demanding to know whether they'd be relocated from homes they're afraid to live in. "It's not safe here," said one man, staring straight at representatives of Norfolk Southern. "I'm begging you, by the grace of God, please get our people out of here."

While the railroad announced it was ready to begin moving more contaminated soil from underneath the tracks, buying homes and moving people out of East Palestine hasn't been discussed, said Darrell Wilson, the railroad's assistant vice president of government relations. "Why?" someone shouted. Few seemed to come away satisfied with answers they heard about air and water testing from state and federal officials - even after the US Environmental Protection Agency said it was ordering Norfolk Southern to begin testing for dioxins, toxic chemical compounds that can stay in the environment for long periods of time.

Many people remain scared about whether the area will be safe for their children years from now, saying they fear that dioxins not yet detected will cause long-term damage. Testing

so far by the EPA for "indicator chemicals" has suggested there's a low chance that dioxins were released from the derailment, the agency said. Some residents booed, laughed and yelled, "Don't lie to us," when Debra Shore, a regional administrator with the EPA, reiterated that tests have continually shown that the village's air is safe. Investigators looking into the fire that erupted after the derailment said it melted a key part of the tank cars filled with toxic chemicals, leading federal officials to warn railcar owners to check their fleets for similar flaws.

The National Transportation Safety Board said investigators determined the aluminum covers over the pressure relief valves on three of the five tank cars carrying vinyl chloride melted and that some of the metal was found around the valves. The NTSB said melted aluminum may have degraded the performance of the valves and kept them from releasing some of the flammable gas to relieve pressure inside the tank cars. Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw has said the failure of the valves was part of why officials decided to breach the cars and burn off the vinyl chloride. The resulting toxic fire prompted the evacuation of half of East Palestine, Ohio, and the

surrounding area near the Pennsylvania border. Shaw said the railroad agreed with all the officials responding to the Feb. 3 derailment that venting the hazardous materials cars was the best way to prevent a disastrous explosion.

"The factors on the ground at that time were that the safety valves on the rail cars had failed and the temperatures inside the railcars were heating up," Shaw said. "So, our independent expert was extremely concerned about a catastrophic uncontrolled explosion that would shoot shrapnel and hazardous gas throughout this populated community." Wilson told residents that Norfolk Southern feels horrible about what happened. So far, more than 2 million gallons (7.6 million liters) of water and liquid waste have been removed along with 1400 ton (1,270 metric tonnes) of solid waste. Many people have complained that Norfolk Southern opened the tracks less than a week after the derailment and didn't remove the soil underneath. The railroad now plans to dig up the areas and should be able to remove all the contaminated soil by the end of April if it's able to start right away, Wilson said. That only brought more jeers and angry shouts. "You should have done it right the first time," someone yelled.

Colombia proposes shipping invasive hippos to India, Mexico

BOGOTA (AP): Colombia is proposing transferring at least 70 hippopotamuses that live near Pablo Escobar's former ranch - descendants of four imported from Africa illegally by the late drug lord in the 1980s - to India and Mexico as part of a plan to control their population. The hippos, which are territorial and weigh up to 3 tons, have spread far beyond the Hacienda Napoles ranch, located 200 kilometers (124 mile) from Bogota along the Magdalena River. Environmental authorities estimate there are about 130 hippos in the area in Antioquia province and their population could reach 400 in eight years.

Escobar's Hacienda Napoles - and the hippos - have become a sort of local tourist attraction in the years since the kingpin was killed by police in 1993. When his ranch was abandoned, the hippos survived and reproduced in local rivers and favorable climatic conditions. Scientists warn the hippos do not have a natural predator in Colombia and are a potential problem for biodiversi-

ty since their feces change the composition of the rivers and could impact the habitat of manatees and capybaras. Last year, Colombia's government declared them a toxic invasive species. The plan to take them to India and Mexico has been forming for more than a year, said Lina Marcela de los Rios Morales, director of animal protection and welfare at Antioquia's environment ministry.

The hippos would be lured with food into large, iron containers and transferred by truck to the international airport in the city of Rioneiro, 150 kilometers away. From there, they would be flown to India and Mexico, where there are sanctuaries and zoos capable of taking in and caring for the animals. "It is possible to do, we already have experience relocating hippos in zoos nationwide," said David Echeverri López, a spokesman for Cornare, the local environmental authority that would be in charge of the relocations. The plan is to send 60 hippos to the Greens Zoological Rescue & Rehabilitation Kingdom in

Gujarat, India, which De los Rios Morales said would cover the cost of the containers and airlift. Another 10 hippos would go to zoos and sanctuaries in Mexico such as the Ostok, located in Sinaloa.

"We work with Ernesto Zazueta, who is the president of sanctuaries and zoos in Mexico, who is the one who liaisons with different countries and manage their rescues," said the official. The plan is to focus on the hippos living in the rivers surrounding the Hacienda Napoles ranch, not the ones inside the ranch because they are in a controlled environment and don't threaten the local ecosystem. The relocations would help control the hippo population, and though the animals' native habitat is Africa, it is more humane than the alternate proposal of exterminating them as an invasive species, said De los Rios Morales. Ecuador, the Philippines and Botswana have also expressed their willingness to relocate Colombian hippos to their countries, according to the Antioquia Governor's Office.

Cambodia opposition leader Kem Sokha sentenced to 27 years

PHNOM PENH (Agencies): Cambodian opposition leader Kem Sokha has been sentenced to 27 years under house arrest after being found guilty of treason, ending a three-year trial drawn out by COVID-19 and delays that allowed for government lawyers to find new evidence of the politician's alleged crimes. The judge at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court court told the former president of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) that he would be banned from politics and voting in elections indefinitely.

Kem Sokha was arrested in September 2017 without a warrant in a midnight raid on his home and taken to a provincial jail. Denied bail several times before eventually being released under house arrest, the prominent politician was charged with "conspiracy with a foreign power" under article 443 of Cambodia's criminal code. The CNRP was dissolved and the government, under the longtime ruler and Prime Minister Hun Sen, made it a crime to associate with the name or depict its leaders' images. Without any effective opposition, Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) swept the board in national elections in 2018.

Shortly after Friday's

verdict was announced, the United States ambassador to Cambodia W Patrick Murphy tweeted that Washington was "deeply troubled" by the conviction. Kem Sokha had consistently denied the charges against him, saying he was only trying to win power through the ballot box. "[Kem Sokha's] trial, built on a fabricated conspiracy, was a miscarriage of justice," Murphy wrote. "Inclusive democracy would further the Cambodian people's aspirations for a prosperous society that respects all voices and rights." When the trial eventually began in January 2020, Kem Sokha was questioned over some 63 hearings about his involvement in politics starting from 1993, his time running a human rights NGO and his ties with Sam Rainsy, another opposition leader who lives in exile in Paris. The two men merged their political groupings to create the CNRP in 2012.

Prosecutors argued Kem Sokha had been caught "red-handed" in a political conspiracy, producing as evidence a two-minute extract from an hour-long speech he made in Australia in 2013 where he said he had had support from the US since 1993. Government lawyers interpreted opposition members'

actions of raising fists, wearing black or giving out lotus flowers as part of Kem Sokha's alleged attempt at a colour revolution. Defence lawyers noted that their opponents kept repeating the argument but failed to show an explicit collusion between Kem Sokha and a foreign government.

As witnesses were questioned in October, the defence again asked why donors from foreign organisations - including the US-based National Democratic Institute whose employees were expelled from Cambodia in 2017 - were not called into the court to explain their alleged association with the defendant. Government lawyers also attempted to link Kem Sokha to foreign governments by sharing photos of the leader with ambassadors as well as at a garment workers' protest against low minimum wages in 2014. Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said the verdict demonstrated a "total lack of independence" between the Cambodian judiciary and Hun Sen's ruling CPP. "Governments that have sought for decades to promote a rights-respecting Cambodia should use this nonsensical and punitive

verdict to reassess their approach to Hun Sen's government," he said.

Kem Sokha's arrest followed the CNRP's strong performance in local polls in 2017, suggesting it would pose a serious challenge to the CPP in national polls that were scheduled for the following year. Hun Sen has continued to crack down on the opposition and freedom of expression in recent years with mass trials of opposition politicians and even party members. Last month, he revoked the licence for Voice of Democracy (VOD), one of the country's last independent media outlets. The next general election takes place later this year.

"This verdict is an unmistakable warning to opposition groups months before national elections," Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director Ming Yu Hah said in a statement. "The use of the courts to hound opponents of Prime Minister Hun Sen knows no limits." "Sokha is one of many opposition figures who has been put through a physically and psychologically taxing ordeal which will continue after today's unjust verdict. There can be no right to a fair trial when the courts have been co-opted by the heavy hand of the government."

Iranian warships in Rio de Janeiro stirring concern abroad

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP): The arrival this week to Rio de Janeiro of two Iranian warships that Brazil's government authorized to dock has prompted rebukes both from Israel and the US. "Israel sees the docking of Iranian warships in Brazil a few days ago, as a dangerous and regretful development," the spokesperson of Israel's foreign relations ministry, Lior Haiat, wrote on Twitter. "Brazil should not grant any prize to a malign state."

Haiat's comments followed others the day before by US State Department spokesperson Ned Price. In response to a reporter's question about the ships reaching Brazil, Price said that Washington is discussing the issue with Brazilian partners and that it wants to ensure Iran "is not able to acquire a foothold, is not able to take advantage of others in our hemisphere." "It is certainly not the case that the Brazilian government, the Brazilian people would want to do anything that would assist, that would aid a government, a regime that

is responsible for a brutal crackdown and violent repression against its own people," he added. One of the two ships was spotted offshore Rio's world-famous south zone of beaches, while the other was docked downtown. The IRIS Makran and IRIS Dena ships are authorized to stay in Rio until March 4.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control last month designated both ships for sanctions. Brazil's foreign ministry didn't immediately respond to the Associated Press' request for comment on the statements from the Israeli and American officials. The trip by the Iranian navy comes amid heightened tensions between Tehran and the West over the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and as the Islamic Republic enriches uranium to its closer than ever to weapons-grade levels. Iranian officials have portrayed the trip as challenging America's influence in its own backyard - long a point of contention as Tehran continually criti-

cizes the presence of the US Navy's 5th Fleet in the region, which patrols the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

The state-run IRNA news agency quoted Iranian navy commander Rear Adm. Shahram Irani in January as saying that "the Islamic Republic is not present in two strategic straits on the planet, but in the current year, the Iranians plan to have a presence in one of them, which is the Panama Canal." State media has described the trip as challenging American "hegemony." Iran also faces nationwide protests and anger after the September death of Masha Amini, a woman who died after being detained by the country's morality police. In the time since those demonstrations, Tehran has tried to flex its military elsewhere as well. Tehran has supplied drones to Russia that killed Ukrainian civilians, run drills in a border region with Azerbaijan and bombed Kurdish positions in Iraq. Brazil's President

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made international diplomacy a feature of his second presidential term, which ended in 2010. That included attempting to broker a nuclear deal between the US and Iran during his second presidential term that same year, though talks ran aground.

Elected in October to return to the presidency, Lula quickly traveled to Washington last month as a means to demonstrate his alignment with President Joe Biden. Biden's special climate envoy John Kerry was also in Brazil's capital this week to discuss collaboration to protect the Amazon rainforest. In a statement, US Sen. Ted Cruz noted that the US has already sanctioned the two Iranian warships, and Rio de Janeiro's port and any Brazilian service providers are now at risk of sanctions. "The Biden administration is obligated to impose relevant sanctions, reevaluate Brazil's cooperation with US antiterrorism efforts, and reexamine whether Brazil is maintaining effective antiterrorism measures at its ports," Cruz wrote.

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JALIL AFRIDI
Managing Editor

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Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001
Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573
E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com
Lahore Office: 0335-4026284
Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com
Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253
Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com
Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907
Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com
*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Migration drive and state of Pakistan

SEVEN Pakistanis died and many were injured in a boat wreckage incident in the Mediterranean sea near the Libyan Port city of Benghazi in recent days. According to the details, the wooden boat was heading to Europe from the Libyan coastal city of Qasr Alkayar with over 80 people onboard. This was the second incident of its kind in less than a week, which involves illegal migration/human trafficking from Asia and Africa to Europe through dangerous sea routes and rough weather conditions. Earlier, a refugee ship carrying near 200 people mostly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangla Dash, and Africa crashed against the rocks off the Crotone, a Coastal city in Southwestern Italy. That incident cost the lives of 62 migrants including 4 Pakistanis, while a Pakistani woman athlete and former football star Shahida Raza was among the deceased in Shipwreck near Italy.

Illegal migration from poor nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is on the rise because of the abundance of economic opportunities, quality education, safety, and security along with lax immigration regimes and civil liberties in Europe and America. As legal migration has a lengthy and hectic process and demands volumes of money, high education, and top skills, thus, young men, and women from developing countries use illegal means to reach top destinations in the west. Such situations gave birth to the lucrative human trafficking industry across the world, particularly in Pakistan, Iran, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Bangkok, Belarus, Poland, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico. The reports suggest that millions of people move through the dangerous sea and land routes, across mountainous terrains in Eastern Europe, and South America while others use horrific sea passages across the Sea of Aegean, Red, and Medditeranean Seas, and Gulf of Marmara to reach Italian and Spanish shores.

Awfully, seven decades after gaining independence from British colonialism in 1947, Pakistan is still facing acute economic fragility and financial depletion despite its possession of tremendous untapped hidden reserves including oil, natural gas, gold, copper, and other minerals coupled with a capable and talented youth. Apparently, decades-long mismanagement of successive governments and corruption of leaders and government officials brought the nation to the verge of an economic collapse. Such a situation shattered the public belief in the rulers and talented people are fleeing the country through illegal and illegal means that have caused a brain drain in the country, thus collective wisdom of the top national economists, political strategists, and public leaders failed to rescue the nation from persistent economic volatility in the past. Presently, top positions in the bureaucracy, judiciary, and other government institutions are auctioned or executives are being hired on political grounds, while no capable youth can achieve his rightful job on merit through legal means. This is the reason that Pakistani doctors, engineers and scientists, intellectuals, and national stars like Shahida Raza are leaving the country every other day after disappointment over the state of affairs in the country.

This is an alarming situation that merits due attention by the leaders if they really have concerns regarding the ongoing population evacuation and brain drain through legal and illegal migration from the country. Therefore, the government must create conducive and livable economic and social conditions in the country so the people prefer to live in their nation instead of losing their lives in barren hills, rough seas, and custodial detention in other nations.

Is it time for the US to open up its space market to allies?

THERE is no doubt that the country leading the space race is the US. It has developed a winning formula that allows for private companies to find a path toward growth. This model has not been replicated anywhere else. Let us start with the basics, which is the launching of rockets into space. We quickly notice that, with 76 launches in 2022, the US is leading the way. It is important to note that 60 of these were achieved by Elon Musk's SpaceX, a private company. Second comes China and its government-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, which achieved a similar total to SpaceX. The US' contract-based system empowers a real commercial creation that goes beyond security. The market size and its rules are a clear advantage for US companies.

There is today a new vision for space that goes beyond launches and this offers opportunities on a global scale. As more assets are deployed into orbit, this becomes a full-on ecosystem and creates real business models and economic activities, starting with mobility. Moreover, with plans to establish a permanent presence on the moon, this also opens up further developments. All this is happening while we are reaching the end of an epoch of global collaboration and are noticing more domestic or regional initiatives. Despite the new commercial side of space, ultimately it mirrors what is happening geopolitically on Earth. Only allies can become business partners. And this is logical. On that matter, there is something very revealing about the

planned replacements for the International Space Station by each nation. The ISS will be decommissioned in 2031 and so each country is preparing an alternative. The Chinese government has developed its own successor, the Tiangong space station, which was launched in 2021 and which highlights the country's policy of self-reliance. It is entirely built and run by the Chinese

mercial activities. It is also symbolic of the importance of entrepreneurship and private initiatives, which is what makes the US attractive. The interesting point is that the US government and various institutions are probably the only ones in the world to give these large contracts. This is not the case in Europe or in China. The recent

ger growth for American companies and the capacity to integrate vertically swiftly.

This is already happening as, if we look at the leader in the domain, SpaceX, we notice that it goes beyond mere launches. It is also about the internet and communications through its Starlink system. Moreover, its propulsion

US will open up more of its tenders to non-US companies that are part of its alliance? Will it be possible to see more access to the market and technology in order to support the growth of private companies in Europe or even the Gulf Cooperation Council? There are, understandably, export and participation restrictions due to the dual-use nature of many of the technologies and clear

space companies, it is easier to work with other companies in the US than to work directly with government entities. The US market provides an opportunity that is not available elsewhere. This capacity-building needs to be an important aspect of the transatlantic alliance. The vision for Europe and the European Space Agency seems to be toward this structure, but it is not easy to move forward and change everything in a day. There has, nevertheless, been impressive changes, which are grounds for optimism. Here, there is also a great opportunity for collaboration between entrepreneurs to use the dual-use technology to develop new concepts and companies. The need for later-stage financing and broader markets is a key point for the future of this domain in Europe.

There is also positive news within the transatlantic partnership. Last year, NATO announced the launch of its Innovation Fund dedicated to the transatlantic alliance. The fund will invest 1 billion (\$1.06 billion) in early-stage startups and other venture capital funds developing emerging dual-use technologies of priority to NATO. Having also created the Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic, NATO will leverage the depth of expertise and breadth of access in the alliance to source future capabilities from dual-use innovators. These are positive signs toward integration. Greater access to the US market would empower this strategy even more. It will not be easy to achieve, but who would have imagined an ecosystem in space just a few decades ago?

Only allies can become business partners. And this is logical. On that matter, there is something very revealing about the planned replacements for the International Space Station by each nation. The ISS will be decommissioned in 2031 and so each country is preparing an alternative. The Chinese government has developed its own successor, the Tiangong space station, which was launched in 2021 and which highlights the country's policy of self-reliance. It is entirely built and run by the Chinese government. The US has chosen a different approach, opening the way for private companies to bid for government tenders and creating a business model for other commercial activities. This approach makes private companies more resilient and encourages new commercial activities. It is also symbolic of the importance of entrepreneurship and private initiatives, which is what makes the US attractive. The interesting point is that the US government and various institutions are probably the only ones in the world to give these large contracts. This is not the case in Europe or in China. The recent announcement by the US Space Force that between 60 and 70 missions are projected for the National Security Space Launch Phase 3 procurement will give even more growth and power to the US space market. Through these tenders and contracts, the US is smartly ensuring even bigger growth for American companies and the capacity to integrate vertically swiftly.

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systems are impressive and more will come. Without government contracts, this would never have been possible. Obviously, it takes two to tango and, without Musk's determination and his willingness to put his private capital at risk, this would not have happened. I cannot help but ask if the

security and national defense priorities.

However, would it not make the alliance stronger if there were greater access to parts of this market for non-US companies? This could be in the form of collaborations and partnerships between space entrepreneurs. And for young

Stop all financial aid to Tunisia until it returns to democracy

TUNISIA'S dictatorial regime has reached a new low. An unprecedented crackdown on the critics of President Kais Saied, which saw dozens of public figures, including politicians, protest organisers, lawyers, judges, union officials, the head of a leading independent radio station and influential business leaders, arrested in often-violent night raids, sparked nationwide protests and fears of a return to autocracy.

The crackdown is the latest attempt by the regime to scare Tunisian people, who are in despair and tired of the authoritarian president's inability to resolve Tunisia's protracted economic crisis, into submission. The record low voter turnout (the lowest since the 2011 revolution) at the December-January parliamentary election made it clear that Saied no longer enjoys widespread public support and that the viewpoints of his critics - who had called for a boycott of the election - are resonating more among Tunisians. Saied is struggling to convince the masses of the competence and legitimacy of his government and thus trying to stifle dissent using state violence. Alongside a

variety of anti-government actions, Saied accused the "traitors" who have been arrested as part of the latest crackdown of "price fixing", "market manipulation" and "creating food shortages". This is a sign that the president is not only attempting to eliminate any and all opposition to his government, but also positioning his critics to take the blame for the abysmal state of the Tunisian economy.

And in another demonstration of the Saied government's fear of any meaningful critique coming from a public figure, on February 18 the president personally ordered Europe's top trade union official to leave the country after she addressed protesters at a protest organised by an influential labour union. Saied accused Esther Lynch, the Irish general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, of making statements that "interfered with Tunisian internal affairs" during a protest organised by Tunisia's General Labour Union, UGTT, in the port city of Sfax.

In an address to the protesters, Lynch had demanded the release of arrested union officials and called on the Tunisian government to take immediate action to

improve the economy. This latest wide-reaching crackdown on dissent came on the back of a similar attack on Tunisia's independent judiciary, which saw dozens of judges arbitrarily dismissed for alleged "financial and moral corruption". Judges, who recently appealed their dismissals and won, say they have been targeted for upholding the independence of the judiciary and refusing to follow the regime's orders.

With all three branches of government captured, independent media silenced, unions sidelined, and prominent opposition figures jailed on superfluous charges, Tunisians desperate to protect their country's young democracy from Saied's growing authoritarianism are turning to the international community for support. So far, however, global powers and international organisations responded to the worrying state of affairs in Tunisia with nothing more than a figurative shrug. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed concern "over the deepening crackdown against perceived political opponents and civil society", while the US State

Haythem Guesmi

Department's spokesperson Ned Price said, "It is a core US principle that people around the world should be able to express themselves without fear or reprisal."

The European Union likewise expressed its "concern" and said it expects the government to fulfil its commitments to the Tunisian people. Of course, such empty expressions of concern do nothing to stop Saied from dismantling Tunisia's remaining democratic institutions and transforming the country into a totalitarian dictatorship.

In the face of Saied's relentless efforts to suffocate what is left of Tunisia's democracy, the international community must act decisively and urgently. Before it is too late, global powers should move to pressure Saied's regime into a peaceful democratic transition using all the economic and political leverage they hold. Since assuming absolute power in a coup d'etat over two years ago, Saied repeatedly refused to cooperate with the international community, ignoring all calls for a swift return to democracy. Nevertheless, Tunisia's international partners continued their coop-

eration with his government, seemingly preferring to deal with a somewhat stable dictatorship rather than a genuine, albeit shaky, democracy. The United States and France continue to bankroll Saied's regime with grants and direct financial assistance worth hundreds of millions of dollars despite its undeniable crimes against the Tunisian people. Hoping to expand the reach of its far right migration policies, Italy has announced that it backs Saied's efforts to secure a much-needed IMF loan.

But this cannot continue. With no real pressure from outside, Saied will only increase the intensity of his government's assault on the most fundamental human rights of Tunisians. The international community needs to understand that Saied has no integrity or faith in democracy. Any strategic cooperation with his regime is doomed to fail. Saied suffers from a messiah complex. From the start of his rule, he has sought to deactivate crucial aspects of Tunisia's legal and political system to impose his quasi-religious vision of politics on the country. He has gone to extreme lengths to dehumanise his critics and establish his delusional

grand vision of saving Tunisians from "evil" and "deep state" forces. Any attempts to support or cooperate with his regime can only end in disaster. If they truly want to support the Tunisian people, global powers should condition any financial assistance to Tunisia on the country's return to democracy. They should make it clear to all factions of Tunisia's powerful security apparatus that they will not see any more money, including any IMF loans, until they enforce a return to democratic rule and the inclusion of opposition in political and economic decision-making.

Saied's regime will continue to violently repress criticism and opposition as long as the security apparatus sees it as advantageous to support his authoritarian rule. Various opposition forces in Tunisia formed a united front against Saied's regime and are bravely fighting to free the country from the clutches of yet another dictatorship. But their efforts will all be in vain until the international community tightens the purse strings to try and convince Tunisia's security forces that supporting democracy is more beneficial for them - and the country.

Palestinians get blame for settlers' Huwara rampage

NO matter what violence Israel engages in against Palestinians, it always finds a way to minimize it and place the blame on the victims. On Sunday, armed Israeli settlers, who repeatedly enjoy the protection of the Israeli military, went on a large-scale rampage through Huwara, a village just south of Nablus in the West Bank.

Settlers terrorized residents, torched buildings and dozens of civilian cars, and attacked civilians including old men, women and children, all under the eyes of Israeli soldiers, who did not act until the wave of violence had ended. Some commentators described the attack as a mini-Kristallnacht, in reference to the violent targeting of Jewish businesses throughout Nazi Germany in November 1938. Israeli officials - unusually - dubbed the settler violence as "actions of terror," but

asserted the violence was "revenge activity," meaning that the perpetrators were provoked by Palestinian violence. This is a double standard, as Israeli soldiers and settlers have targeted and killed many Palestinians, including 11 in a military attack in Nablus just days earlier.

The killing of two Jewish settlers touched off Sunday's violence and incurred the wrath of Israeli politicians and the media, as if their deaths were more important than the five times more Palestinians who were killed the week before. Since Jan. 1, more than 60 Palestinians have been killed, most during sweeping Israel Defense Forces raids into Jenin and Nablus. Those killed have included old men, women and children, although Israel's one-sided PR machine usually describes the victims as "terrorists." A database run by Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem shows that, since

2000, 10,341 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers, compared to 855 Israelis killed by Palestinians. Another 86 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli civilians. In addition to the killings, Israelis have destroyed thousands of Palestinian homes. And, during the past year, dozens of Jewish-only Israeli settlements in the West Bank have been built or expanded on Palestinian lands.

The lopsided nature of the statistics exposes the hypocrisy of Israel's PR spin, which puts all the blame on Palestinians and excuses Israeli terrorism as being a reaction to the violence. When you monitor the mainstream news media, it is clear that cases involving Israeli victims receive more detailed coverage, humanizing them, than Palestinian deaths, which are presented as mere statistics. Israel has

Ray Hanania

killed over 10 times more Palestinian Christians and Muslims without having to worry about a public backlash because the public does not get an objective presentation of the violence. It is only when Israeli Jews are killed that the media, along with many elected officials in the US, react with outrage.

Although the problem is the violent nature of Israel's apartheid government, one factor fueling this imbalance involves the failure of the international community to intervene. Palestinians have support from nations throughout the world, including many of the largest, most-powerful countries, but none of them seem able to weigh in strongly enough to stop Israel's continued violent abuse of Palestinian human rights. It is not that Palestinians are ungrateful for the support they get from Europe, Asia, Africa,

the Middle East, South America and even from the US. It is just that this support is often empty and void of substantial action.

Support for Palestine is significant when you look at the numbers, but it is weak when you look at the substance. At the UN, for example, General Assembly resolutions condemning Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians are adopted by large margins, supported by as many as 143 of the organization's 193 member states. There are usually fewer than 10 nations, including Israel, voting against such resolutions, with the remainder abstaining, not wanting to offend either side. But the General Assembly has far less power than the UN Security Council, as its resolutions are essentially expressions of attitude, not real action, unless the subjects are uncontroversial. It is almost as if the nations of the world have no power to do anything when it comes

to Israel. Huwara is an example of the urgent need for the international community to step up to the plate and take concrete action. It is important that expressions of outrage go beyond simple statements of reprimand.

Israel has a growing interest in the Arab world, which has been its most important international focus in recent years. Arab countries have enormous power to influence Israel's actions. They can take their outrage and convert it into influence by taking foreign policy actions against Israel. Until the international community puts teeth into their condemnation of Israel's violence, nothing will change. Israeli military units will continue to bully their way into Palestinian communities in the West Bank and kill more and more Palestinians, with the media and pro-Israel American politicians providing a shield of twisted sympathy.

Arab News

Brexit: UK PM makes breakthrough but 'Brexiternity' continues

Andrew Hammond

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak this week struck a deal with the EU over the Northern Ireland protocol. Yet, even if the agreement is approved by legislators, it will not end the state of flux that has dogged the UK since 2016, which has been called "Brexiternity." Seen from the vantage point of early 2023, it is clear that the 2016 EU referendum was a seminal moment in UK postwar history. But far from being a single, isolated event, Brexit should be seen as a process made up of multiple negotiations, including within the UK, between the EU and the UK, and within the EU about its future.

The Northern Ireland protocol deal, which still has to be signed off by the UK parliament, is only the latest chapter in these debates. After four months of negotiations, Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Monday announced the proposed Windsor Framework, which seeks to resolve the challenges of the previously agreed Northern Ireland protocol. That protocol is part of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement that formally took the country out of the EU. Its purpose is to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland by requiring Northern Ireland to align with EU law in

some areas and allowing it to maintain frictionless access to the bloc. However, it also means that goods entering Northern Ireland from England, Scotland and Wales need to prove they comply with EU law in these areas.

At the heart of the revised pact are several key issues: physical controls and checks on trade to Northern Ireland from England, Scotland and Wales, the role of the European Court of Justice, the application of EU law, and the place of Northern Ireland in the UK's internal market. On the first issue, it is understood that the majority of controls and checks will disappear on goods destined to remain in Northern Ireland. The role of the European Court of Justice as the ultimate arbiter of disputes will be removed, while the EU will no longer have the right to automatically launch proceedings against any so-called infraction of the protocol. The UK and EU will deliver the deal through removing customs paperwork for consumers, guaranteeing medical supplies in the long term.

There will also be a new "Stormont brake" to give assembly ministers in the devolved legislature in Northern Ireland a say on EU laws, allowing them to stop

them applying in that nation. Moreover, Northern Ireland's ministers will be given sight of new EU laws as they are drafted. In turn, it is hoped by Sunak and Von der Leyen that the deal will help guarantee the future of peace and stability. This comes about a quarter of a century after the landmark Good Friday Agreement helped bring an end to the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

However, the deal is far from done. Sunak is concerned about possible resistance from the hard-line Brexiteer camp in his Conservative Party, plus the Democratic Unionist Party, which wants the protocol scrapped altogether. Even if Sunak can surmount these challenges, however, the UK's Brexit saga is by no means at an end. As Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, for instance, has said in recent weeks, London and Brussels are likely to have an increasingly close economic relationship in the years to come.

This underlines that, as the seventh anniversary of the UK's landmark EU referendum approaches, the nation's relationship with Europe is still not settled. And it is likely to remain so for years, if not decades, to come. So, as much as

the new Windsor Framework may be a milestone, the relationship between London, Brussels and the 27 EU member states will continue to evolve for many years. It is therefore possible - in a similar scenario to Swiss-EU relations over the last 30 years - that a series of further UK-EU bilateral deals will be made to fashion the new institutional relationship.

For the decade ahead, at least, the UK may well also follow a path of incremental changes. Far from "getting Brexit done" in 2019 and 2020, as former Prime Minister Boris Johnson frequently asserted, this points to UK-EU negotiations and internal political wrangling continuing long into the future. Moreover, views on the relationship the nation wishes to have with Brussels could well change significantly over time, in a more or less integrationist direction, as political and public opinion evolves.

Taken together, all of this is why London may, ironically, now need to devote at least as much of its attention to the EU in the coming years as it did when it was a member. The stakes in play therefore remain huge and historic, as both sides continue to fashion a new partnership that can hopefully bring significant benefits for both at a time of significant geopolitical turbulence.



Why is Slovakia confiscating minority owned property?

Balázs Kovács

As we mark the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, public debates over what to do with frozen Russian assets are raging. There seems to be growing pressure to seize the property and funds of sanctioned Russians and hand them over to Ukraine to help with its reconstruction. Though undoubtedly driven by moral outrage over the unforgivable suffering of the Ukrainian people, such a policy - if implemented without careful consideration - could have serious long-term repercussions.

In this context, Slovakia can serve as a cautionary tale. Since 2017, Slovak courts have supported administrative agencies in applying World War II decrees to seize the property of ethnic Hungarians and Germans without compensation. These laws allow for the dispossession of these two communities on account of their "collective responsibility" for crimes during the war. Thus, people who were not even born during World War II are being deprived of their property on the basis of their ancestry in what is a clear case of collective punishment. A vivid example is the construction of part of a highway, financed by the European Union, through a suburban district of Bratislava. According to János Fiala-Butora, a human rights lawyer, as many as 250 people have been affected by the mass expropriation of land in the area under the decrees.

No one really knows the total number of cases of dispossession, as there are instances where the heirs of the property were not even aware of their ownership status in the first place.

Using a twisted argument, Slovak authorities claim that the confiscations, in fact, occurred when the decrees were passed and their present actions are a remedy for bureaucratic oversights of the past. Although Slovak civil society and human rights advocates have pointed out that this is a glaring violation of international human rights conventions and the fundamental rights of citizens, Slovak state officials remain stubbornly unwilling to confront the objective reality staring them in the face. But how is this even possible? The explanation is to be found in the confluence of international hypocrisy and a country's unwillingness to develop a more mature relationship with its history.

In Central Europe, the years after the end of World War II were marked by chaotic, and often horribly violent mass displacement of "undesired" ethnic groups, such as the Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and Hungarians. The outcome of this was that countries in the region became much more demographically homogeneous. This policy of ethnic cleansing, which had been undertaken with the blessings of the Soviet Union and the Western Allies, was viewed as a legitimate means to prevent the resurgence of ethnic antagonisms that had been so skilfully exploited

by the Nazis as a pretext to set the entire continent ablaze. With homogeneity being the ultimate goal, the newly restored Czechoslovak Republic also set out to forcibly displace its minorities in order to "Slavize" the cities and towns that had been either German or Hungarian-speaking for centuries.

In an attempt to provide a legal veneer for the cleansings, Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš issued a series of infamous decrees stripping Germans and Hungarians of their citizenship and authorising the seizure of all property belonging to them. From the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, as many as three million Germans were deported and resettled to Germany. However, the Allied powers were more hesitant when it came to the Hungarians of Slovakia, eventually agreeing only to a "voluntary" population exchange with Hungary. Most of the Hungarian community, however, resisted the strong pressure to leave and today, some 8.5 percent of Slovakia's population are Hungarians.

On occasion, despite the generally cordial relations, there are disputes between Hungarians and Slovaks over how to remember these events. The former customarily point out that no official apology, let alone compensation, was ever given to the victims of the decrees, while Slovaks are inclined to bring up Hungary's participation in the partition of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Neither side is innocent of a kind of competitive martyrology, as both nations have tried to claim a superior moral standing by painting themselves as the victims of the other's hostility. But at the end of the day, the truth remains that the ongoing confiscations, as well as other discriminatory policies, effectively relegate the remaining ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia to a second-class citizen status.

This is not to say that progress has not been made. Especially since Slovakia's EU entry in 2004, the country has moved away from its strong assimilationist approach towards minorities, and certain minority communities have seen improvements in infrastructure and social services. But the desire to preserve one's own minority cultural and linguistic distinctiveness is either condescendingly ridiculed for being at odds with modernity or perceived as something to be confined to one's private life. Any suggestions of recognising the inherent value of minority identities, perhaps by granting their language official status, are roundly dismissed out of hand as a dangerous idea that would upset the peaceful coexistence between the majority and the minorities. The Beneš decrees, despite every claim to the contrary, are not mere historical footnotes.

They remain in effect to this day, enshrining the superior status of the "state-bearing nation" and denying equal recognition to those who do not subscribe to the identity of the nation-

al majority. The recent confiscations are thus not an incident but a logical crescendo of a deeply ingrained anti-minority premise.

In view of these bitter sentiments, it is no surprise that many Hungarians of Slovakia, chiefly those more conservative-minded, are looking up to Hungary as the external defender of their interests. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's right-wing government has certainly earned votes at home for demonstrating its commitment to the fate of Hungarian communities abroad, a stance that has invited accusations of irredentism in neighbouring countries more than once. However, when it comes to Slovakia, there are strict limits to how far Budapest is willing to push against the Slovak government's preferences. The European Commission's decision to withhold EU funds from Hungary over democratic backsliding concerns has left Orbán desperate for allies. It is no surprise then, that when the issue of property confiscations was raised during a joint press conference last December, the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs chose to remain silent while his Slovak counterpart once again denied any state-sanctioned land grabs.

The only other actor that could credibly speak out against these violations remains the EU. Given Brussels' appetite for lecturing others on human rights, one might expect to see some expression of outrage at these violations. But so far there has been only silence. And that did not change even after the European Court of Human Rights ruled that a Hungarian citizen's right to a fair trial had been impeded when the Slovak authorities ordered the confiscation of a forest estate on the basis that the owner had ancestors of Hungarian descent. Ethnolinguistic diversity is a cornerstone of EU values, but it is being tragically ignored in Slovakia. And the issue of property infringement is not a theoretical issue of diversity, but a grave violation of human rights, which cuts to the very heart of the EU's raison d'être. These dispossessions are not occurring because the families involved are colluding with an illegal war. They are happening because of the perceived sins of their ancestors.

The questions raised by the potential policy of confiscation of Russian assets are cast in an even sharper light when we acknowledge the ongoing violations in Slovakia. It is hypocritical to claim to defend international rules-based order while turning a blind eye to transgressions in your own union.

To oppose the imperialist aggression in our neighbourhood is correct. But to do so while tolerating ethnic-based discrimination within our own borders is lamentable. Taking a stance against the injustice of ethnic-based confiscations is therefore a matter of principle. It is high time for the European Union, as well as the international community, to support all victims of discrimination.

Biden's asylum ban: The view from the Darién Gap

Belén Fernández

IN November of last year, Jesús, a 33-year-old man from the Venezuelan state of Falcón, spent 10 days traversing the Darién Gap - the treacherous stretch of jungle between Colombia and Panama - with his wife and two-year-old son. They were but three of the nearly 250,000 people who survived the crossing in 2022, most of them hoping to eventually reach the United States several thousand kilometres to the north.

I spoke with Jesús recently in the town of Metetí in Panama's Darién province, where he is washing cars in an attempt to scrape together funds for his family's onward journey. He recounted to me how, at one point in the jungle, he had been tumbling down a near-vertical hill of mud and had frantically grabbed what he thought was a tree root - but which turned out to be a hand belonging to a human corpse. He had been disconcerted at first, he said, but had then thought to himself: "That hand saved my life."

The same cannot be said for US President Joe Biden, who, despite continuously promising to lend a helping hand to persons seeking refuge, is currently working to dismantle the very concept of asylum - in contravention of both international and domestic law. On February 21, the Biden administration unveiled its proposed scheme to deal with the predicted upsurge in arrivals to the southern US border following the scheduled expiration of Title 42 in May. Title 42, of course, is the charming Donald Trump-era policy that, using the coronavirus pandemic as a transparently disingenuous pretext, has enabled the US to summarily expel asylum seekers without allowing them to apply for asylum.

Biden's new rule - which has been likened to Trump's own "transit ban", a policy that was struck down in the federal court - would largely eliminate the possibility of asylum for folks who

"circumvent available, established pathways to lawful migration ... and also fail to seek protection in a country through which they traveled" before reaching the US. And while the rule comes accompanied by the provision that the "presumption of asylum ineligibility" is always "rebuttable" and subject to "specified exceptions", this is sort of the equivalent of suggesting that someone who has been eaten by a shark will have the opportunity to contest the arrangement.

To be sure, it is nothing less than absurdly barbaric to demand that refugee seekers - many of whom must cross the Darién Gap after travelling from as far afield as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Burkina Faso - seek "protection" in another country before reaching the US. It takes a sinister imagination to believe that refugees can find protection in countries like Honduras or El Salvador - which regularly find themselves on the list of world homicide capitals and which produce their own surpluses of asylum seekers in the first place. It is equally absurd to claim that there are sufficient "pathways to lawful migration" for the poor and vulnerable; if that were the case, you wouldn't see hundreds of thousands of people risking their lives in the Darién. Lawful migration was not an option for Jesús and his family, just as it was not an option for the owner of the hand that saved him.

Nor was it an option for the Venezuelan extended family I met on the side of the highway in Metetí. They had just emerged from 10 days in the Darién Gap with a one-year-old baby in tow and their own inventory of cadavers encountered in the jungle. They reported one particularly heart-wrenching scene, which had entailed a dead mother, two dead children and a man - presumably the desperate father - who had hanged himself nearby. The family informed me that

they were walking to the United States as their lives in Venezuela were not presently sustainable, and requested recommendations on where in the US they might go to perform farm work. They were walking, they said, because they lacked the \$40 per person that the Panamanian government is charging "illegal" migrants for the luxury of being bussed north and dumped on the border with Costa Rica - a form of official extortion that is not without its own life-threatening aspects. In mid-February, one of these buses crashed, killing some 41 people.

In Metetí I also spoke with Tamara Guillermo, field coordinator for Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontières, or MSF), which provides primary and mental health-care services in the region's two migrant reception centres - work that is all the more necessary in light of recent allegations that Panamanian authorities are committing sexual and other abuses against migrants. She observed that the trans-Darién trajectory would be difficult enough "for an Olympic athlete", much less unprepared and improperly equipped humans fleeing all manner of calamities in their respective countries. She then recapped the litany of horrors that transpire in the jungle, from rampant rapes and continuous assault and robbery to separated families, disappearances, and killings - some involving decapitations.

Condemning the criminalisation of migrants for simply exercising their "right to pursue a better life", Guillermo stressed that the current setup in the Darién Gap constitutes a total violation of the "dignity" of people who have already suffered relentlessly. For many, she said, "the only thing waiting for them at home is death." Now, Biden's proposed asylum ban certainly won't be helping anything on the whole dignity front - not that the US was ever much into such

things anyway. Indeed, the United States' own history of politically and economically ravaging other countries has played a significant role in fuelling the "migrant crisis" - and in making "home" so often a place of death.

In his book *The Dispossessed: A Story of Asylum at the US-Mexican Border and Beyond*, journalist John Washington notes that, according to the US government, "you are eligible for asylum only if you have suffered persecution on account of an immutable characteristic - your race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or your membership in a particular social group". But what if poverty is the immutable characteristic - and the US itself has had a strong hand in making it so? During my stay in the Darién region, I managed to visit the tiny Indigenous village of Bajo Chiquito on the Tuquesa River, the first point of arrival for most people exiting the Darién Gap. I entered undetected by Panamanian migration and National Border Service officials, who are not keen on having the camp's inhumane conditions exposed to the outside world.

There I chatted with an amiable group of young Colombian and Venezuelan men endeavouring to cook rice in river water over a pitful fire, who declared that they would not go back in that jungle for a million dollars. The otherworldly stench of decomposing bodies had served as a constant reminder of the proximity of death - and, while there was still much undignified and deadly road ahead, there was no turning back now. While I was talking to the young men, three long canoes packed with refugee seekers from Haiti, Ecuador and an array of other nations pulled up to Bajo Chiquito. So much for available "pathways to lawful migration". And as the Darién becomes an ever more populated graveyard for folks who are merely trying to live, it's safe to say Biden is going down a very wrong path.

Aljazeera

Conditions in Lebanon ripe for civil war

Dr. Dania Koleila Khatib

SHEIKH Ahmed Al-Rifai, a fierce critic of Hezbollah, was found dead on Saturday in the north of Lebanon. Almost immediately, Hezbollah's opponents accused the group of carrying out the murder. Army intelligence and internal security officers quickly conducted an investigation and arrested the culprits. The ring-leader is a relative of the slain sheikh, with whom he had long-standing animosity.

This incident shows how tense the situation in the country has become. If it were not for the army and security forces' quick action, the murder of Al-Rifai would have unfolded into a sectarian clash. This time, the army saved the day. The question is, for how long can it keep the situation under control? The obvious answer is not for long. The situation in Lebanon is not sustainable. The tension is very high and the only agent that is preventing total collapse is the army. The commander of the army has been on a fundraising spree to feed his soldiers. Last year, Qatar donated \$60 million to prevent the disintegration of the armed forces, a scenario that would definitely lead to chaos. But what next? When this money is depleted, who, if anyone, will be the next donor to pay the salaries of the army? The situation is not sustainable. Lebanon needs a proper state with functioning institutions.

If we rewind what happened in the north, assuming that the army and security forces were dysfunctional and did not mobilize and

conduct the investigation, what would have happened? For sure, there would have been a sectarian clash. Nevertheless, the army was quick to dispel the fallacies that Hezbollah killed the sheikh and to calm the situation. However, even after the investigation concluded that a cousin of the victim was the assailant and it was a purely personal issue, the sectarian tension did not totally dissipate. Several people posted on Twitter an old picture of the culprit and his son, who was also his accomplice in the murder, showing them participating in a Hezbollah event commemorating the death of Imam Mughniyeh, the high-ranking official and former mastermind of its operations, trying to indirectly link the group to the murder.

Another question mark is raised over the murder regarding the loose control over arms in the country. The army found in the home of the assailant a warehouse of weapons. Hezbollah may be armed, but it is not the only armed entity in the country, and the animosity toward it is increasing. The different groups are blaming Hezbollah for the current deplorable situation. For example, the exchange rate has gone from 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the US dollar to 80,000 at the time of writing. This time, the army was able to prevent a widespread clash, but this will not necessarily be the case later on. The army is low on resources and it relies on the resourcefulness of its commander,

while banking on the loyalty of its soldiers and officers. At the same time, the army is being attacked by the political class. Gebran Bassil, the son-in-law of the last president, who is frustrated at seeing his hopes of succeeding his father-in-law fading away, is launching a fierce campaign against the army because its commander is the most favored candidate among the international community, as well as domestically. Hence, the country is edging toward an internal confrontation.

Every day, there is a clash of some sort. The army has so far been able to contain and localize those clashes, but it is exhausted and, if those clashes spread and the army finds itself unable to contain them, the country will plunge into chaos - a chaos that might lead to another civil war. Lebanon can either conduct reforms and have a state with functioning institutions or face chaos. However, chaos in Lebanon, which would lead to internal alignments and could result in a civil war, would be very destabilizing to the region. It could also be destabilizing for the EU. Already, people are risking their lives and leaving the country illegally in the hope of reaching Europe. It is not even in Israel's interest to have instability in Lebanon. Though some pundits advocate that the best way to get rid of Hezbollah is to let the country break down on its head, Israel does not need another Gaza on its

northern frontier.

The EU has created a framework for sanctions on political actors but it has not activated it. Member states should act quickly and start applying pressure on the different political figures to push them to end the deadlock, elect a president and put in place a government that is committed to reform, rather than looking after the different political parties' interests and clientelist networks. The clock is ticking. The Al-Rifai episode should be a wake-up call for Hezbollah. Its position is also not sustainable anymore. Its hegemony over the country is no longer tolerated. It cannot maintain its maximalist positions. It needs to compromise and understand that its safety valve should be the state, as only a strong state can keep everyone in their rightful place. A weak state will definitely allow Hezbollah to expand, but it also allows its opponents to confront it.

Even though a civil war is not in anyone's interest, this does not mean it will not happen. People do not go to war because it is in their interest to do so, they do so because they are threatened. At the moment, Hezbollah feels threatened by the increasing internal opposition and the anti-Hezbollah camp is threatened by the former's hegemony. This is why the different parties could be dragged into a war. Hence, there is no substitute for reforms and for having a state that will provide services to the people and ensure law and order.

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Weekly inflation falls by 0.30 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.30 percent for the combined consumption group during the week ended on March 02, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

The SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 240.57 points as compared to 241.29 points during the past week, according to PBS data. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed

an increase of 41.07 percent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 is covering 17 urban centers and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs 17,732 witnessed a 0.08 percent decrease and went down to 244.94 points from last week's 245.14 points.

Meanwhile, the SPI for the consumption group from Rs 17,732-22-888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175; and above Rs 44,175 witnessed a decrease of 0.09 percent, 0.12 percent, 0.20 percent, and 0.43 percent respectively. The items which recorded a decrease in their

average prices on a week-on-week (WoW) included onions (13.24%), eggs (6.11%), garlic (4.24%), chicken (2.00%), tomatoes (0.59%), pulse gram (0.38%) and potatoes (0.33%), non-food items, LPG (1.84%) and petrol (1.80%).

The items which recorded an increase in their average prices on a week-on-week (WoW) basis included bananas (7.34%), long cloth (3.44%), energy saver (3.33%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (2.48%), gur (2.03%), cooked daal (1.87%), tea packet (1.79%), matchbox (1.66%), lawn printed (1.52%), cooking oil 5 litre (1.45%) and sugar

(1.07%).

On a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis, the commodities which recorded a decrease in their average prices included tomatoes (56.29%), chillies powdered (7.42%) and electricity charges for q1 (6.64%).

The commodities that witnessed an increase in prices on a YoY basis included, onions (311.17%), cigarettes (165.86%), gas charges for Q1 (108.38%), diesel (93.82%), petrol (77.89%), eggs (77.83%), rice irri-6/9 (76.96%), rice basmati broken (75.55%), pulse moong (73.30%), bananas (72.66%), chicken (64.70%) and tea packet (64.53%).

Karandaaz Pakistan signs data sharing agreement with TASDEEQ Credit Bureau

ISLAMABAD (APP): Karandaaz Pakistan signed a data sharing agreement with TASDEEQ, a private credit bureau operating in Pakistan. By joining hands with

TASDEEQ, Karandaaz will be enhancing the data offered through its data portal (<https://portal.karandaaz.com.pk/>) to include enterprise credit information for more than 70 sub-sectors in Pakistan.

The lending data will also be disaggregated by geography at the provincial, district and city level, and categorized by type of credit provider, said a press release issued here on Friday. Speaking about the partnership and what data access at this scale will mean for Pakistan, Mr. Waqas ul Hasan, CEO Karandaaz, said, "Karandaaz's Data Portal is a state-of-the-art platform through which information on financial inclusion, and macro and micro economic indicators can be obtained, layered, analyzed, and shared with relative ease. We are constantly adding to the depth and breadth of the data points on this portal and our partnership with TASDEEQ is a testament to these efforts. This will be the first time that a private credit bureau in Pakistan

will share aggregated information on a wide array of credit indicators on a publicly accessible data portal. I am very pleased with this partnership and the countless possibilities it opens up for researchers, academics, financial institutions and policy makers."

Karandaaz's interactive Data Portal collates and aggregates financial and economic data for Pakistan from multiple publicly available sources, including but not limited to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reports, several financial inclusion surveys, the Economic Survey of Pakistan, Population Census, Labor Force Surveys, etc. The portal provides stakeholders, including policymakers, private sector and public sector institutions and researchers and students a wide range of data that can be layered and customized for analysis.

As a private credit bureau licensed by SBP, TASDEEQ's core business is collecting credit data from a wide range of financial service providers. TASDEEQ's CEO, Mumtaz Syed, said on the occasion, "Our aim is to equip the financial industry within Pakistan with data and insights, promoting financial inclusion, and our partnership with Karandaaz

exemplifies that. TASDEEQ is creating an ecosystem to address issues in access to finance by potential borrowers and lenders by leveraging Financial Institutions Data, Utility Data and Alternate Data."

Talking about the need to improve access to information in Pakistan, Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, Chairperson Karandaaz, said, "It is important to realize that development of emerging markets is contingent on the availability of information to support informed decision making and building investor confidence in underdeveloped markets. There is a strong need for the adoption of open data practices and to strengthen the right to information which is already available in our laws but not always practiced with the same spirit. Greater access to data will promote greater transparency and accountability in the government and private sector while supporting development outcomes. This partnership between TASDEEQ and Karandaaz is the blueprint for a way forward not only because of public accessibility of vital data but also because data collection is a cost- and time-intensive exercise and such agreements can drive those costs down."

Pharmaceutical goods' export increases by 32.37% to \$205.138 mln

ISLAMABAD (APP): The export of pharmaceuticals goods from the country has witnessed an increase of 32.37 percent during the first seven months of the fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period last year.

Pakistan exported pharmaceutical products worth US\$ 205.138 million during the period from July-January (2022-23) as compared to the export of US\$ 154.973 million during July-January (2021-22), showing a growth of 32.37 percent, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, the export of pharmaceutical goods also rose by 104.67 percent from 16,718 metric tons to 34,217 metric tons, the data revealed.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the pharmaceutical goods' export increased by 77.19 percent during the month of January 2023 as compared to the same month of last year. The pharmaceutical exports in January 2023 were recorded at US \$30.114 million against the export of US\$ 16.996 million in January 2022, the PBS data revealed. On a month-on-month basis, the exports of pharmaceutical goods however decreased by 3.41 percent in January 2023 as compared to US\$ 31.176 million in December 2022.



MULTAN: Traders busy in unloading Tomatos bags from delivery van at vegetable for selling at market.

PSX continued with bullish trend, gains 666 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Friday, gaining 666.12 points, a positive change of 1.64 per cent, closing at 41,337.00 points against 40,670.88 points the previous day.

A total of 194,817,148 shares were traded during the day as compared to 152,162,654 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs.7,768 billion against Rs. 8,150 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 342 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 221 of them recorded gains and 93 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 28 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were BankIslami Pakisan with 15,739,000 shares at Rs.11.07 per share; WorldCall Telecom with 15,470,777 shares at Rs.1.30 per share, and Oil and Gas Dev. with 13,422,769 shares at Rs.88.12 per share.

Pak Services witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.152.39 per share price, closing at Rs.2,193.00, whereas the runner-up was Nestle Pakistan with an Rs.100.22 rise in its per share price to Rs.5,400.00.

Unilever Foods witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.1,687.42 per share closing at Rs.20,811.58; followed by Rafhan Maize with Rs.200.00 decline to close at Rs.8,500.00.

SCCI urges for pragmatic steps to promote SMEs, large-scale industries

PESHAWAR (APP): Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Muhammad Ishaq urged the government to take pragmatic steps for the promotion of small and medium enterprises and large-scale manufacturing industries.

Talking to traders and industrialists during the visit of the caretaker minister for trade, technical education and revenue department Adnan Jilil here at Chamber House on Friday, the SCCI chief called for revamping relevant institutions to put them on modern lines and resolve problems of the business community on fast-track grounds. He mentioned that the trading community is being faced with a host of challenges and issues as a result of the anti-industries and trade policies imposed by the present government. He added the situation is becoming alarming and deteriorating due to unlawful actions by the departments concerned.

The chamber president suggested the introduction of a strong monitoring and evaluation and scrutiny system in the government institutions. He demanded to provide facilities to traders and industries through one-window operation in a true spirit.

Former president Faiz Muhammad

Faizi, former senior vice president Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, former vice president Abidullah Yousafzai, provincial chief SMEDA Rashid Aman, executive members Affaf Ali Khan, Faisal Afzal, Hamza Ibrahim Butt, Laal Badshah, Munawar Khurshid, Ms Qurtul Ain, and Waqar Ahmad, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Ghulam Bilal Javed, Ihsanullah, Aftab Iqbal, Fazal E. Wahid, Saddar Gul, Rashid Iqbal Siddique, Shahrul Khan, Ishtiaq Muhammad, Women chamber president Ms Azra Jamshid, vice president Anila Khalid, along with senior officials from KPEZDMC, KPBOIT, KP TEVTA, SIDB, traders, industrialists and exporters were present during the meeting.

The SCCI president demanded that KP-EZD&MC should stop issuing plot cancellation notices to industrialists. He sought a two-year extension in the allotment of plots for the establishment of the industrial unit.

He asked to ensure the provision of soft loans through banks to small-scale businesses, industries and women entrepreneurs. He also emphasized that proactive steps should be taken for revamping and putting institutions on modernization. Ishaq called for encouraging colo-

nization in existing industrial estates across the province. He demanded to ensure representation of the chambers in boards of all relevant government institutions. Adnan Jilil while responding to the demands of the business community acknowledged that the business community, especially industrialists faced a number of issues, which mostly related to KP-EZDMC. The caretaker minister said the provincial government is taking pragmatic steps for the promotion of businesses, industries, trade and exports. He said the initiatives have been made to resolve issues of the business community on a fast-track basis. The minister directed the KP-EZDMC to hold a meeting in consultation with SCCI to frame a joint mechanism for the resolution of industrialists' issues.

He directed the management of KP-EZD&MC to submit a written report of the joint meeting on Monday next week. He said the government is fully committed to bringing reforms and revamping institutions. The minister assured that the government will utilize all available resources to facilitate the business community and resolve their issues on a priority basis.

Business and Lawyers Communities to work for promoting dignity of judiciary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Shabbir Kiani and Vice President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, Friday, said that no society can develop without justice, and it is imperative for the promotion of justice in society that the business and the lawyers' communities work together.

Ahsan, while leading a delegation, visited Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) and congratulated the newly elected President Naveed Malik, Secretary Rizwan

Shabbir Kiani and Vice President Ali Hussain Bhatti. Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar said that victory in IHCBA's election is a reflection of the trust and confidence of lawyers' community in the leadership capabilities of new office bearers and hoped that they would deliver up to their expectations.

He was optimistic that the leadership of Raja Aleem Khan Abbasi, Naveed Malik and Qaiser Imam Gondal will play a role to increase the respect of the judiciary and the lawyers' community.

He assured that ICCI will fully cooperate with them to increase the dignity of the judiciary. He emphasized that the business and the lawyers' communities should work together to reduce the number of court cases by promoting speedy justice through mediation.

Naveed Malik, President, Islamabad High Court Bar Association, thanked Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI and all members of the delegation for visiting IHCBA to congratulate them.

He said that ICCI has always encouraged the newly elected Office Bearers of IHCBA, which is laudable. He said that the business and the lawyers' communities are playing an important role in the development of the society and the economy, so through close cooperation, they can get resolved their common issues more effectively. Raja Aleem Khan Abbasi, Vice Chairman, Islamabad Bar Council said that it is the responsibility of all of us to establish a society based on justice for future generations.

The data did not prompt a strong market reaction. Among major shares, Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing was up 3.87 percent at 28,200 yen, Sony Group was up 0.66 percent at 11,455 yen, and construction machine maker Komatsu was up 0.86 percent at 3,394 yen. Nippon Steel was up 0.90 percent at 3,144 yen after a report said it is considering a major investment in a green steel project powered by hydrogen outside Japan, which may cost an estimated 100 billion yen (\$733 million) or more.



BAHAWALPUR: Pet lovers are buying different species pigeons from a vendors on roadside pigeon stalls.

Asian markets rise with Wall St on lower rate hopes

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets on Friday tracked a Wall Street rally after a top Federal Reserve official said he would back a small interest-rate hike at its next meeting but hinted at a possible summer pause to see how tighter policy has impacted inflation.

A strong run of data sent chills through trading floors in February -- wiping out almost all January's rally -- as investors realised the US central bank had more work to do to control prices.

The unease largely overshadowed optimism about China's recovery after officials ended three years of strict zero-Covid containment measures that battered the world's number two economy.

Several Fed policymakers have lined up this year to insist that while inflation

is coming down, they remain determined to keep hiking rates until they hit their two percent target.

The latest indicators have led investors to bet on rates hitting a peak of 5.5 percent, though six percent has also been mooted, putting further downward pressure on equities.

However, while talk has been swirling that the central bank could hike rates by 50 basis points at its March meeting, traders were given some much-needed hope by Atlanta Fed chief Raphael Bostic, who said he favoured a 25-point move.

He also questioned whether it should go much higher than 5.25 percent from the current 4.5-4.75 percent. That would allow the bank to pause its tightening in the summer.

"I let the data guide me," he said. "If the data continue to come in suggesting the economy is stronger than I had projected, I'll adjust my policy trajectory."

His comments came after he and Minneapolis boss Neel Kashkari called for more hikes and for rates to be held for some time into next year.

Meanwhile, figures released Thursday showed that eurozone inflation remained sticky in February, leading European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde to say more tightening was needed.

All three main indexes on Wall Street ended in the green, with the Dow up more than one percent.

And much of Asia followed suit. Tokyo piled on

more than one percent, while Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta also enjoyed their time in the sun.

SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes said that while markets remained uncertain, "unlike last year, where policy shocks drove market shifts through most of the year, this year's price action has been driven as much by improving global growth as by tighter global policy".

"Indeed, that is a more digestible mix for stock market operators. Still, the uptick in January inflation has muddied this picture and caused a fair bit of panic in market circles."

However, he warned: "As long as activity data remain too strong, fanning the inflation fires, the real

vulnerability for risk assets is a definitive hawkish policy shift, particularly from Chair (Jerome) Powell, who represents the core members."

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: UP 1.5 percent at 27,898.37 (break)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: UP 0.5 percent at 20,525.29

Shanghai - Composite: UP 0.2 percent at 3,316.24 (close)

Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.0609 from \$1.0599 on Thursday

Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.1967 from \$1.1949

Euro/pound: DOWN at 88.65 pence from 88.68 pence

Dollar/yen: DOWN at 136.58 yen from 136.73 yen

West Texas Intermediate: DOWN 0.4

percent at \$77.88 per barrel

Brent North Sea crude: DOWN 0.3 percent at \$84.46 per barrel

New York - Dow: UP 1.1 percent at 33,003.57 (close)

London - FTSE 100: UP 0.4 at 7,944.04 (close)

Tokyo stocks open higher on US gains, cheap yen

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks opened higher Friday, helped by a cheap yen and US rallies on bargain-hunting despite worries over tighter US monetary policy.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index was up 0.70 percent, or 192.37 points, at 27,691.24 in early trade, while the broader Topix index added 0.64 percent, or 12.73 points, to 2,007.30.

"The Japanese market is expected to start with gains

following rallies in US stocks and a cheap yen" against the dollar, Monex senior market analyst Toshiyuki Kanayama said in a note.

The dollar fetched 136.69 yen in early Asian trade, against 136.73 yen in New York and 136.40 yen in Tokyo on Thursday.

Overnight, US equities forged higher in one of the most upbeat sessions in weeks.

Wall Street shares rose as "worries eased over acceleration in the pace of rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve, after Atlanta Fed President (Raphael) Bostic showed his support for a quarter-point rate hike" in the Fed's meeting this month, Kanayama noted.

Japan's jobless rate in January stood at 2.4 per-

cent, down from 2.5 percent in December, according to data released by the internal affairs ministry before the opening bell.

The data did not prompt a strong market reaction.

Among major shares, Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing was up 3.87 percent at 28,200 yen, Sony Group was up 0.66 percent at 11,455 yen, and construction machine maker Komatsu was up 0.86 percent at 3,394 yen.

Nippon Steel was up 0.90 percent at 3,144 yen after a report said it is considering a major investment in a green steel project powered by hydrogen outside Japan, which may cost an estimated 100 billion yen (\$733 million) or more.



In brief

National Tenpin Bowling C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Tenpin Bowling Championship will be played at Leisure City Bowling Club, Jinnah Park, Rawalpindi, from March 8 to 12. According to Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation (PTBF), male and female athletes from across the country would participate in the extravaganza. A kit-launch ceremony of the National Ten Pin Bowling Championship was also organised by PTBF in this regard and the kit was revealed by chief guest PTBF President Ijaz ur Rehman. PTBF Secretary General Mohammad Hussain Chhatta was also present on this occasion. The PTBF President said the women's competitions would be held on the opening day of the championship to mark International Women's Day on March 8. "The championship will be inaugurated by Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chhatta, while federal and provincial ministers will be special guests at the closing ceremony of the championship," he added. Ijaz said there was no shortage of tenpin bowling talent in the country, but there was a need to provide resources to players. "Despite limited resources and support, the federation is using all resources to promote the sport at the grass-roots level," he said.

UVAS Sports Day to be held on 8th

LAHORE (APP): The University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore is arranging the 19th Annual Sports Day on March 8, in City Campus Sports Ground. Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Nasim Ahmad chaired a meeting of conveners of management committees and reviewed preparations for the sports day. The conveners of committees briefed the meeting on the working progress of their respective committees. Secretary Livestock & Dairy Development Department Punjab Muhammad Masood Anwar will be chief guest on the inauguration ceremony while UVAS (retired) Prof Dr Sarver Khan will be chief guest in prize distribution ceremony of the annual sports day. Various games, including 800, 200, 100 meter races, shot-put, 4 X 400 Meter Relay Race Javelin Throw, Long Jump, Triple Jump, Discus Throw, High Jump, Three Leg race, Tug of War, Badminton, Table Tennis, Martial Arts/Gymnastic show etc will be played on the annual sports day. Students of various departments from UVAS Ravi Campus Pattoki, CVAS Jhang, CVAS Narowal, City Campus Lahore, staff and faculty members will participate in the contests.

Advocate Rana as Election Commissioner

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Cricket Board has appointed Ahmed Shehzad Farooq Rana, former Deputy Attorney General and ex-Secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association as its Election Commissioner. The appointment was made by the PCB Patron and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in accordance with Article 29 of the PCB Constitution 2014. Following the notification, Mr Rana assumed charge on Thursday and met Chair of the PCB Management Committee, Mr Najam Sethi, to discuss the elections process, which will commence with elections in approximately 50 districts. In this regard, and in consultation with the Chair of the PCB Management Committee, Mr Rana has appointed 13 Deputy Election Commissioners, who will be responsible for conducting free, fair and transparent elections in the districts.

Azam Khan's 72 off 41 balls leaves Kings on the brink of elimination

KARACHI (Cricinfo): A remarkable counter-attacking knock from Azam Khan ambushed Karachi Kings, snatching a win away from them in a game they had been dominating from the start. Islamabad United's middle order batter smashed an unbeaten 72 off 41, putting up a 125-run stand with Faheem Ashraf and helping seal a six-wicket win. The loss put Kings on the brink of elimination. United had never chased a target in excess of 200 before, so when Kings put up 201, thanks in large part to another outstanding knock from their captain Imad Wasim, their batters were up against it. They

started brightly, as United always do, but Mohammad Amir struck early to remove Colin Munro, and despite a cameo from Alex Hales, Aamer Yamin cleaned him up with the last ball of the powerplay. Rassie van der Dussen saw one stay low against him from Tabraiz Shamsi, and all of a sudden, United were three down at the halfway stage, and the asking rate had crept above 12. But Azam had decimated Quetta Gladiators a week earlier, and while he was at the crease, United were in it. He slapped Imad Wasim for a four and a six in the 11th over - there had been no boundaries scored in the

previous four. It got United up and running again. A pair of sixes off Shamsi in the next saw the asking rate creep under 12. Faheem provided support, if not too many runs, from the other end, but Karachi were growing desperate for a breakthrough. That showed, in particular, in the face of Amir, who appealed incessantly for far-fetched lbw calls, and burned both Karachi reviews with reckless abandon. The muddled thinking was obvious when, having run out of reviews, Amir frantically signalled for another one on yet another unrealistic shout, only to be reminded that wasn't an option.

Roy ton powers England to victory in 2nd Bangladesh ODI

DHAKA (AFP/APP): Jason Roy struck a century while Sam Curran put in a fine all-round performance as England thrashed Bangladesh by 132 runs in the second one-day international in Dhaka on Friday. The victory, giving holders England valuable practice on spinning, low-bounce South Asian pitches before the 50-over World Cup in India later this year, meant that the visitors took the series 2-0 with one match still to play. England dismissed Bangladesh for 194 runs in 44.4 overs, thanks to Curran's 4-29 and Adil Rashid's 4-45 after Roy struck 132 off 124 balls to guide the side to 326-7, the highest ODI score by a side in Dhaka in over five years. The win also made England the first side to

win an ODI series in Bangladesh in over six years, with the side also winning a series here last time in 2016. Curran, replacing Chris Woakes, took three wickets in five balls in the opening two overs, including two in two balls in the first over to leave Bangladesh reeling at 9-3. The hosts could never recover from the damage despite veteran all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan making 58 runs. Shakib and skipper Tamim Iqbal shared 79 runs for the fourth wicket before Moeen Ali removed Tamim for 35 to end their resistance. Shakib was caught by Curran at extra cover off Rashid. Bangladesh, who were playing their 100th ODI at Mirpur, earlier elected to bowl first and kept the tourists in check at the start. Top-order batsmen Phil

Salt (7), James Vince (5) and first-match centurion Dawid Malan (11) all fell cheaply. But Roy and skipper Buttler gave England lift-off with their fourth-wicket stand of 109. Roy departed when Shakib had him out leg before. Buttler then took over the charge until he was dismissed by Mehidy for 76 off 64 balls. Moeen added a late blitz of 42 runs from 35 balls for reigning one-day and T20 world champions England. Curran, one of the two changes in England squad from three-wicket win in Wednesday's opening match win, played his part with an unbeaten 33 off 19 balls. Taskin Ahmed was the pick of the Bangladesh bowlers with 3-66. The final match is on Monday in Chittagong.

All-Pakistan Inter-University Women, Men Throw Ball Championship begins

PESHAWAR (APP): All Pakistan Inter-University Women and Men Throw Ball Championship got underway here at Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Indoor Hall on Friday under the aegis of the Directorate Sports University of Peshawar. Secretary of Higher Education Dawood Khan was the chief guest on this occasion. He was accompanied by Vice Chancellor Peshawar University Professor Dr. Muhammad Idris, Director General Sports Bahre Karam University, Deputy Director Higher Education Arshad Hussain along with other dignitaries. On this occasion, Vice Chancellor Muhammad Idris and Secretary of Higher Education Dawood Khan gave a briefing regarding the planned project of the construction of the international standard academy at the University of Peshawar. Bahre Karam on this occasion while briefing

Dawood Khan and Professor Dr Muhammad Idris said that the project that includes international standard facilities for all indoor Games would be completed in a record two hours times with a total cost of Rs. 130 million. The Gymnasium would include facilities like Resource Center, Fitness Center, Basketball, Netball, Futsal, Volleyball, Throw Ball courts besides facilities for other Martial Arts and Indoor Games for both males and females. In the opening match of the All Pakistan Inter-Varsity Throw Ball Championship under the auspices of the University of Peshawar, the women of the University of Peshawar team defeated the Women's team of Iqra National University Peshawar. The University of Peshawar won the match by 25-9. In the first set, the score was 25-10, second set 25-19 and 25-22. In other women's competitions, Islamia College

University beat Lahore College by 3-1, Shaheed Benazir University beat the University of Punjab by 3-0, the University of Management Lahore beat the University of Swabi 2-0, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan beat Iqra University 3-1 and the University of Punjab defeated the University of Multan by 2-0. Similarly, College University Peshawar started successfully by defeating Kohat University of Science and Technology by 25-18, 25-10 and 25-17. In the Men competitions, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan defeated the University of Lakki Marwat by 25-8, 25-12 and 25-19, the University of Management Lahore defeated Agriculture University TandoJam by 25-9, 25-12 and 25-22 while in the last match of the day the University of Peshawar defeated University of Hazara Mansehra 25-11, 25-19 and 25-14.

BN Polo, FG Polo qualify for main final of 2nd President of Pakistan Polo Cup

LAHORE (APP): BN Polo and FG Polo qualified for the main final of the 2nd President of Pakistan Polo Cup 2023 after winning their respective semifinals played here on Friday at the Jinnah Polo Fields. Heroics of Roberto Arias and Hamza Mawaz Khan helped BN Polo qualify for the main final after outsmarting Diamond Paints by 6-3 in the first semifinal of the day. Roberto Arias and Hamza Mawaz were in sublime form and played excellent polo for BN Polo and thrashed in three goals each. For Diamond Paints, all the three goals were converted by Chulo Corti. Diamond Paints got off to a flying start as they

converted two 40-yard penalties successfully to earn a 2-0 lead in the first chukker. BN Polo bounced back well in the second chukker with two back-to-back goals to level the score at 2-2. They added two more goals in the tally in the third chukker, but Diamond Paints then converted a 40-yard penalty to reduce the margin to 3-4. The rest of the match was then dominated by BN Polo, as they first converted one goal in the dying moments of the third chukker to stretch their lead to 5-3 and then slammed in one more in the fourth and last chukker to comfortably win the match by 6-3.

Raul Laplacette was the hero as FG Polo edged past Master Paints/Newage Cables by a narrow margin of 9-8 in extra time on sudden death in the thrilling second semifinal of the day. From FG Polo, Raul Laplacette did magic with mallet and polo pony and fired in five fantastic goals while Mian Abbas Mukhtar banged in a brace and Ramiro Zavaletta and Saqib Khan Khakwani converted one goal apiece. For Master Paints/Newage Cables, Simon Prado smashed in superb five goals while Juan Cruz Greguoli thrashed in two goals and Farooq Amin Sufi struck one goal.



RAWALPINDI: A view of cricket match between Islamabad United and Karachi Kings teams during PSL 8 T20 cricket match at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Indore pitch rated as poor

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday rated the pitch for the third Test of the ICC World Test Championship series between India and Australia at the Holkar Cricket Stadium in Indore as "poor" under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process.

ICC Match Referee Chris Broad submitted his report to the ICC expressing the concerns of the match officials and after consulting with captains of both teams, said a press release. Following the assessment, the venue has received three merit points.

The report has been forwarded to the BCCI, who now have 14 days if they wish to appeal against the sanction. Broad said, "The pitch, which was very dry, did not provide a balance between bat and ball, favouring spinners from the start. The fifth ball of the match broke through the pitch surface and continued to occasionally break the surface providing little or no seam movement and there was excessive and uneven bounce throughout the match."

Inter-District Kabaddi from March 6 in City

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-District Kabaddi Championship will be commencing from March 12, this year at different venues including Bannu and Peshawar with collaboration of Directorate of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This was stated by Syed Sultan Shah, Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Kabaddi Association, while talking to APP on Friday. He said the schedule of inter-district kabaddi competitions has been announced and DG Sports Khalid Khan has assured full support in organizing these competitions to be starting from March 6-12, 2023 at Mandan, Bannu. On the occasion of the closing ceremony of these competitions, DG Sports Khalid Khan will be the chief guest who will distribute the prizes to the players, while the Inter-District competition in Peshawar will be held from March 16-19, 2023 at village Surizai Payan.

Karachi produced most famous athletes: Tessori

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has said that the example of the best and most famous athletes that Karachi has produced is hardly found anywhere in Pakistan. He said this while addressing the opening ceremony of Karachi Games 2023 at the KMC Sports Complex here on Friday.

He said that as the Governor, he declares that the doors of the Governor's House are now open for all talented youth of Karachi. It is hoped that superstars will emerge from the Karachi Games.

He congratulated the Administrator Karachi and his entire team for organizing the Karachi Games 2023. These sports should not only be held for ten days but for the whole year

and every year Karachi Games should be held.

Dr Syed Saif-ur-Rahman, Municipal Commissioner Shujaat Hussain, consul generals, diplomats, prominent players who have made Pakistan famous in various sports, departmental heads of KMC and other officers were also present on this occasion.

Governor Sindh said that Karachi will play and will definitely play, during the matches of Pakistan Super League, he said to Dr. Syed Saifur Rehman that we will organize 42 games in Karachi. "I thank all organizations for sponsoring the Karachi Games", he said.

The Administrator Karachi thanked the Governor of Sindh for supporting the sports in the

city. Earlier, the Governor of Sindh administered the oath to the Karachi Games players and announced the formal opening of the Games. All the teams participating in the Karachi Games presented salutes while passing in front of the chief guest.

The torch of the Karachi Games was carried by various famous players including Olympian Hanif Khan, cricketer Sadiq Muhammad, Shoaib Muhammad, Tauseef Ahmed, former snooker champion Muhammad Yusuf, athlete Naseem Hameed, Ali Salman, Hashim Hadi, hockey star Islahuddin, finally it reached the hands of squash legend Jahangir Khan who then lighted the fireplace for games.

Australia beat India by nine wickets to win third Test

INDORE (AFP/APP): Travis Head and Marnus Labuschagne held their nerve on a viciously turning Indore pitch to guide Australia to a nine-wicket victory Friday and only their second Test win in India since 2004.

After Australia were thrashed in the first two Tests inside three days, the series now stands at 2-1 to the hosts with one match remaining.

Labuschagne finished on 28 not out and Head on 49, having lost opener Usman Khawaja to only the second ball of the day.

The dogged victory secured Australia a berth in the ICC World Test Championship final in June at The Oval. India will be sure of their place in the final if they win the fourth Test in Ahmedabad.

"I just tried to take it one step at a time," said Head.

"We have seen it throughout the series that with the wickets, the quality of bowling, anything can happen.

"So we were just trying to take it one ball at a

time. It's just nice to contribute."

In a low-scoring and frenetic encounter, Australia skittled India for 109 on day one with spinner Matthew Kuhnemann giving the hosts a taste of their own medicine with five wickets.

In reply Australia made a solid start before collapsing to 197 all out before lunch on day two, their last six wickets tumbling for just 11 runs.

Eight wickets for spinner Nathan Lyon saw India bundled out for 163 in their second innings, setting up a victory target of 76.

Australia made the worst of starts with Khawaja, the hero of the first innings, out second ball of the day.

The opening batsman edged Ravichandran Ashwin to keeper Srikr Bharat for a duck.

A stunned Khawaja, who had looked supremely assured in the first innings, reviewed the decision but the dismissal was upheld -- to jubilation from the noisy

Indore crowd.

Virat Kohli was convinced he had caught g u m - c h e w i n g Labuschagne, the world number one Test batsman, at slip off Ashwin in the seventh over but India's review was unsuccessful.

After 45 minutes, Labuschagne and Head changed gears.

Head launched Ashwin for a six over mid-on and the next over drilled Ravindra Jadeja down the ground for a four as the shackles came off.

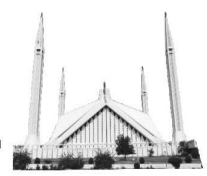
Labuschagne too got in the act, hitting Jadeja for a four and dismissing a short Ashwin delivery on a half-volley for four more to bring a rare Australia win in India in view.

A flurry of more boundaries quickly reduced the deficit, calmed nerves in the Australian dressing room and silenced the home crowd.

It is only the third time that India -- who have won their last 15 home series -- have lost a game at home in the last decade.



ATTOCK: Students are participating in high jump competition during the annual competitions of Government Graduate College Attock.



In brief

IRSA releases 99,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 99,900 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 50,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1453.44 feet and was 55.44 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 14,800 cusecs while outflow as 50,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1107.55 feet, which was 57.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 18,000 cusecs and 27,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 52,300, 41,200, 31,600 and 7,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 8,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Turi pays visit to Turkish Embassy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HD) Sajid Hussain Turi paid a condolence visit to the Turkish Embassy and expressed grief and sorrow over the deaths and destruction caused by the earthquake. The Minister said that Pakistanis share the grief of their Turkish brothers and sisters in this difficult hour, said a press release. May Allah raise the ranks of those martyred in the earthquake and grant patience to the bereaved families, he added. Pakistan and Turkey are two brotherly countries and are always with each other in pain and suffering. Federal Secretary Zulfiqar Haider was also accompanied by Federal Minister Sajid Hussain Turi.

76 kite sellers, flyers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police on the directives of City Police Officer, Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani here continued a special crackdown against kite sellers and flyers and managed to net 76. According to a police spokesman, all police stations of the district had been directed to accelerate ongoing operations against kite flying ban violators while special teams constituted to control kite flying under the supervision of senior police officers were conducting raids in different areas. Police teams recovered 3200 kites and kite flying string rolls from the possession of arrested kite sellers and flyers, he said. The spokesman informed that New Town police arrested a kite seller namely Jan Muhammad and recovered 2000 kites and kite flying string rolls from his possession. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Capt. Muhammad Amir Khan Niazi said that all available resources were being utilized to control kite flying. He said, Police under the supervision of Senior Police Officers on Thursday night and Friday conducted raids in different areas and rounded up the kite flying ban violators. Police had made a comprehensive security plan to maintain high vigilance in the city as well as to curb kite flying. The spokesman further informed that divisional superintendents of Police had also directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers. He said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the kite flying ban violators and they were being sent behind the bars.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Privatisation Abid Hussain Bhayo calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

FAO, IFC, ADB & BOI organize symposium to catalyze investments in agriculture sector

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Agriculture Investment Symposium was held in Islamabad to bring together key stakeholders, including investors, policy-makers, farmers, development partners, and researchers, to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences to drive investment in the agriculture sector. Attended by more than 300 participants, the symposium provided a platform for matchmaking and exploring opportunities for private investors and financial institutions to invest in the agricultural sector.

Booths for B2B meetings were setup, which served as an avenue for investors to connect with agriculture companies to exchange knowledge and access to available options related to technologies and bankable products. Several memorandums of understanding were signed or pledged at the B2B meetings.

Jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Finance Corporation (IFC), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Federal and Provincial Boards of Investment (BOI), the symposium catalyzed investments, partnerships, and collaborations for sustainable and inclusive growth in the sector, leveraging digitalization while managing the adverse impacts of climate

change. Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, urged private investors and financial and government institutions to collaborate and work together in the agricultural sector, which has a high potential of economic returns and poverty alleviation. Appreciating the efforts of FAO, he highlighted that the cluster-based development was part of the government's Vision 2025 to maximize agriculture and termed this approach as a key to our future influenced by Michael Porter's landmark work on "The Competitive Advantage of Nations."

FAO's Investment Centre also works with private sector partners through financial institutions to attract greater and more responsible private agri-food investment, said Mohamed Manssouri, Director of FAO Investment Centre. It acts as a bridge between Members and financing partners to scale up investment for a more significant impact at the country level.

Investment potential and economic benefits in eight agriculture commodities, such as apple, beef, chili, date, mango, onion, rice and tomato, were presented to induce private investors. Likewise, the financing needs identified under the living Indus Initiative for the sustainability of irrigated agriculture were also shared. This approach of the country

fits very well with the Hand in Hand (HIH) Initiative of FAO, which supports the transformation of agri-food systems to eradicate poverty (SDG1), end hunger and malnutrition (SDG2) and reduce inequalities (SDG10).

Other speakers at the inaugural session, including FAO Representative Florence Rolle, Khalid Gardezi, Additional Secretary, Ministry of National Food Security & Research, Zeeshan Sheikh, Country Manager, IFC, Mohammad Farooq, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Climate Change, Yasmin Siddiqi, Director ADB, and Aamer Irshad, Head of Program, emphasized the challenges faced by the agriculture sector and proposed various reforms, policy actions and identified investment potential for the sustainable management of the agriculture sector of Pakistan under high climatic risk vulnerability.

Two interactive panel discussions were also organized on the theme of the symposium where successful entrepreneurs shared their experiences for catalyzing investment and exploiting digital technologies to enhance agricultural competitiveness, facilitated by ADB and IFC.

Jamil Qureshi, Executive Director General, Board of Investment (BOI), Government of Pakistan, in his closing remarks, shared the way forward and concluded the event.

Hunza Festival to kick off in Federal Capital

ISLAMABAD (APP): Two-day Hunza Festival will kick off in the Federal Capital from March 4 featuring number of cultural and fun activities from Hunza region for the enthusiasts of twin cities.

The event which is being organized by Hunza Cultural Forum (HCF) will not only display the beauty of the valley but will also promote the rich tourist opportunities available in the land. The event aimed at promoting various colorful aspects of the valley including cultural heritage, art and crafts and tourism opportunities of the fairy tale land of Pakistan.

The event will feature intriguing folk instrumental music by traditional bands from Hunza Valley, folk songs in various languages of the Valley including Burushaski, Wakhi, Shina, and Domaki, display of traditional handicraft products and organic cuisine of Hunza Valley and other regions of Gilgit-Baltistan are also a part of the event.

Senate body to examine delegated legislation over Ministry of Education

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Senate Functional Committee on Delegated Legislation, under the Chairmanship of Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, convened on Friday would examine the delegated legislation of selected attached departments of the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training.

After a thorough examination, the committee presented a rigorous report, raising various queries regarding regulations, said a press release.

During the meeting, the committee discussed the Islamabad Capital Territory Private Educational Institutions (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2013.

The committee members noted that the Private Educational Institutions (Registration and Fee Determination) Rules, 2016 were challenged by private educational institutions through a writ petition, and the Islamabad High Court declared several sub-rules ultra vires to their parent act, including the schedule II of the rules. The Ministry assured the committee that draft rules will be forwarded to Ministry of Law for input within one week to which the Secretary,

Ministry of Law assured the Committee that opinion will be given on such rules within one week. The committee gave timelines to both Ministries to complete the said task.

The committee also raised a query about the status of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Employees Service Regulations, 1989, which apparently had not been repealed by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Employees Service Regulations, 2005. The officials were not able to provide a satisfactory reply to the queries. The committee expressed its reservation about the unpreparedness of the officers.

The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission Act, 2011, and the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission Employees (Service) Regulations, 2018, were also examined during the meeting. The committee pointed out that the provisos of some rules were in contradiction with the regulations of 2018, and queries were raised about regular, contract, and probation periods.

PTI's flawed economic policies, mismanagement will take time to get back on track: Senator Afnan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senator Dr Afnan Ullah Khan Friday said that the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf government's flawed economic policies and mismanagement had brought the country on the verge of collapse and that it will take time to get back on track. "Imran Khan had no right to question the economic policies of the current government as it had been striving hard to undo the "mess" created by the previous PTI regime", he said while talking to PTV news channel.

He said Imran Khan had apparently lost his senses after being ousted from power through a successful no-confidence motion and was in dire need of psychological counseling, adding, Niazi had made

the constitution, law, and judicial system of the country a "joke".

He said that the country had been isolated due to Khan's bad foreign policy, economic instability, and closure of work on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and power production projects.

Replying to a question, he said the government has categorically said that the next general elections would be held at its right time and no one would be allowed to take the law into his hands. "Imran Niazi is in no position to demand early election or dissolution of the provincial assemblies for his own interests as it is the mandate of the incumbent government to decide about future polls," he mentioned.

8,647 graduates get training in freelancing centers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Information Technology has provided financial assistance for the establishment of about 20 training centers under the National Freelance Training Program to impart IT training to fresh graduates.

"As many as 8,647 graduates were trained through International standard IT courses and these students contributed to the country's economy by earning \$23 million through freelancing after training, said an official of the Ministry of IT.

He said, during the year

2022, around 1,638 new IT companies got registered with Pakistan Software Export Board, while 761 call centers and 1,463 freelancers were also registered with the PSEB.

He said the ministry was also establishing specialized incubation centers in agriculture and textile, aerospace technologies, gaming and animation to create more businesses in these areas and boost exports. For the provision of early-stage investment, he said Ignite was starting an accelerator program so that early-age startups can sustain

their businesses.

Ignite is collaborating with international partners like Plug & Play, orbit, DMZ, 500 global and hub 71 so that the local startup ecosystem can be exposed to international investors.

He said that about 33 million people have got themselves registered for freelancing courses under the Digi Skills Programs of Ignite, which is 75% more than the target.

By June 2022, the freelancers trained with Digi Skills have earned a whopping \$290 million, adding to the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Sherry for creating mass awareness about wildlife conservation, protection

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman on Friday said that on this World Wildlife Day, it was very important to create awareness among the public and all stakeholders about the importance of wildlife conservation and take steps to protect them.

In her message on World Wildlife Day, the federal minister said that

public awareness and stakeholder engagement were a must in order to ensure the survival of these valuable resources and assets for future generations. Senator Sherry Rehman said World Wildlife Day was being celebrated all over the world including Pakistan. The purpose of the day was to spread awareness about wildlife conservation and their rights, she added.

The conservation of nature and wild areas and wildlife was the duty of every person living on earth, she added.

The Minister underlined that World Wildlife Day was very important for Pakistan. "Pakistan is home to wildlife that includes rare snow leopards, Indus dolphins, deer, birds and countless other species," Sherry Rehman added.

‘Her Hunnar’ exhibition to celebrate women entrepreneurship

ISLAMABAD (APP): ‘Her Hunnar’, an exhibition of attractive products will celebrate women entrepreneurship here on March 4 and 5 at Pak China Friendship Center.

Organized by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), during the 2-day event, women entrepreneurs from Northern Areas, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan, Chitral, Swat and Rawalpindi Islamabad will be exhibiting a range of high-quality and unique products.

Besides handicraft products representing Pakistan, sideline activities of the

event include live cultural performances, seminars, kids' arena and a food court featuring traditional cuisines from Gilgit Baltistan, Chitral, Swat etc. According to the organizers, ‘Her Hunnar’ is more than just an exhibition tapping the potential of women entrepreneurs. It is offering exciting sideline activities for people of all ages to enjoy and make memories. It is an event for people of twin cities and adjoining areas who must visit ‘Her Hunnar’ with their friends and families.

Her Hunnar is the platform to strengthen and encourage women entrepreneurs, representing all parts of Pakistan. It focuses on the significance of women entrepreneurship or women-led businesses in economic growth and development which is unquestionable.

The exhibition provides a platform for women entrepreneurs to exhibit their skills and talent and showcase their businesses in a productive competitive environment. TDAP is organizing this exhibition for women entrepreneurs representing all walks of life to strengthen and enhance their efforts with the aim to bring them to the mainstream so the world to know their potential.

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ISLAMABAD: Senator Seemee Ezdi, chairperson Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change and members of the committee are being briefed during their visit at Islamabad Wildlife management board visitor Information Center.

TB diagnose, treatment facility

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): A 12-bed Tuberculosis (TB) diagnoses and treatment facility has been inaugurated in the Central Prison of southern Kandahar province, an official said on Friday. Mullah Niamatullah Seraji, the prison affairs director, said the facility has been built with the efforts of the Ministry of Public Health and with the financial support of Medicines Sans Frontier (MSF) also known as Doctors without Borders.

DAB to Auction 16m USD

KABUL (BNA) Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) said that it will put in auction 16 million U.S. dollars as part of efforts to keep the local currency afghani stable by Saturday. The Central Bank has asked eligible banks and money changer services to participate in the tender, adding that the winners of the auction are obliged to settle their accounts by the end of the day. Partial settlement of transactions is not allowed and the winners of the auction are obliged to deliver the money owed to Da Afghanistan Bank in cash once.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Qatar offers educational help to world, including Afghanistan: Alkhatar



KABUL (TOLONews): Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister, Lolwah Alkhatar, said Doha believes in education and that it provides development assistance in the education sector at the world level including Afghanistan.

In a video released by the Doha foreign ministry on Twitter, Alkhatar says at a human rights conference that participants at the education conference on Afghanistan in Bali agreed that education is a human right and "even a religious" obligation.

"The state of Qatar is at the forefront of countries that provided international

development assistance in the education sector in a number of countries including Afghanistan by providing opportunities for both men and women," she said.

She said that Qatar in cooperation with Indonesia held a conference on the education of women in Afghanistan last year that had participants from more than 40 countries, educational institutions, and other organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, European Union, and United Nations.

This comes as the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken in a video mes-

sage on the 75th year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said that the US condemned the "Taliban's draconian repression of women and girls in Afghanistan including barring them from universities and secondary schools."

"The right to education and work has been taken.

The freedom of the people has been taken from them. The non-Taliban are not allowed to contribute to politics," said Naseer Ahmad Taraki, a political analyst. The Islamic Emirate said that the edicts about women and girls' education and work are not permanent.

"The Islamic Emirate has not denied the issue of education but it has determined a timeframe—a temporary timeframe—until the preparation is being taken for this and the problems are solved," said Islamic Emirate's Spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid.

It has been more than one and half years since the schools above grade six have remained closed for girls.

The Islamic Emirate late last year issued a decree that banned female students from going to universities. The issue faced widespread reactions at the national and international levels.

29 million Afghans need humanitarian aid: Blinken

KABUL (ToloNews): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that 29 million people in Afghanistan need humanitarian aid.

In a video message marking the 75th year since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, Blinken said that the "Taliban's" recent prohibition of barring Afghan women from working at NGOs "has closed off yet another pathway that should be open for them."

Blinken in an interview with Doniyor Tukhsinov of Kun.uz, an Uzbekistan news outlet, said that the US has been the number one provider of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan because it doesn't want the "people to suffer; and they are, but we've worked very hard to make sure that food, medicine, basic supplies were made available to them."

"The Taliban has made that more difficult by prohibiting women's participation in the delivery of humanitarian assistance," he said. This comes as women's rights activists and citizens urged the Islamic Emirate to facilitate women's access to work.

"We call on the Islamic Emirate to pave the way for work. In the current situation, women need to have



access to work," said Sahar, a resident of Kabul.

"We demand the Islamic Emirate allow women to learn and have access to work," said Fareshta, a resident of Kabul.

"The men and women who are employed can earn income and Halal food and they can also provide the food and pay the expenses of their families," said Suraya Paikan, a human rights defender.

Economists believe that

women's work in government departments plays a positive role in economic growth. "The economic presence of women is undoubtedly essential. This improves the economic development, GDP and annual income of Afghanistan and it can also put a positive impact on the reduction of poverty in Afghanistan," said Mir Shikib, an economist.

This comes as the Islamic Emirate said that

women are working in the areas where they are needed. "The Ministry of Economy—that is in contact with the international organizations—is working on a procedure to identify the areas that will be exempt and also provide an alternative to the women who are jobless," Mujahid said. Earlier, the Ministry of Economy said the reduction in financial support for Afghanistan has affected the people.

Students complain about lack of libraries in provinces

KABUL (TOLONews): Students told TOLONews that there are not enough libraries, or any way to access books, in their provinces. They asked the Islamic Emirate to focus on creating reading facilities in the provinces.

"There is no place for reading in our province, there is no library so people can study in it, we don't have a government library," said Habib, who came to Kabul from Paktia.

"We ask the government to build more libraries for us so that students can have easy access to books without problems," said Noorul Haq, another student.

Meanwhile, the owner of the women's library in Kabul said that after the closure of the universities, the number of visitors to the library has dropped.

The owner of the women's library, Julia Parsi, asked the Islamic Emirate to lift restrictions on women and provide opportunities for them in the fields of education and reading. "I ask the Islamic Emirate to stop interfering with our library and let it grow, if they truly want to promote the culture of reading books. Girls should be able to visit and study at our library whenever it is



open," Julia told TOLONews.

The director of the public library, Abdullah Abed, said that it is important to focus on fostering a culture of reading.

"The Islamic Emirate should pay special attention to the reading culture and scientific institutions and should spend money in this field, as much as the expenses are spent on the military," Abed said.

However, officials in the Ministry of Information and Culture said that it pays special attention to the

growth of reading culture in the country and will allocate a specific budget for the building of libraries in the next year.

"These issues truly exist, and we're working in this area to find a specific budget for building more libraries in the coming year," said Hayatullah Mahajer Farahi, press deputy for the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Some booksellers said that the market for selling books has dropped and the current government should take measures to foster the

culture of reading. "In this area, the government should establish a national cultural policy that will establish a clear path, and after that, public libraries should be established, at least, in every district, and the government should buy books for the libraries," said Safiullah, a bookseller. "Sadly, the culture of reading books is very weak in our country. Weak means that they are either distant from the book or do not have access to it, according to Mohammad Akbar Azimi, head of the Kabul Booksellers' Union.

Islamic Emirate leader meets with ministers, clerics

KABUL (TOLONews): The supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate, Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada, met with the heads of the interior, foreign, and defense ministries as well as religious clerics and officials of several provinces, and discussed the activities of the government departments as well as next year's budget," a spokesman said.

The Islamic Emirate's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said that Mawlawi Hibatullah met

with acting Minister of Defense Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid; acting Minister of Interior, Sirajuddin Haqqani; the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and the acting Minister of Technology Information and Telecommunication.

According to Mujahid, the meeting was also attended by clerics from Kabul, Khost, Nangarhar and other provinces.

"The Emir (leader) always calls on his minis-

ters and is monitoring them and giving them essential advice," he said.

"The religious clerics have responsibilities regarding the nation and people. The clerics should convey the problems in front of the people to the leader," said Abdul Qadir Qanat, a religious cleric. But what is the real message behind the meeting of the Islamic Emirate's supreme leader with the acting ministers?

"Security measures—because of the Daesh and

Resistance Front issue and as well as the issue of female schools and universities—might have been discussed," said Aziz Maarij, a political analyst.

"These ministers have gone to visit the leader on behalf of the cabinet," said Faizullah Jalili, a political analyst. After back-to-back edicts of the Islamic Emirate's leader, a council of religious clerics from 19 provinces has been formed in order for clerics to provide consultation to local officials.

Afghan trade hurt by Pakistani economic crisis: ACCI

The economic collapse in Pakistan has impacted the trade between Kabul and Islamabad, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) said.

According to the ACCI, the trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan reached close to \$3 billion but has recently dropped.

"Our trade has been becoming worse day by day. In addition to the impact of the Pakistan

economy, the reduction in value of Pakistani rupees has been affecting imports as well," said Khanjan Alokzai, a member of the ACCI. Meanwhile, economists said that the economic crisis in Pakistan is not only affecting the life of Afghan refugees in Pakistan but will also have a negative impact on economic conditions of the people inside Afghanistan.

"The export of Pakistan to Afghanistan has dropped. The reason is that Pakistan is in an economic crisis, the prices of gas and oil have tripled. The truth is that Afghanistan also faces problems due to the economic crisis in Pakistan," said Zalmay Azimi, a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment of Nangarhar.

"Pakistan is one of the trade partners of

Afghanistan... Whenever there is an economic crisis in Pakistan and the people lose the capacity to afford things, we cannot have exports to that country," said Abdul Naseer Rishitia, an economist.

According to Pakistani media, the economic crisis in the country has unexpectedly affected the value of Pakistani rupees in exchange for the US dollar.

The prices have also increased in Pakistan.

In Kabul, lack of transparency alleged in aid distribution

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of destitute people in Kabul are complaining about a lack of transparency in the distribution of aid and claim mostly undeserving individuals are given the assistance, but officials insist the aid should be given in exchange for work.

The international community cut off all but emergency aid to Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, with the US freezing more than \$9 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank. As a result, the level of unemployment and poverty in the country increased.

Later, some countries and the United Nations started a humanitarian aid distribution program to prevent the Afghans' economic

situation from getting worse. But some people say the aid distribution is not transparent and many undeserving people have been benefitting from this program. While complaining about unemployment and poverty, Zainab, a resident of Khushal Khan area in Kabul city, told Pajhwok that she had many times attempted to get aid, but she was not included in the list of those in need.

"I have seen several of my relatives and neighbors who even own cars and are economically sound receiving the aid that is supposed to be given to the poor."

She asked the government to ensure the aid was justly distributed. She said the caretaker government should seriously evaluate

the aid distribution process and prevent corruption in it. Abdul Hamid, a 35-year-old resident of the 11th district of Kabul city, father of five children, told Pajhwok that he was working in a non-governmental organization, but became unemployed after the fall of the previous government.

Struggling with joblessness and economic problems, Hamid said he had not received any help from any organization.

He also complained about the lack of transparency in the distribution of aid and alleged nepotism in the process, saying many undeserving people received the aid.

He added: "My name has been many times written in the lists of deserving

people, but I have never been helped. I don't know why they write our names and take ID cards from us."

Hamid also sought transparency in the distribution of aid. But officials say from now on the aid should be distributed in exchange for work as it will help address people's complaints about lack of transparency in the distribution process. Kabul governor Mohammad Qasim on Thursday launched the distribution of 500 metric tons of pulses provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock to the needy people in Kabul, saying like other provinces a lot of aid had been distributed to the people in Kabul.

KABUL (TOLONews): The Kabul municipality has hired 1,100 employees to maintain trees being planted in the city.

The head of the greenery affairs department of the

Kabul municipality, Abdul Wakil Mutawakil, said that the 600,000 trees will be planted in the coming solar year of 1402.

"The municipality of Kabul will send 60 to 70

tankers in every area to maintain the trees. Planting trees is an easy job but maintenance requires effort," he said.

"The greening of the country, planting trees and

growth in agriculture, benefit the Afghanistan infrastructure," said Saifuddin Tayib, deputy head of the department. The department of environmental protection called on the residents to play their role in the maintenance of the city.

The deputy of the environmental protection agency, Zainuddin, called on the UN to resume its incomplete projects in Afghanistan.

"These projects have begun and some of them remain half completed. We have talked about it previously, they were bringing the issue of (international recognition of the government) as a problem," said Zainuddin, deputy head of the environmental protection department.

Meanwhile, some residents of Kabul suggested that the Kabul municipality should pay attention to the irrigation of the plants.





ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the 5th Cerebral Palsy Conference.

LHC orders release of PTI leader held in ‘Jail Bharo Tehreek’

LAHORE (Agencies): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday ordered the release of PTI’s Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Asad Umar and other leaders and workers after they were detained during the party’s ‘Jail Bharo Tehreek’ (court arrest movement).

Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh suspended the detention orders during an open court hearing today on a petition moved the same day by PTI Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry. The written order, said the respondents were directed to release the people mentioned in the list attached with Chaudhry’s petition “forthwith if they are not required in any criminal case”.

The petition requested that the respondents be ordered to release all political workers who courted arrest as part of the PTI campaign and that any preventive measure or order issued should be declared illegal and quashed.

During the hearing, the judge asked what was illegal about the detention of the PTI workers and leaders, adding that the party had started the court arrest movement itself. He questioned Chaudhry’s lawyer, Advocate Sikandar Zulqarnain, about the admissibility of the petition. “They are all political prisoners. It is clearly explained in the rules about political prisoners,” Zulqarnain said, adding that the court arrest movement had started as a protest and the PTI leaders had presented themselves for arrest.

Meanwhile, the public prosecutor argued that there was no proof

attached to the petition that PTI workers were in custody and said he would get instructions from the authorities concerned. Justice Sheikh directed him to inform the court after taking instructions. The government counsel said that the PTI’s leaders and workers had entered custody willingly. Reconvening after a break, the judge suspended their detention orders and issued notices to the respondents for March 7.

PTI challenges detention of leaders, workers in LHC: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Friday challenged the detention, arrests of the party leaders and workers, who voluntarily presented their arrests for Jail Bharo Tehreek.

PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry through his lawyer Zafar Iqbal filed a petition with the Lahore High Court (LHC). The Punjab government, the secretary of the interior, IGP Punjab, and IG prisons have been made respondents in the case. Chaudhry in his plea stated that the PTI leaders and workers who presented their court arrest have been ‘detained’, which is illegal.

As per law, the deputy commissioners do not have any powers for house arrest, the plea said. The LHC has been pleaded to pass orders of the immediate release of PTI leaders and workers by nullifying the detention/arrest orders. It may be noted that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan Wednesday announced the suspension of the “Jail Bharo Tehreek” after the Supreme Court (SC) verdict on Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) polls.

Taking to Twitter, the former premier had said the party was suspending its “Jail Bharo Tehreek and moving forward with election campaigns in KP and Punjab”. It was the responsibility of the Supreme Court to uphold the Constitution and they have valiantly done that through their judgment today. It is an assertion of the Rule of Law in Pakistan,” the PTI chairman wrote in a tweet.

LHC bars Punjab’s interim CM from inaugurating development projects: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday barred Punjab’s interim Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi from inaugurating development projects in the province.

Justice Shahid Karim heard the plea filed by Haroon Farooq to counter smog in Lahore. The judge remarked that he would award those sentence, who cut trees as smog was extremely dangerous for the residents of Lahore. The court barred the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) from cutting trees.

The judge remarked that the interim CM inaugurated the Kalma Chowk underpass which he was not authorised to do. Why the caretaker CM was in haste to inaugurate the underpass as it was still under construction, he inquired. The court, on the other hand, rejected the plea seeking a one-hour extension in the duration for keeping bakeries open in Ramadan and summoned the Planning Commission chairman while issuing him a contempt notice. Meanwhile, the judge also summoned the Punjab chief secretary and the P&D chairman in a personal capacity.

Funds for ‘Sehat Card’ facility: PHC orders govt to submit reply

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Musarat Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered Federal Health’s Ministry to submit reply in case regarding ending of ‘Sehat Card’ for tribesmen in erstwhile Fata, on Friday.

The counsel for petitioner Ali Gohar Durrani Advocate informed that federal government has stopped funds for erstwhile Fata which has ultimately resulted in closure of ‘Sehat Card’ facility despite promised Rs1 thousand billion in 10 years for the region.

The counsel added that erstwhile Fata is also deprived from her share at National Finance Commission (NFC) Award despite the region is badly impacted from war on terror. He added that infrastructure of erstwhile Fata also damaged due to continuous insurgency.

The counsel added that tribesmen already aggrieved while current situation made them hopeless and added that a writ petition regarding NFC Award also present before PHC while requested clip both cases. The divisional bench of PHC comprising of Justice Musarat Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad clip both writ petitions while ordered Federal Health Ministry to submit reply in this regard and adjourned further hearing.

Mother sacrifices her life for son

GUJRANWALA (PPI): A heroic mother has sacrificed herself so that her son could survive from electrocution caused by a kite string during the Basant being celebrated in Gujranwala despite a ban on the illegal spring festival.

According to a report on Friday, the woeful incident took place in Ferozwala Road when 14-year-old Hamad was standing on the rooftop of his house. Meanwhile, he suffered from an electric shock as a stray metallic string fell on him. Her mother standing nearby rushed to rescue him. She succeeded in freeing her son from further damage from the electric wire. However, she was also electrocuted during the scuffle.

According to the rescue sources, she had suffered cardiac arrest due to electric shock. They were immediately taken to the hospital for medical aid. But the mother remained unfortunate and died before reaching the hospital. In another incident, 28-year-old Sher Ali was injured when the string of a kite fell on the electric wires on Race Course Road. He was shifted to the hospital for medical assistance.

Buzdar joins NAB inquiry

LAHORE (INP): Former Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar on Friday appeared before the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in an assets beyond means case in Lahore. The former chief minister has got his pre-arrest bail from an accountability court.

Earlier, Buzdar had failed to appear before the NAB on its call-up notices issued to him for Feb 22 and Feb 16. The bureau’s Lahore office had issued notices to Buzdar to show up along with details of income tax and property tax. Separately, an accountability court in Lahore released the written interim order of the interim bail of Usman Buzdar. The order was released by Judge Sheikh Sajjad Ahmad.

The NAB prosecutor who opposed the bail plea submitted his reply to the court. The prosecutor informed the court that Buzdar had not joined the NAB investigation so far. The court, however, directed the former chief minister to join the bureau’s investigation and asked the investigation officer to complete the inquiry as soon as possible. The court also ordered the lawyers of both the parties to present their arguments on the case by March 7. Buzdar has already got interim bail to avoid arrest in the case. The anti-graft watchdog has started an inquiry against the ex-CM on the charges of accumulating illegal wealth.

Imran says ready to talk to army chief ‘for betterment of country’

LAHORE (Agencies): Former prime minister Imran Khan on Friday said he was ready to talk to Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir “for the betterment of the country”, stressing he has “no quarrel with the establishment”.

In a wide-ranging discussion with reporters at his Zaman Park residence in Lahore, he touched upon politics, his ties with the military, his frustration with retired army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa and why he chose not to fly to Islamabad for court hearings. When asked why he was not speaking to the “establishment” — a euphemism for the military — he said he never had a quarrel with the establishment, and it was Gen Bajwa that “stabbed me in the back”.

He added that even after he lost his government, he spoke to Gen Bajwa for the betterment of the country. “But it was General Bajwa who wanted to crush me,” he said. “But if anyone thinks that I will bend the knee, that cannot happen.” Imran also criticised the retired general for “delivering a speech against Russia” and demanded that he be “court-martialed for this speech”.

“I am willing to speak to the establishment even now — for the betterment of the country — but if no one is willing to talk, what can I do?” he asked. He then said that “it seems like the [current] army chief is considering me his enemy”. He then challenged the incumbent army chief to prove any corruption case against him and his wife.

Speaking about the state of his ties with former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi, who recently left PML-Q and joined PTI, he said the establishment lacked an understanding of politics. “They tried their best

to make Chaudhry Parvez Elahi leave my side.” “Now we will have to show him loyalty,” Imran added, emphasising that he could not betray anyone.

The comments are the latest in a barrage of criticism for the retired general. Imran had also recently voiced his demand for an internal military inquiry against Gen Bajwa in an interview with Voice of America Urdu, which aired on Feb 10. Commenting on the alleged threats to his life, the former premier said a video recording of his was being kept abroad. He has previously referred to the recording which, according to him, contains the names of the “conspirators”. He had said it would be made public if anything happened to him.

At one point in today’s conversation, Imran revealed why he chose to travel to Islamabad for court hearings by road. He said he got word that there were plans to arrest him from the airport and take him to Balochistan. “I am in danger from those who are supposed to protect me,” Imran said. He, however, said that going to jail “gets one more votes”.

On whether the forthcoming elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab are coming at a time when the national exchequer is rapidly repleting, he suggested that if “general elections are held at once, money will be saved”. The PTI chairman claimed that the PTI would win the elections despite the “umpires siding with the PDM”. When asked if he had decided a candidate for Punjab chief minister in light of the upcoming by-polls, Imran said there would be “bloodshed” if he finalises the name right now. “Even women elected on reserved seats want to be the Punjab chief minister,” Imran said.

SC seeks report from ECP on expats voting right

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Overseas Pakistanis may exercise voting right in upcoming general elections as top court sought progress report form Election Commission of Pakistan in response to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and Awami Muslim League’ pleas seeking declaration for expats right to vote.

A three-member bench led by Justice Ijazul Ahsan resumed hearing of the pleas that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan and Pakistan Awami Muslim League (AML) founder Sheikh Rashid had filed invoking jurisdiction in the matter.

During adjudication of the case the top court questioned on what grounds an amendment of law of the right to vote of overseas Pakistanis not constitutionally valid? A member of the bench Justice Muneeb Akhtar observed saying the “Parliament enacted the Election Act in 2017”, adding that “Section 94 of the act regarding the right to vote of overseas Pakistanis is clear.” He further remarked “in 2018, the Supreme Court had declared Section 94 as constitutional.”

“In the year 2021, the

He also noted that “every enactment of Parliament is a constitutional concept no matter what the courts’ observations are.” “The petition filed for violation of fundamental rights should be clear,” remarked Justice Akhtar. Justice Mazahar Ali Naqvi then directed the petitioners’ counsel to submit an amended application and also directed the electoral watchdog to submit a progress report on voting rights of overseas Pakistanis.

It is pertinent to mention that during last year, the federal cabinet approved an election amendment bill aiming to reverse the PTI-era legislation which had granted voting rights to overseas Pakistanis and made it compulsory to hold elections through electronic voting machines (EVMs), deciding that pilot projects should determine the fate of both the proposals. The cabinet termed the overseas Pakistanis as a valuable asset of the country saying it was important to include them in the election process. In this regard, it said that the previous government enacted legislation without taking the ECP into confidence.

President for greater Pak-US linkages

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday emphasizing greater collaboration with the United States in the fields of education, agriculture and information technology said both sides needed to explore the tremendous potential. The president made these remarks in a meeting with a visiting delegation of California’s State Assembly led by Chris Holden, here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The president said that Pakistan and US enjoyed a long-standing and broad-based relationship, which needed to be further expanded for the mutual benefit of the two countries. He appreciated the signing of the Sister-State Resolution between Punjab and California on January 9, 2023. He said that Punjab had great potential to attract the US investment and businesses that would help amplify the trade between the two countries.

He expressed the hope that the visit of the delegation would further broaden ties between Punjab and California as well as encourage other Assembly members to visit Pakistan. The president underlined the need for exploring opportunities to enhance cooperation between the universities of the two countries and promote more student exchanges.

Highlighting the importance of cooperation in the education sector, the President suggested that the US universities could provide live lectures to Pakistani students. He also highlighted the measures taken for the social and economic empowerment of women. He apprised the delegation about the efforts of Begum Samina Alvi who had been playing a significant role in raising awareness about breast cancer in Pakistan.

The delegation emphasized the need to increase cooperation in the agriculture sector, including the transfer of technology related to the field of agriculture. It also called for students and faculty exchange programmes to further boost cooperation in the education sector. The delegation also urged the need to make combined efforts for addressing the challenges of climate change. It also informed that there was a large diaspora from Punjab in California which had been playing a significant role in transport and agriculture sectors.

Bilawal to chair ‘Women in Islam’ moot in US

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, arrives in New York next week for a hectic, 4-day visit during which he will preside over a conference on ‘Women in Islam’ to be held on the sidelines of the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Hosted by Pakistan in its capacity as the chair of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), the one-day conference will take place in the Economic and Social Council’s chamber at UN headquarters on March 8, a day after the foreign minister arrives. On March 7, FM Bilawal is also expected to participate in a high-level UN Security Council debate on ‘Women, Peace and Security’, sponsored by Mozambique in its capacity as the Council’s President for March.

Meanwhile, the stated

objective of the conference, convened by Pakistan, is to bridge the perception-reality gap on the rights of women in Islam and celebrate the experiences and successes of iconic Muslim women. It is aimed at establishing an annual policy dialogue to address challenges and explore opportunities to advance the role of women role in OIC countries. Titled “Women in Islam: Understanding the Rights and Identity of Women in the Islamic World”, FM Bilawal will open the high-level segment of the conference with an address.

He will be followed by the UN General Assembly President, Csaba Koros; OIC Secretary General, Houssein Braham Taha; Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous; Chairperson of 67th CSW, South African Ambassador Mathu Joyini; dignitaries and representatives of OIC Member States. Also participating in the conference will be non-OIC states and representatives of UN Agencies.

The outcome document will be a chair’s summary of the deliberations. Later, in pursuit of the General Assembly landmark resolution 76/254 designating 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the General Assembly president and the foreign minister will be co-convening a special high-level event to commemorate the day on March 10. The 193-member Assembly’s resolution followed the OIC Foreign Ministers’ resolution of 2020 designating 15 March as an international day to combat Islamophobia. During his visit, FM Bilawal will also hold meetings with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the General Assembly president. He will also brief the UN and International Press on the outcome of these events.

Iran blames foreign enemies for wave of schoolgirl poisonings

TEHRAN (Agencies): Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday blamed a wave of poisonings of hundreds of schoolgirls around the country on Tehran’s enemies. The so-far unexplained poison attacks at more than 30 schools in at least four cities began in November in Iran’s holy city of Qom, prompting some parents to take their children out of school. Since the outbreak of the mysterious poisonings, almost 1,200 students have required hospital treatment for breathing difficulties, an Iranian lawmaker said on Wednesday.

The poisonings have provoked a wave of anger across the country, with critics denouncing official silence in the face of the growing number of schools reportedly being targeted. Iran’s health minister said on Tuesday that hundreds of girls in different schools have suffered and some politicians have suggested they could have been targeted by religious groups opposed to girls’ education.

Raisi, speaking to a crowd in southern Iran on Friday in a speech carried live on state television, blamed the poisoning on Iran’s enemies. “This is a security project to cause chaos in the country where-by the enemy seeks to instil fear and insecurity among parents and students,” he

said. He did not say who those enemies were although Iranian leaders habitually accuse the United States and Israel, among others, of acting against it. Separately, a senior Iranian official said a fuel tanker found next to a school in a Tehran suburb and which had also been spotted in two other cities was probably involved in the poisonings.

Authorities seized the tanker and arrested its driver, Reza Karimi Saleh, deputy governor of Pardis suburb, told the semi-official Tasnim news agency. He is the first government official to report an arrest in connection with the wave of poisonings.

He said the same tanker had also been to Qom and Boroujerd, in Lorestan Province in western Iran, where students have also suffered from poisoning. He did not elaborate. “Guards at a parking lot where the fuel tanker was parked also suffered from poisoning,” Saleh said, referring to the Pardis site.

Social media posts are replete with photos and videos of hospitalised girls. Some said they were nauseous and suffered heart palpitations. Others complained of headaches or heart palpitations. Reuters could not verify the posts. Schoolgirls have also taken

part in the anti-government protests triggered by the death in the custody of an Iranian-Kurdish woman last September. They have removed their mandatory hijabs in classrooms, torn up pictures of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and called for his death.

In one online video last year, schoolgirls were seen waving their headscarves in the air and heckling a member of Iran’s paramilitary Basij force. The United Nations backed a call from Germany’s top diplomat on Friday urging a full and transparent investigation into the reported poisoning. “The reports of schoolgirls being poisoned in Iran are shocking,” Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Twitter.

“Girls must be able to go to school without fear — whether in Tehran or Ardabil. This is nothing less than their human right,” Baerbock said. “All the cases must be fully investigated,” she said. In Geneva on Friday, the UN rights office also voiced alarm at the poisoning allegations. “We are very concerned about these allegations that girls are being deliberately targeted under what appear to be mysterious circumstances,” spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters.