

Sh Rasheed's plea okayed

ISLAMABAD (INP): A district and sessions court on Saturday granted exemption from appearance to AML chief Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed till March 18 in a case registered against him for interference in state affairs in Murree. Additional Sessions Judge Irfan Naseem announced the decision while hearing a petition filed by the prosecution seeking cancellation of bail of the former interior minister in the case.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX

No. 48

Regd. No. 241

SHABAAN 12 1444 -- SUNDAY, MARCH 05 2023

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

Price. 20

China approves \$1.3b loan rollover for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Pakistan received \$500 million from Chinese bank, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced late Friday, as part of the \$1.3 billion facility approved by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).

The cash-strapped country has faced growing economic challenges, with high inflation, sliding forex reserves, a widening current account deficit and a depreciating currency. "Formalities completed [and] Chinese Bank, ICBC approved rollover of \$1.3 billion facility which has been repaid by Pakistan to ICBC in recent months," the finance czar announced on Twitter.

He said that the facility would be disbursed in three instalments, first

one of \$500 million has been received by the State Bank of Pakistan. "It will increase forex reserves!" Dar added. Hours before his announcement, the finance minister revealed that China has renewed a facility under which Pakistan expected an additional inflow of \$500 million in the "next few days".

Highlighting the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led government's economic achievements, Dar said that the foreign exchange reserves held by the SBP climbed to \$3.8 billion from \$2.8 billion — recorded last month. He maintained that the government returned \$6.5 billion of foreign debt during the current fiscal year. Pakistan has made payments of around \$5.5 billion (excluding the \$1 billion sukuk payment).

These include \$2 billion to China Development Bank and ICBC and \$3.5 billion have been given to banks in other countries," he said.

"Debt is usually rolled over but the debt stock does not reduce. We are reducing debt stock," he said. "Formalities with ICBC were completed last night. We returned \$1.3 billion to it and this facility has been renewed and we will receive the amount back in three tranches." "We paid back \$1.3 billion in three tranches — \$500 million, \$500 million and \$300 million. We will receive it back the same way. Pakistan will get \$500 million in two-three days. We might receive it on Monday. Then we will get an additional \$500 million in 10 days."



LAHORE: Pakistan Ambassador to US Sardar Masood Khan called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Lt Gen (retd) Nazir named NAB chairman

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has appointed Lieutenant General (retd) Nazir Ahmad as the National Accountability Bureau's (NAB) chairman for a three-year term.

In a notification, the Ministry of Law and Justice said that the appointment had been made by the federal government after a consensus between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Raja Riaz. The post of NAB chairman became vacant on February 15 after the acceptance of the resignation tendered by Aftab Sultan, the notification said.

After "detailed deliberations", both sides agreed on the appointment of Lt Gen (retd) Ahmad. The NAB chairman, according to the law ministry, shall hold office for a "non-extensible term of three years" and will not be eligible for subsequent appointment. It is also not possible to remove the chairman from office except on the grounds and in the manner as provided in Article 209 of the Constitution, the notification added.

Protest sit-in ends in Khyber

F.P. Report

KHYBER: After assurance of the officials of Tribal electric Supply Company (TESCO) to supply six hour power supply to the tribesmen, three days long protest sit-in ended here on Saturday.

It is worth mentioning here that the locals of Khyber rushed to the roads in protest when the TESCO directed the local grid stations to provide only two hours electricity in day and night to the tribal due to energy crises in the country. The protestors' leaders informed that a successful meeting of the tribesmen representatives and the TESCO officials, conducted on Saturday noon, the lator agreed to provide six hours power supply to the residents of Khyber.

Pakistan values its mutually beneficial ties with US: PM

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that Pakistan valued its mutually beneficial ties with the United States and was determined to further enhance its trade and investment in multi-dimensional fields of IT, agriculture and industry.

The prime minister was talking to Pakistan's Ambassador to the US Sardar Masood Khan who called on him, PM Office Press Wing said in a press release. The prime minister directed the envoy to identify further avenues of collaboration to promote Pak-US trade and investment.

He further directed Pakistan's Mission in

Washington and the authorities in Pakistan to extend full cooperation to the American investors. The prime minister underscored that the government was working on priority basis to further ease trade and investment-related rules and regulations. The ambassador briefed the prime minister about the performance of Pakistan's mission in the US.

PM to leave for Qatar today: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will participate in the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), being held in Doha, Qatar. The Conference, which starts on Sunday and will continue till Thursday next, will con-

sider steps for accelerating sustainable development in the Least Developed Countries, helping them make progress on the road to prosperity.

The Prime Minister will hold bilateral meetings and interactions with participating leaders and Heads of Delegation on the sidelines of the Conference. Pakistan has been playing a leading role at UN platforms to amplify the collective voice of the Global South to promote sustainable development worldwide. The Prime Minister's participation in the Conference will signify Pakistan's support and solidarity with the Least Developed Countries, in their quest for social progress and economic prosperity.

LHC urged to lift ban on Aurat March

LAHORE (Agencies): Expressing commitment to support gender equality in Pakistan on Saturday, recently elected female Secretary Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) Sabhat Rizvi sought Lahore High Court directives in lifting the ban on the upcoming Aurat March.

Earlier during the course of day, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Lahore, Rafia Haider refused to grant permission to organise upcoming Aurat March in the provincial capital under the security reasons, alleged public 'reservation' and fear of a clash with the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) who have 'announced a program against the Aurat March'.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) has strongly condemned the Lahore district administration's decision. Whereas Amnesty International South Asia also condemned the decision terming rejection of the permission is an "unlawful and unnecessary restriction".

The Aurat March is an annual event held in Pakistan on International Women's Day, March 8, to

raise awareness about issues affecting women and to demand gender equality, however, the Aurat March has been surrounded by controversy since its inception in 2018.

This March has been criticized by some conservative segments of society who view it as being against Pakistani culture and values. Some have also taken issue with the slogans and placards carried by the marchers, which they view as being vulgar and offensive.

The decision to ban the Aurat March in Lahore has sparked controversy and debate, with many arguing that it is an attempt to suppress women's voices and prevent them from exercising their constitutional rights. Secretary LHCBA termed the ban on a peaceful march as a violation of the Constitution saying the principal law of the country guarantees the right to freedom of expression and assembly. She emphasized the importance of protecting women's rights and creating a safe space for them to speak up about their experiences and demands.

The petitioner prayed the court to issue directives to the DC to lift the ban in the

matter till final adjudication of the petition in hand. Meanwhile, JI Amir Siraj-ul-Haq announced that his party would organize programs throughout the country on March 8. He said that the biggest event in this regard will be held in Islamabad.

ECP may issue schedule for polls next week

ISLAMABAD (INP): The ECP has started its preparations for holding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa following the SC orders.

According to media reports, the election watchdog is likely to announce schedule for Punjab and KP general elections next week. The ECP has decided not to acquire workforce from the judiciary for performing duties of District Returning Officers (DROs) and Returning Officers (ROs), they say. Moreover, the electoral watchdog would also send letters to the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finance for security and funds for the general elections in the province.

Imran wants 'NRO' to save his skin: Marriyum

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Saturday said PTI Chairman Imran Khan wanted an NRO like a concession to "save his skin in corruption cases".

"The [alleged] foreign agent and a thief who has stolen a wristwatch from Toshakhana [referring to Imran] does not want to compromise [as the PTI chief claims] but rather is seeking an NRO," the minister said in a news statement. She said that nobody would sit with Imran Khan for the talks whether he "screams, whines or bemoans".

"The PTI chief wanted to evade accountability in corruption cases of Al-Qadir Trust and others," she accused. Marriyum asked Imran Khan why he wanted to meet Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir. She further quipped that Imran was ready to compromise with those whom he accuses of ousting him from power. She further emphatically highlighted the paradox that now Imran was looking for rapprochement with those who he had slandered for imposing "imported government and the facilitating an attack on him".

Imran's every political trick fails: Asif

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Defense Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Saturday said that during the last year, all political tricks of Imran Khan have failed miserably.

Talking to Pakistan Television News, the defense minister said that Imran Khan's "Jail Bhao Tehreek" was a hollow slogan that failed shamelessly. Khawaja Asif further said that PTI chief was so scared that he gathered the workers outside the house for his protection in order to avoid being arrested.

IAEA head visits Iran for nuke talks

TEHRAN (Agencies): The head of the global nuclear watchdog is holding talks in Tehran in an effort to reach an understanding with Iran on nuclear safeguard issues that could also affect the country's 2015 nuclear deal, which collapsed in 2018.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), landed in the Iranian capital on Friday evening and met with Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The two continued their talks on Saturday and also held a joint press conference. Grossi then met with foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, before meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi "presented cooperation as a two-sided affair which can continue based on maintaining the independence of the agency and realising the rights of the Iranian people," the president's deputy for political affairs, Mohammad Jamshidi, said. Grossi is expected to hold another press conference when he returns to Vienna later on Saturday.

Governor receives ECP's letter for polls date in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Governor house has received the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will be consulted regarding the election date and whatever date is available the commission will hold elections on that date in light of the SC verdict.

Furthermore, the governor KP maintained that arrangement for elections is ECP's responsibility, and they will announce the possible date. He added that it would have sent a positive message if the president had invited me

the letter, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will be consulted regarding the election date and whatever date is available the commission will hold elections on that date in light of the SC verdict. Furthermore, the governor KP maintained that arrangement for elections is ECP's responsibility, and they will announce the possible date. He added that it would have sent a positive message if the president had invited me

for consultation on the same date for KP elections.

The ECP had written a letter to Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali, stating that he must consult with the ECP and announce a date for election in KP. Earlier, President Arif Alvi announced April 30 as the date for elections in Punjab. The announcement from President Alvi came after the ECP proposed dates for the election in the province in light of the SC verdict.

Civilians flee Ukraine's Bakhmut as battle rages for city

KYIV (Agencies): Pressure is mounting on Ukrainian troops and civilians hunkering down in Bakhmut, as Kyiv's forces try to help residents flee the beleaguered eastern city. A woman was killed and two men were badly wounded by shelling while trying to cross a makeshift bridge out of Bakhmut on Saturday, according to Ukrainian troops who were assisting them.

A Ukrainian army representative who asked not to be named for operational reasons told The Associated Press news agency that it was now too dangerous for civilians to leave the city by vehicle, and that people had to flee on foot instead. For months, Bakhmut has been

a key target of Moscow's grinding eastern offensive, with Russian troops, including large forces from the private Wagner group, inching ever closer to Kyiv's key eastern stronghold.

Journalists from the AP near Bakhmut on Saturday reported seeing a pontoon bridge set up by Ukrainian soldiers to help the city's few remaining residents reach the nearby village of Khromove. Later, they saw at least five houses on fire as a result of attacks in Khromove. Ukrainian units during the past 36 hours destroyed two key bridges just outside Bakhmut, including one linking it to the nearby town of Chasiv Yar along the last remain-

ing Ukrainian resupply route, according to UK military intelligence officials and other Western analysts.

The UK defence ministry said in the latest of its regular Twitter updates that the destruction of the bridges came as Russian fighters made further inroads into Bakhmut's northern suburbs, ratcheting up the pressure on its Ukrainian defenders. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a Washington, DC-based think tank, assessed late on Friday that Kyiv's actions may point to a looming Ukrainian pull-out from parts of the city.

It said Ukrainian troops may "conduct a limited and controlled withdrawal from particularly difficult sec-

tions of eastern Bakhmut," while seeking to inhibit Russian movement there and limit exit routes to the west. Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin said Friday his fighters had "practically encircled" Bakhmut. In the latest video, Prigozhin directly called on Zelenskyy to abandon the town.

Capturing Bakhmut would not only give Russian fighters a rare battlefield gain after months of setbacks, but it could rupture Ukraine's supply lines and allow the Kremlin's forces to press towards other Ukrainian strongholds in the eastern Donetsk region. As the fighting raged on, civilians remaining in the area

spoke about their daily struggles amid the near-constant enemy fire. Bakhmut resident Hennadiy Mazepa and his wife Natalia Ishkova both chose to remain in Bakhmut, even as fierce battles reduced much of the city to rubble. Speaking to the AP on Saturday, Ishkova said that they suffered from a lack of food and basic utilities.

"Humanitarian [aid] is given to us only once a month. There is no electricity, no water, no gas," she said. "I pray to God that all who remain here will survive." Elsewhere, Ukraine's emergency services reported that the death toll from a Russian missile attack on Thursday that hit

a five-storey apartment block in southern Ukraine has risen to 10.

The Main Directorate of Ukraine's State Emergency Service said in an online statement that rescuers had pulled three more bodies from the wreckage overnight, some 36 hours after a Russian missile tore through four floors of the building in the riverside city of Zaporizhzhia. It said that a child was among those killed, and that the rescue effort was continuing. Russian shelling on Saturday also killed two residents of front-line communities in the surrounding Zaporizhzhia region, the local military administration reported in a Telegram post.

PPP seeks applications

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan People's Party-Parliamentarians (PPP-P) has sought applications from potential candidates for the award of tickets for general elections in Punjab. PPP Central Punjab Acting Chairman Rana Farooq Saeed has sought applications from aspirants of party tickets and instructed them to submit their requests in the name of the party president along with a bank draft of Rs30,000.

SHAUKAT KHANUM FUND METER UPDATE



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March 10 sit-in will be decisive against rigging: Hafiz Naeem

KARACHI (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi Ameer Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman has said that the Pakistan People Party government in Sindh has made a new low in the country's political history by demonstrating naked

fascism and mocking the electoral process as well as mandate of Karachiites.

The JI leader expressed these views at Idara Noor-e-Haq, the JI Karachi headquarters, here on Saturday, while commenting over the corrupt prac-

tice, adopted by the returning officer and district returning officer in connection with the recounting of ballot papers in Union Council 4 of Gulshan-e-Hadeed.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that the DRO and the RO expressed more loyalty to the PPP on the cost of showing disloyalty to the state and their oath as recounting was carried out despite the fact that seals of envelopes were found broken and the ballot bags were found already torn.

In addition, he maintained, the officers failed to provide the data of remaining ballot papers. The UC won by the JI by 165 votes was presented to the PPP with a fake margin of 53 votes as only those votes were rejected which had been casted in the favor of the JI.

He said that the JI has

been issuing heads-ups to the Election Commission of Pakistan about the post-poll rigging in the name of recounting but unfortunately the commission failed to take notice of the corrupt practice.

On the occasion, he said that the JI is going to stage a decisive sit-in protest against the post-poll rigging and the ambush on the mandate of Karachiites.

JI leader Muhammad Islam also discussed the details of what happened during the so-called recounting process. He held SHO Khalid Abbasi responsible for facilitating the rigging and corrupt practice.

He demanded of the ECP to take notice of the situation and decide the matter on the basis of form 11 and 12 that provide bases for an undisputed solution for the controversy.



MUZAFFARGARH: Federal Minister PA&SS and chairperson BISP, Ms. Shazia Marri talking to the media after inauguration of Dynamic Registry at BISP Tehsil office, Khangarh.

Marri inaugurates Benazir Dynamic Registry Center

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Shazia Marri Saturday said that the government has allocated an amount of more than 78 billion for the next installment of the Benazir Kafalat program while the annual budget for the program is 252 billion rupees.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of Benazir Dynamic Registry Center under the Benazir Income Support Program in Khangarh, she informed that so far 8 lakh 72 thousand surveys have been completed in Benazir Dynamic Registry Centers.

Six Dynamic Registry Centers

have been set up in Muzaffargarh district while currently, more than 3 lakh 21 thousand families in Muzaffargarh district are being given scholarships under the Benazir Income Support Program," she stated. The political opponents criticized BISP program; however, United Nations and other reputed international organizations have appreciated it, she added.

The Federal Minister also talked to the beneficiaries who urged the minister to increase the number of counters. Upon receiving the request, she immediately directed the D.G Punjab and Zonal Director BISP to increase the number of centers for beneficiaries' relief.

Ms. Marri, later on, also attended the Workers Convention in Khangarh. While talking to media she lamented the previous government for the current economical fiasco. She said that the previous government had inked the deal with IMF therefore, the incumbent government had no other choice but to take drastic measure in order to save the country from default.

Later on, she also chaired the workers convention of Pakistan People's Party at Khangarh. She reminisced that PPP last government had provided economic assistance to thousands of families by providing income support.

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3.	Accountant PPS-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MBA/M. Com or equivalent degree in 1st Division from HEC recognized university/DAI with 06-years post-qualification experience of accounts in a University/ Government Department/ recognized autonomous/ semi-autonomous organization in pay scale 17/equivalent & above including 4-year experience in dealing with project including civil work component. 	As per Project Pay Scales of Development Projects funded from PSDP

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Essarani for security arrangements

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Provincial Minorities Affairs Minister Giyanchand Essarani has written a letter to Sindh IG Ghulam Nabi Memon for ensuring special security arrangements on eve of Holi.

The provincial minister said that the Hindu community is celebrating the festival of Holi on March 6 and 7. 'Special security arrangements should be made at the places of worship of the Hindu community across Sindh so that the Hindu community can celebrate its festival of colors with traditional enthusiasm without any fear,' he added.

Shujaat says strong system required to combat soaring inflation

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said on Saturday that there were multiple reasons of inflation including the lack of strict action against the profiteers and hoarders.

Talking to journalists, he said inflation can be controlled by taking steps such as developing strong, robust institutions that focuses on the accountability of all. Strong system would ensure the writ of state established.

PML-Q's president said authorities should be given to municipal corporations and committees along with the local administration so that the rate of market inspection improved. He added the cooperation between the market committees and local administration would reduce inflation as monitoring of markets would be improved.

Murtaza 'unhappy' over Miftah's statement

KARACHI (INP): Sindh government spokesperson Murtaza Wahab has expressed regret over the statement issued by former finance minister Miftah Ismail against the PPP-led provincial government.

In a statement, the spokesperson noted that the former finance minister claimed the Sindh government does not collect agricultural and property taxes from the citizens, expressing regret over the statement.

"It is unfortunate that a person, serving on a position of finance minister, is unaware of tax-related matters", Murtaza Wahab said.

Delegations of journalists, traders call on Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Saturday said that journalism is a sacred profession and journalists associated with this profession not only interpret public aspirations but also play their role in changing public opinion.

Pakistani journalists living abroad have a heavy responsibility to highlight the positive image of their country and nation, he said this during a meeting with a 20-member delegation of senior Pakistani journalists from the UK at Governor House Peshawar.

The delegation of British journalists who visited the Governor House under the leadership of Tahir Chaudhry and Zahid Khattak included journalists from 92 News, Urdu Times UK, Dunya News, Geo News, PTV Global, Urdu Point, Channel 44 and others.

In the meeting, there was a discussion about journalistic responsibilities abroad, fulfilling professional duties and projecting the best image of Pakistan.

Governor Haji Ghulam Ali while welcoming the press delegation on their arrival at the Governor's House said that Pakistanis belonging to all fields living abroad are our valuable assets and they are bringing glory to the country and the nation in their respective fields.

He said that Pakistani journalists working in foreign countries, including the UK, should inform the world about the positive activities of the Pakistani people and government through their pen and camera so that Pakistan can have a prestigious place in the world.

Apart from this, a 10-member delegation headed by President of Khanewal Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Tayyab Sajid, also met Governor Haji Ghulam Ali at the Governor's House and discussed the country's economic situation and commercial activities.

Senior Vice President Sakhi Muhammad along with Sahibzada Ali Sher, Syed Jamshed Ahmed, Waheedullah, Mian Mohammad Gul, Shafaqat Mehmood, Mohammad Asif were included in the delegation, while former president Sarhad Chamber of Commerce Haji Mohammad Afzal was also present on the occasion.

In the meeting with the delegation, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said that the country's economy is supported by the business community, the government is trying hard to provide all facilities to the business community throughout the country despite the current economic crisis, because it is a fact that economic stability is possible only with the development of industries.



PESHAWAR: KP Caretaker Minister for Excise and Narcotics Contral Haji Manzoor Afridi inspecting working of Excise Squad at Peshawar Motorway.

Chinese peanuts to be a solution to high oil prices

PESHAWAR (INP): Chinese peanuts to be a solution to high oil prices in Pakistan, says a report published by China Economic Net (CEN) on Saturday.

"Look! Our seeds are rich in nutrient elements," Dr Babar Ijaz, person in charge of overseas projects, Shandong Rainbow Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd, showed a plump peanut seed to the reporter during an interview with CEN.

Lately, Rainbow's high-oleic-acid peanut cultivation base project was formally included in the framework of China-Pakistan agricultural cooperation by the Ministry of Agriculture of China.

"As you can see, our seed registration in Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) has started. A total of five high-oleic peanut varieties for oil extraction, Runhua series have been trial-planted in Pakistan, expected to achieve fruitful results.

Next, our aim is to increase the area gradually to 1,500 hectares in coming years," Fan Changcheng, Deputy General Manager of Rainbow, noted bluntly.

"My country has a long tradition of peanut planting. Peanut like a warm environment with sufficient sunlight, with loose and breathable sandy loam as the most suitable soil condition.

Potohar region, Punjab is the best area for peanut production here," Babar Ijaz added, "Peanut seeds contain 40-50 percent oil, and high oleic peanut oil is rich in unsaturated fatty acids, which is not only more storable, but also lowers blood lipids.

During our trial, we always focused on how the local environment can act on the quality of seeds on the whole. The varieties we selected have the highest oleic acid content, up to 75-80 percent, which means very high nutritional value."

"Self-sufficient in peanut production means that we can reduce our import bill of edible oil," said Muhammad Jahanzaib, scientific officer of the Oil Seed Research Program in NARC, Pakistan.

Statistics from United States Department of Agriculture showed that Pakistan's peanut planting area in 2022/23 is about 150,000 hectares, with a total output of 140,000 metric tons, and an average yield of about 0.93 metric tons per hectare.

According to Babar Ijaz, such a relative lower yield needs a lot of room to be improved, "especially we need to produce more edible oil and get rid of the situation that edible oil is highly dependent on imports. If our project area can be gradually expanded, it can even improve the peanut farming ecosystem in Pakistan as a whole."

In January, Rainbow and Beli Technologies, a well-known Pakistani agricultural enterprise, signed a large-scale planting MoU. First lot of peanut seeds with independent intellectual property rights has been exported to Pakistan. Overall, the seed germination rate of Rainbow's peanuts is over 98 percent.

As for future, Fan mentioned two major obstacles that affect the peanut industry in Pakistan: insufficient planting area and low yield. After gradually increasing yield, subsequent by-product processing also has a good prospect.

We are working with the Chinese Government to establish the "China-Pakistan oilseed crops lab" focusing on the quality testing of peanut oil, and will also assist in the formulation of unified standards for the peanut oil in Pakistan. In addition to edible oil, other food processing is under consideration.

Except the improvement of local edible oil structure, at the same time gradually upgrade entire peanut industry, which is a win-win situation for us and Pakistan enterprises."



PESHAWAR: A view of garbage cover Walibad canal needs attention of concern authorities.



PESHAWAR: Delegation of Pakistani journalists living abroad meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali.

KP to use AI for highways monitoring

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Communications and Works (C&W) along with Pakhtunkhwa Highways Authority (PKHA) to Artificial Intelligence (AI) for monitoring of roads, on Saturday.

In this regard C&W and PKHA arranged workshop for technical staff of both departments to train them on launching of new technologies.

Chief Engineer Zulfiqar Ali, Muhammad Ibrahim and Associate CEO Engineer Jawad Diyar Khan distributed certificates and shields among participants.

Chief Engineer South Muhammad Arif and Chief Engineer Mega Projects Qudrat Ullah along with Engineer Shakir Habib, Ijaz Ahmed Khan, Zulfiqar and Engineer Shahzad Afzal Khan were also present during the workshops.

The participants stressed that using of artificial Intelligence will be helpful for both financial and human resources.

Fahad: 64 shopkeepers arrested for profiteering

PESHAWAR (APP): District administration Peshawar during crackdown against profiteers has arrested 64 shopkeepers in Hayatabad on Monday.

On directives of the Deputy Commissioner (DC), Shah Fahad, the officers of district administration carried out raids in different markets of phase-I, phase II, phase III and phase IV and arrested 64 shopkeepers for profiteering, lack of official price-list, selling under-weight roti and unhygienic conditions.

The arrested shopkeepers included fruit and vegetable vendors, bakers (nanbais), butchers, milkmen, grocers and others.

Deputy Commissioner Peshawar has directed the officers of district administration for consecutive surprise visits to bazaars across the district to take stern action against profiteers.

Assistant Commissioner visits Rescue Station

PESHAWAR (APP): Assistant Commissioner Laachi, Khola Tariq Saturday visited Rescue 1122 Station Laachi and acquired a briefing about operational matters of the station.

According to the Rescue 1122 Spokesman, Assistant Commissioner was briefed about available fire extinguishing equipment, ambulances and fire fighting vehicles.

Assistant Commissioner Laachi, Khola Tariq was informed that all the necessary equipment and vehicles are available in the station to cope with any emergency.

Speaking on the occasion, Assistant Commissioner Laachi, Khola Tariq appreciated the professionalism of rescue 1122 staff and assured cooperation and assistance to them.

Assistant Commissioner Laachi, Khola Tariq said that the issues of Shakar Darra staff rescue have been resolved and they would be provided potable water next week.

Wildlife Day observed in province

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife Department on Saturday organized various events to mark International Wildlife Day in different districts of the province. The theme of Wildlife Day was 'Partnership for Wildlife Conservation.' The events besides the general public were attended by teachers, students and faculty members of schools, colleges and universities.

DFO Wildlife Extension organized a ceremony for school students at Govt Shaheed Hasnain High School where the DFO Wildlife briefed students about the importance of biodiversity and said how children could play a role in the preservation of wild flora and fauna.

DFO Swat Wildlife Division Fayaz Ali Khan also addressed students in connection with Wildlife Day and highlighted the positive impacts of animals and forest species on human lives. He said that the protection of these species could help address several problems and create job opportunities for local communities.

In Dikhan, the ceremony was held at St Helen's

Allied Health Sciences Programs: KMU conducts centralized test for admissions

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar conducted special centralized tests here on Saturday for admissions in various BS programs.

A total of 796 candidates participated in the said test. The result of the test will be declared within 48 hours which can be seen on the official website of KMU (<http://cat.kmu.edu.pk>).

The test was conducted in KMU main Campus Peshawar in which 796 students participated. It is essential to keep in mind that for admission to all allied health sciences programs affiliated to KMU, it is mandatory for every student to appear in KMU-CAT, without which no institute is allowed to take admission in any discipline.

Meanwhile, KMU vice-chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq has said that the purpose of conducting this test was to save the future of those students aspiring for admission in allied health sciences programs who, for whatever reason were not able to participate in the previous tests of KMU and now they were facing difficulties in admissions to KMU-affiliated institutes.

He said that private institutes of allied health sciences affiliated to KMU are our main stakeholders, so protecting their interests and solving their problems is our top priority.

He said that the decision to hold the recent special KMU-CAT was taken on the request of the private sector, which would give them an opportunity to fill their vacant seats.

The vice-chancellor said that the peaceful and transparent conduct of the test is a testament to the hard work and professionalism of the entire staff of KMU.

He said that various fields of allied health sciences are of fundamental importance in the health system that is the reason KMU is taking all possible steps to improve the quality of these disciplines.



PESHAWAR: PTI's local leader with party workers after release from jail. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

Administration seals offices of illegal housing society

PESHAWAR (APP): District administration Mardan sealed illegal housing society and urged the people to avoid doing business with illegal housing societies.

On the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mardan, the Additional Assistant Commissioner ((AC) Headquarters, Mardan Junaid Khalid along with Town Municipal Officer (TMO) Mardan, Naveed Khan and other officials visited various housing societies and sealed Al-Jannat Homes Housing Society for noting meeting legal requirements.

The district administration has also removed banners of the society to prevent fraud with the people.

The action has been taken on complaints that most housing societies are illegally operating across the district, which have neighbor obtained formal approval from the concerned department nor have been issued any no objection certificate (NoC).

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mardan has directed the continuation of operation against illegal housing societies and has also informed the people against business with such schemes.

BRT XER-15 buses to take stop at Saddar Bazaar Station

PESHAWAR (APP): The super express route (XER-15) buses of Zu Peshawar will take stop at Saddar Bazaar Station from Monday (March 6, 2023), said a spokesperson of the TransPeshawar Operator of the service Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Peshawar on Saturday. She said that besides taking a stop at Saddar Bazaar Station, the operation time period of the route has also been increased while keeping in view the number of buses and demand of the commuters, the time space between the buses has also been decreased from 10 minutes to 6 minutes.

First bus of the service on the route will leave Chamkani station at 7:30 A.M and the last one at 6:30 P.M. The route comprises Chamkani, Sardar Ghari and Mall of Hayatabad stations. The inclusion of Saddar Bazaar station in the route would help reduce the crowds of the commuters of Express Route 1. The buses of the route stop at Platform No.2 of Chamkani station and at Platform No.1 of all remaining stations. "The decision has been taken with the purpose of providing best transportation facilities to commuters," concluded the spokesperson.

Food authority discards 200ltr adulterated milk, 800 kg bran spice

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority on Saturday discarded about 200 liters of adulterated and substandard milk.

The Authority team took 30 samples of milk from the vehicles supplying milk to the city at the Motorway Toll Plaza and checked on the spot. Food Safety Team also imposed heavy fines on the owners.

Similarly, during another operation, the food safety team raided the Mirch Mandi and recovered 800 kg of bran and 50 kg of non-food grade color from the spice unit, after which the spice unit was sealed.

Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority Shahrukh Ali Khan gave a stern warning to the businessmen related to food items and asked them to follow public rules as selling of substandard edible items is forbidden in Islam.

KP's Special Assistant refuses to get salary, benefits

PESHAWAR (APP): Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pir Haroon Shah has decided that he would be continuing his duties without any salary or benefits.

In a statement, he said that he joined the provincial cabinet in the spirit of public service and, given the current economic crisis, he did not want to burden the government treasury by taking any salary or benefits. Instead, he plans to focus all his attention on serving the people of the province.

This selfless act of Pir Haroon Shah is being lauded as an exemplary display of public service and dedication towards the betterment of society.

Excise officials foils attempts of smuggling

PESHAWAR (APP): The Excise Officials foiled an attempt of smuggling drugs and recovered 18 kg hashish with two alleged drugs smugglers arrested who were carrying the drugs in a motor vehicle on Mardan road on Saturday.

The operation was carried out in Peshawar on a tip-off, a spokesman of the Excise Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa told media men. He said during the search, 18 kg of hashish was recovered from the motor vehicle.

Two suspects were arrested on the spot, a case was registered at Excise Police Station, Mardan region. He said further investigation is ongoing.



In brief

Admn seals offices of illegal housing society F.P. Report

MARDAN: District administration Mardan sealed illegal housing society and urged the people to avoid doing business with illegal housing societies. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mardan, the Additional Assistant Commissioner ((AC) Headquarters, Mardan Junaid Khalid along with Town Municipal Officer (TMO) Mardan, Naveed Khan and other officials visited various housing societies and sealed Al-Jannat Homes Housing Society for noting meeting legal requirements. The district administration has also removed banners of the society to prevent fraud with the people. The action has been taken on complaints that most housing societies are illegally operating across the district, which have neighbor obtained formal approval from the concerned department nor have been issued any no objection certificate (MoC). Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mardan has directed the continuation of operation against illegal housing societies and has also informed the people against business with such schemes.

Spring tree plantation opened

NAUSHEHROFEROE (INP): Deputy Commissioner Shahzaib Shahik here on Saturday inaugurated the spring tree plantation campaign by planting a sapling in Government Madrasah High school. Divisional forest officer Gul Hassan, District education officer, Head Master Muhammad Ramzan, officers, teachers and students were present on the occasion. The Deputy Commissioner said that around 50,000 saplings would be planted in all government offices, Schools, colleges, roads and canal banks of all talukas of the district during the plantation campaign. DC also appealed to citizens to plant more saplings so that people could be protected from the impacts of climate change. Other guests also planted saplings on the occasion.

Son kills father

BAHAWALNAGAR (PPI): In Bahawalnagar, son has killed his father for not paying pension money in the Basti Abdul Rehman near Chak Nadir Shah on Saturday. Bahawalnagar police has said that the accused Sagar killed his father Jahangir with an axe on the head and fled from the spot after the incident. On the other hand, the body of the deceased was shifted to the District Hospital for postmortem.

Cops suspended

HYDERABAD (INP): Hyderabad Range Police, taking strict action against police officials allegedly involved in looting people on Super Highway, suspended mobile incharge ASI and driver on Saturday. The action was taken after a video went viral on social media wherein police officials are seen looting citizens on Karachi's Super Highway. The action has been taken against police personnel seen in the video. The suspended cops have been ordered to report to the Police Lines. However, the SHO Nooriabad has been issued show-cause notice only. The action was taken on hiding the police mobile number plate and resorting to snap checking by police. The inquiry into the matter has been entrusted to DSP Jamshoro.

Police to implement zero tolerance policy against drug barons

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Bannu district police officer Ziauddin Ahmed has said that the police will implement zero tolerance policy against drug barons so as to save youths from the menace and eliminate it completely.

During a visit to the press club in Bannu city on Saturday, he asked the drug peddlers to stop selling narcotics and become useful citizens or leave the area. He said that narcotics eradication teams had been constituted to fight the menace of drug use effectively. The press club president Muhammad Alam Khan, general secretary Umar Diaz Khan and other members were also present.

Zia stressed the need for launching integrated efforts to tighten noose around the elements involved in nar-

cotics selling. "The coordinated efforts on part of all stakeholders will enable the police to wipe out the menace from the district completely", he maintained. He said promoting good and destroying evil is the prime duty of police and that all available resources will be utilized to provide protection of life and property to citizens.

He asked the journalists to bridge the gap between the general public and police and join hands to make the district crime-free. He made clear that the elements involved in display of weapons and aerial firing would be dealt sternly. The district police chief said that police would also launch actions against land grabbers, gamblers and anti-state elements. He called upon the media personnel to motivate people on extending full coopera-

tion toward police so as to make actions against criminals' gangs result oriented.

In Lakki Marwat, a party of Shaheed Asmatullah Khan Khan Khattak police station arrested two drug barons and seized 2500 gram hashish and 1000 gram ice drug from them. The arrested suspects identified as Asif Salim and Ulfat Khan were shifted to the police station where separate cases were registered against them. Also on Saturday, the Lakki Marwat and Ghaznikhel police stations got new station house officers. District police officer Muhammad Ashfaq Khan issued transfer/posting orders of the subordinate police officials. Sub inspectors Rahat Shah and Abdul Hakim waiting for posting in the police lines have been made SHO's of Lakki Marwat and Ghaznikhel police stations respectively.

Caretaker KP minister visit Buner

F.P. Report

BUNER: The care taker minister Mohammad Ali Shah Bacha was visited Buner district where in he inspected flour mills and held meeting with department heads at DC office in Daggar and directed to make sure provision of quality flour with normal prices at village council level daily to meet public demand.

The minister was also held meeting with PML-N leaders in Daggar and asked them to properly monitor distribution of flour in the villages councils so as to make a difference as compared previous government. The minister also visited nazaar Swari Bazaar and inspected under construction road and

directed the PKHA to make sure spalt so as to address public and business community worries.

The minister attended lunch was hosted in his honour by PML Nawaz KP vice president Haji Sadiqullah in Pacha Kalay Pir Baba. The minister addressed gathering at the residence of Haji Sadiqullah and shared all about his visits and actions for the betterment of public. The minister shared it was his first priority to ensure provision of quality flour with normal price and make sure its availability at villages council level.

The minister was vocal to respond being caretaker his prime responsibility is to discourage loot and plundering national treasury and as the country especially

the KP was facing acute financial crisis at the hands of out going government. The minister was vocal to promise public interest programmes incase the treasury afford it.

Prior to that the host Haji Sadiqullah welcomed all of guests with chief guest and thanked for honour and asked leaguers and other parties leaders to express their viable suggestions before the minister in larger public interest. On the occasion Mian Syed Laiq, Mian Noor, Mohammad Hanif, Jahabar Khan, Ibrar Khan, Mutabar Khan pointed out various issues including core issue of flour crisis its quality and unjust distribution and demanded action to satisfy the worried people of this backward district.



MINGORA: Regional Police Officer Malakand Mehmood Satti offering dua at Yadgare Shuhada.

Three dacoits killed during 'encounter'

KAMOKE (INP): Three dacoits wanted by police were killed by firing of their own colleagues during an alleged encounter in Nowshera Virkan area of Kamoke in Gujranawala Division on Saturday.

The law enforcers of Police Station Saddar Kamoke had set up a picket at Harpoki Canal, when they stopped seven to eight people. The accused started firing at the police party. The police personnel lay on the ground and saved their lives. They returned fire only a few times just in self-defence. The accused

were successful in escaping from the scene amid intense firing.

As the firing stopped, the police party, during their search, found three dead bodies of the alleged dacoits. They were killed by the alleged firing of their fellow robbers. The dead were identified as Zeeshan alias Shani, Amer and Sajid. All the three accused were got freed by their fellow dacoits from Police Station Ladhewala Warraich after an exchange of fire.

The accused have criminal record. They were

wanted by police for being involved in many cases of dacoities, house robberies and raping women during dacoities. The accused in past few days had rapped many women during dacoities in the limits of Police Station Tatley Aali.

The police teams were formed under the supervision of SP Saddar Rizwan Tariq to arrest the accused. The CPO said that elements involved in crimes would be dealt with iron hands and the citizens will be provided calm and peaceful environment.

Training session held

F.P. Report

BARA: A day long training and awareness session aimed to impart knowledge pertaining rescuing procedures to the students was held here in Hira public school, Speen Qabr, subdivision Bara district Khyber last day. The awareness activity was organized by the district Rescue 1122 and was attended by a large number of learners and their teachers.

Under the head of training wing incharge Dr



Wakeel Shah, fruitful sessions were delivered on first aid, rescuing methods in fire eruption and various emergencies. The participants were also taught how to deal with natural disasters and practical training

was given to them.

District emergency officer Syed Shoaib Mansoor and emergency officer Baryal Mukhtyar who supervised the training gathering said that besides facilitating people in emergencies, the Rescue 1122 also freely trained different sections of the society of the tactics to deal with untoward incidents. Students and Teachers thanked Rescue 1122 for arranging useful training in which they learnt a lot regarding the rescue process.



KHAR: Caretaker KP Minister for C&W Muhammad Ali Shah talking to officials during his visit to Pusht Hospital in Bajaur.

DPO visits city, reviews security

F.P. Report

KOHAT: District Police Officer (DPO) Kohat, Shehzada Umar Abbas here Saturday paid a surprise visit to the main markets of the city and listened to problems and issues of people.

He met with representatives of trade organizations and inquired about their concerns. He also reviewed security of sensitive locations in main market and directed police officials to remain vigilant and be prepared to avoid to any untoward incident. He also directed strict monitoring of movement on egress and ingress points of the city and urged people to cooperate police force to further improve security of the city.

Assistant Commissioner visits Rescue Station Laachi: Assistant Commissioner Laachi, Khola Tariq Saturday visited Rescue 1122 Station Laachi and acquired briefing about operational matters of the station.

According to Rescue 1122 Spokesman, Assistant Commissioner was briefed about available fire extinguishing equipments, ambulances and fire fighting vehicles. She was informed that all the necessary equipment and vehicles are available in the station to cope with any emergency.

Speaking on the occasion, Khola Tariq appreciated the professionalism of rescue 1122 staff and assured cooperation and assistance to them. She said that issues of Shakar Darra staff rescue have been resolved and they would be provided potable water in next week.

Industrialists meet DIG

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: A delegation of officials and members of Hattar Industrial Estate Haripur met with DIG Hazara. Hazara Police will provide all possible life and financial security to all industrialists and businessmen of Hattar Industrial Estate. The industrialists should provide the complete details of the domestic and foreign workers working under their supervision to the police.

The delegation of Hattar Industrial Estate Haripur under the leadership of Chairman Malik Ashiq Awan and Chief Patron Qadir Mehmood met with DIG Hazara Tahir Ayub Khan, they discussed security and other important issues. Chairman Malik Ashiq Awan and Qadir Mehmood Congratulated IG Hazara on his appointment in Hazara. DIG Hazara Tahir Ayub Khan while talking to the delegation said that Hazara Police will provide all possible life and financial security to all industrialists and businessmen of Hattar Industrial Estate.

If industries are set up by investing in the same way, more employment opportunities will be provided to the people, which will also reduce the crime rate in the society. Excellent relations have been established between Hattar Industrial Estate Haripur and Police and in the future they will be further strengthened so that the problems faced by both are resolved through mutual consultation.

KFW delegation viists PCSP projects

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A senior delegation of the KfW Development Bank led by Marlene Schild, Portfolio Manager KfW and Imran Khan, Senior Governance Specialist, visited the implementation areas of Pakistan Community Support Project (PCSP) in Nowshera today. The purpose of the visit was to gather feedback from the local community and review the progress of the community-led development work facilitated by the PCSP. The PCSP and World Bank task teams facilitated the visit.

While interacting with the communities, Marlene Schild, who is in-charge of the KfW portfolio in Pakistan, appreciated the inclusive and participatory role of the communities to ensure that they benefit from the development opportunities being offered by the PCSP. The PCSP is one of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) projects in Pakistan, which also comprises Germany as a key funding partner.

The delegation visited different community-led project sites in Nowshera, including a 2,103 feet farm to market road in Turkaman village which is being com-



pleted at a cost of PKR 8.3 million to benefit more than 400 households in the village. The community members shared that the road has resolved their long-standing mobility issues including easier access to transportation, education, health, and other basic services.

The KfW delegation also went to Sheikhan village in Nowshera to visit a solar-powered irrigation tube well which has been completed at a cost of PKR 7.4 million. The community informed that the tube well has been irrigating 15 acres of land, which has spurred the agricultural productivity as the crop production was dependent on rainfall pre-

viously. The water supply and irrigation channel have now enabled the local farmers to grow wheat, maize, sugarcane, and cash crops.

The delegation concluded with a visit of Jalozi Mahal where the community has successfully completed a street pavement including the drainage facility. The 1 kilometer stretch of streets has been completed across the stretched-out village at a cost of PKR 8.9 million, which has made commute easier and swifter for its large population. The proper drainage facility is also ensuring disposal of wastewater from houses and stagnation issues have also been resolved.

Teachers urged to focus on producing good citizens



F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa director elementary and secondary education department Dr Hafiz Muhammad Ibrahim has said that the state-run schools in the province have been provided with adequate furniture with a cost of Rs 3 billion while the furniture-deficient schools will also be provided with it once the government released rest of the Rs 3 billion. He was addressing a school function at Talash during his visit to the district wherein he was warmly welcomed by students and teachers.

The additional deputy commissioner Abdul Wali Khan, district education officer Swat Muhammad Riaz, district education officer Chitral Miftahudin and other education officers from Lower Dir were also in attendance. The function was also addressed by prominent educationist Muhammad Rahim Haqqani, Tumergara tehsil chairman Mufti Irfanudin Din, ADC Abdul Wali Khan and others also addressed the function.

Hafiz Ibrahim said the overall education index in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had increased by 3 per cent dur-

ing the last two years. Appreciating the performance of teachers and schools' heads in Lower Dir, the director said that the district was third after Mansehra and Mardan regarding the students' enrollment. He said the process of education started in Dir in 1970 but despite that bitter fact the Derojani were now leading in many sectors. He said the provincial director general health Dr Shaukat Ali, provincial director general tourism Bakhtiar Khan and director elementary and secondary education department all belonged to Lower Dir that showed the district had great potential for progress and development.

Hafiz Ibrahim said the province had limited resources yet it was spending a huge amount on education enhancement. He said the ratio and standard of education in the newly merged districts was not satisfactory before the merger but now the government had focused on it and he hoped the standard would be upgraded soon. About the teachers he said that a teacher never tired or retired but he lived in the hearts of students forever in case he devotedly performed

his duties. He said that producing good citizens for a state was the utmost responsibility of teachers so they should mainly focus on character building of the coming generation. He said the nation needed a good doctor, good engineer, lawyer, teachers, scientist, administrators and a good human. About his services as a provincial director he presented himself for accountability and said that if anyone could directly contact him and he would resolve his/her grievances. The director was presented with gifts by schools' heads and teachers of the district on the occasion as he was due to retire from services on superannuation on March, 14.

Inflation protested: The Tehreek Labaik Pakistan Adenzai chapter staged a protest rally outside the Chakdara press club against the current inflation and devaluation of Pakistani currency. The TLP workers led by its nominated candidate for bye-election in NA 6 Maulana Taif Khan chanted slogans against the government for its failure to control price hike in the country.



UN chief slams rich countries' treatment of poor states

UNITED NATIONS (AFP): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday slammed the world's rich countries and energy giants for throttling poor nations with "predatory" interest rates and crippling fuel prices.

Speaking in the Qatari capital, Doha, Guterres told leaders of more than 40 of the most deprived states that wealthy nations should provide \$500 billion a year to help others "trapped in vicious cycles" that block efforts to boost economies and vital services. The summit of Least Developed Countries (LDC) is normally held every 10 years but has twice been delayed since 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Afghanistan and Myanmar, two of the poorest countries, are not present at the Doha meeting of 46 LDC states because their governments are not recognised by UN members. No leader from any of the world's major economies attended. At a leaders' summit ahead of the start of the general LDC conference on Sunday, Guterres hit out straight away at the way poor nations are treated by the more powerful.

"Economic development is challenging when countries are starved for resources, drowning in debt, and still struggling with the historic injustice of an unequal COVID-19 response," he said. The LDCs have complained that they did not get a fair share of the Covid vaccines that went mainly to Europe and North America.

"Combating climate catastrophe that you did nothing to cause is challenging when the cost of capital is sky-high" and the financial help received "is a drop in the bucket", said Guterres. "Fossil fuel giants are raking in huge profits, while millions in your countries cannot put food on the table."

Guterres said the poorest nations were being left behind in the "digital revolution" and the Ukraine war had fuelled their food and fuel prices. "Our global financial

system was designed by wealthy countries, largely to their benefit," he said. "Deprived of liquidity, many of you are locked out of capital markets by predatory interest rates," the UN leader said. A host of presidents and ministers hit out at financing conditions for LDCs, whose debt has more than quadrupled in a decade to an estimated \$50 billion in 2021.

East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta called interest rates "rapacious" and "insensitive", Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera, the summit chairman, highlighted "broken promises" and said aid was not "an act of charity" but a "moral responsibility". Wealthy nations had failed to keep a promise to give 0.15-0.20 percent of their Gross National Income to LDCs, the UN chief said.

With poorer states trapped in a "perfect storm for perpetuating poverty and injustice", Guterres said LDCs required a "minimum" \$500 billion a year to overcome their problems, build up job creating industries and repay debts. He added that the United Nations would also "keep pushing" richer countries to hand over hundreds of billions of dollars promised separately to help poorer states battle climate change.

Under proposals a so-called Doha Programme of Action, a food stockholding system, will be set up to help countries facing hunger crises through drought and high prices. It also calls for new efforts to help LDCs attract foreign funding and lower interest rates to ease the impact of their debts. Bhutan will this year become one of seven countries -- along with Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands to "graduate" out of LDC status by 2026. But they will gradually lose trade and aid privileges. Guterres said they risk becoming "victims of the cruellest sleight-of-hand trick -- support systems vanishing before their eyes" and would need help after they move up the wealth scale.

Hungary delays vote on Sweden, Finland joining NATO

BUDAPEST (AP): Hungary has further delayed a vote on ratifying Sweden and Finland's NATO accession bids, according to an updated schedule published on the National Assembly's website, the latest in a series of postponements that have frustrated Western allies. The delay, which pushes the vote back by two weeks to the parliamentary session beginning March 20, comes as Hungary remains the only NATO member country besides Turkey that has not yet approved the two Nordic countries' bids to join the Western military alliance.

Hungary's populist prime minister, Viktor Orban, has said that he is personally in favor of the two countries joining NATO, but alleges that the governments in Stockholm and Helsinki have "spread blatant lies" about Hungary which have raised questions among lawmakers in his party on whether to approve the bids. In a radio interview on Feb. 24, Orban confirmed that Hungary would send a parliamentary delegation to Sweden and Finland to seek "clarification" on such issues before the ratification could come to a vote in parliament.

"It's not right for them to ask us to take them on board while they're spreading blatant lies about Hungary, about the rule of law in Hungary, about our democracy and about life here," Orban said. "(How) can anyone want to be our ally in a military system while they're shamelessly spreading lies about Hungary? So let's stop for a friendly word and ask them how this can be." The delays, which have come in succession since July 2022, have frustrated some in the European Union as well as members of Hungary's opposition parties.

In comments in Hungary's parliament, Agnes Vadai, a liberal lawmaker and a former secretary of state in Hungary's ministry of defense, criticized the governing Fidesz party for the numerous delays, and accused them of deliberately dragging their feet on the vote. "This could have been a quick and simple issue in Hungary's parliament, but it wasn't. It wasn't because there was always some excuse or stalling tactic from the governing party," Vadai said, adding that dispatching a parliamentary delegation to Sweden and Finland was "the newest trick to postpone."

The Hungarian delegation is expected to meet with Swedish assembly Speaker Andreas Norlén and other lawmakers in Sweden's parliament, the Riksdag, next Tuesday, according to a Riksdag statement sent to The Associated Press. That meeting will focus on "the ongoing ratification process of Sweden's NATO application, which is ongoing in the Hungarian parliament," the Riksdag wrote in the statement. A unanimous vote of all 30 NATO members is needed to admit new countries. With the exception of Hungary and Turkey, all other 28 members had approved membership for the Nordic countries by the end of September.

Modern weapons being smuggled to Haiti from US: UN report

UNITED NATIONS (AP): Increasingly sophisticated weapons are being trafficked into Haiti mainly from the United States and especially from Florida amid worsening lawlessness in the impoverished Caribbean nation, according to a UN report released. The report by the Vienna-based Office on Drugs and Crime said a network of criminal actors including members of the Haitian diaspora "often source firearms from across the US" and smuggle them into Haiti illegally by land from the neighboring Dominican Republic, by air including to clandestine airstrips, but most frequently by sea.

"Popular handguns selling for \$400-\$500 at federally licensed firearms outlets or private gun shows in the US can be resold for as much as \$10,000 in Haiti," the report said. "Higher-powered rifles such as AK47s, AR15s and Galils are typically in higher demand from gangs, commanding correspondingly higher prices." The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's investigations unit reported "a surge in firearms trafficking from Florida to Haiti between 2021 and 2022" and a spokesman described the recovery of increasingly sophisticated weapons destined for Haitian ports "including .50 caliber sniper rifles, .308 rifles, and even belt-fed machine guns," according to the report.

"Weapons are frequently procured through straw man purchases in US states with looser gun laws and fewer purchasing restrictions" and then transported to Florida where they are concealed inside consumer products, electronic equipment, garment linings, frozen food items and even the hull of freighters, it said. "On arrival in Haiti, including major hubs such as Port-de-Paix and Port-au-Prince, cargo is offloaded and passed on to end-users via a host of intermediaries." The 47-page report, entitled "Haiti's Criminal Markets: Mapping Trends in Firearms and Drug Trafficking," cites the challenges of patrolling 1,771 kilometers (1,100 miles) of Haiti's coastline and a 392-kilometer (243-mile) border with the Dominican Republic with national



police, border and coast guard operations that are severely under-staffed, under-resourced and "increasingly targeted by gangs."

The heavily-armed gangs are also targeting ports, highways, critical infrastructure, customs offices, police stations, court houses, prisons, businesses and neighborhoods, the report said. And throughout 2022 and early 2023 they have expanded their control over key access points to cities including the capital Port-au-Prince. "Many are also engaged in predatory behavior in communities under their control contributing to rising levels of extortion, sexual violence, kidnapping and fatal violence," it said, citing an increase in homicides from 1,615 in 2021 to 2,183 in 2022, and a doubling of kidnappings from 664 to 1,359 during the same period.

The UN report said private security companies in Haiti are permitted to buy and keep arms, and while independent verification isn't possible "specialists speculate that there could be 75,000 to 90,000 individuals working with roughly 100 private security companies across the country, at least five times the number of registered police officers." According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Haiti has long been a transshipment hub to move cocaine, cannabis and to a lesser extent heroin and amphetamines to the United States and the Dominican Republic.

The drugs mostly enter the country via boat or plane, arriving through public, private and informal ports as well as clandestine runways.

During the 2000s, the report said, drug traffickers moved illegal airstrips from the outskirts of Port-au-Prince northward to more isolated areas including Savane Diane, roughly 50 miles north of the capital. When then-President Jovenel Moïse ordered the destruction of suspected clandestine airstrips in June 2021, UNODC said "local authorities refused." A week later, he was assassinated.

Since the assassination, UN officials said gangs have grown more powerful, and gang violence has reached a level not seen in decades. In December, the UN estimated that gangs controlled 60% of Haiti's capital, but most people on the streets in Port-au-Prince say that number is closer to 100%. In late February, the UN condemned a new surge of gang violence in central Haiti.

Haiti was stripped of all democratically elected institutions when the terms of the remaining 10 senators expired in early January. No elections are on the horizon and Prime Minister Ariel Henry continues to plead for the deployment of foreign troops, a request first made in October. The international community has instead opted to impose sanctions and send military equipment and other resources.

'Surgical' shark-killing orcas fascinate off S Africa

CAPE TOWN (AFP): Scores of disembowelled sharks have washed up on a South African beach putting the spotlight on a pair of shark-hunting killer whales whose behaviour has fascinated scientists and wildlife enthusiasts. Marine biologists were alerted to the find by beach walkers who stumbled upon the grim sight last week in Gansbaai, a small fishing port 150 kilometres (93 miles) south east of Cape Town.

"The dead sharks are torn open at the pelvic girdle, they have Orca teeth marks known as rake marks on their pectoral fins and their liver is missing," said Alison Towner, 37, a shark scientist with the Dyer Island Conservation Trust. All evidence points to "Port" and "Starboard", an infamous pair of killer whales spotted off Gansbaai only three days earlier.

Recognisable by their twisted dorsal fins, the animals are well known to locals, who have developed a penchant for sharks. "We found in total 20 sharks," said Ralph Watson, 33, a marine biologist with local conservation and diving group Marine Dynamics. Victims included 19 broad nosed seven-gill and one spotted gully sharks, he added.

Towner said the slaughter was noticeable as it was the first time that Port and Starboard had hunted those species in the area and "so many of them washed out after one visit." Yet, it wasn't the

orcas' most daring hunt. Experts credited the duo with having caused white sharks, one of the world's largest sea predators, to disappear from some of the waters near Cape Town.

Last year, Starboard and another four orcas were captured on camera chasing and killing a great white off Mossel Bay, a southern port town. The unusual behaviour had never been witnessed in detail before. Orcas, the ocean's apex predator, usually hunt dolphins in these parts and have been known to prey on smaller shark species. But evidence of attacks on great whites was previously limited.

Port and Starboard were first spotted near Cape Town in 2015. "They probably came from somewhere else. West Africa, east Africa, the Southern Ocean, we don't know," said 45-year-old Simon Elwen, who heads Sea Search, a scientific collective. Unlike other killer whales, the pair likes to hunt near the coast -- something that has made their peculiar fins a common sight in the region.

"Within southern Africa, Port and Starboard have been seen from as far west as Namibia to as far east as Port Elizabeth," said Elwen. The marine mammals' killing technique is "surgical", added Watson, explaining the pair targets sharks' liver, "a very nutritious organ, full of oils." "They tear

open the pectoral girdle chest area... then the liver flops out," said Watson.

The 2022 video showing Starboard in action has worried biologists, for it suggested the practice was spreading with studies having established that the black and white animals have the capacity to teach hunting techniques. Some Antarctic orcas use the cunning tactic of hunting in packs and making waves to wash seals off floating ice, according to researchers. In the Antarctic two orca populations -- not subspecies, but different groups that overlap at the margins -- used very different hunting techniques, taught across generations.

Such behaviour is not hard-wired, but learned -- one of the arguments for suggesting that whales have 'culture'. In the clip, the other four orcas shown were not known to have attacked white sharks before. "This is now an additional threat to shark populations on coastal South Africa," said Towner.

Elwen said it was "fascinating, and frustrating" to see "a rare, endangered animal killing another endangered species". Still, the overall danger Port and Starboard posed to South Africa's shark population remained very limited. Hundreds of thousands of sharks are fished out of the sea every year, said Watson. "Two killer whales are not going to wipe out a species," Elwen said.

Biden assembles team of allies to boost re-polls drive

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US President Joe Biden's team is moving to tap top Democratic allies and even some people once seen as possible rivals as key representatives of his expected re-election bid.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) will host a "national advisory board" comprised of the sorts of rising-star politicians, including governors J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania and Phil Murphy of New Jersey, who are known for their own bids for higher office but stayed on the sidelines after Democrats survived the 2022 midterm elections with their Senate majority intact.

The move by White House political officials and other allies to sign on high-profile spokespeople, which is typical for parties moving into the frenzy of campaign season, shows Biden is headed towards a formal re-election announcement now expected in April, though the date could slip, sources familiar with the situation told Reuters.

Biden's team is making other steps, too, including thinking through possible options for a campaign manager a host city for the 2024 party convention where Biden would be formally nominated. Chicago

and Atlanta were seen by Democratic officials as the primary contenders for the convention, which was conducted virtually in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign's strategy is expected to be set by the same inner circle that guided Biden's 2020 race against Republican former President Donald Trump, including his final 2020 campaign manager, Jen O'Malley Dillon. But that group has struggled to hone a short list of potential campaign managers for 2024 as they look for a trusted operator outside their own ranks who has experience winning a state-wide campaign in a competitive state, among a variety of other qualifications.

"They are looking for a unicorn," said one party adviser. The new advisory board will be used to demonstrate unity in the party behind the candidate, traveling the country for campaign appearances and doing interviews on television on behalf of the party and, eventually, the candidate. News that the group was being assembled was first reported by the Washington Post.

Biden, who turned 80 in November, is the oldest president to hold office. Recent polls show aging leaders are a concern for Americans in general, and

Biden's age in particular worries Democratic voters. But the president's aides are shrugging off polls showing doubts about his age as irrelevant at this stage of the race. No major rivals for Biden have emerged on the Democratic side, though the self-help guru Marianne Williamson is expected to formally announce on Saturday that she is mounting a long-shot bid in the primary after doing so in the more crowded field from which Biden emerged victorious in 2020.

On the Republican side, Trump is seeking a second term, and a set of would-be challengers are laying the groundwork for their campaigns. In the absence of a formal re-election announcement, the White House continues to book Biden in campaign-style appearances across the country.

On Monday, Biden is expected to speak to the International Association of Fire Fighters, the first major labor group to endorse him ahead of the 2020 campaign. Biden's public approval rating was just 41% in a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll last month. That is close to the lowest level of his presidency, though similar to where Trump was at the same time in his administration.

NK says US causing int'l arms control collapse

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea on Saturday blamed the United States for what it said was the collapse of international arms control systems and said Pyongyang's nuclear weapons were a just response to ensure the balance of power in the region.

"The Korean peninsula is turning into the world's biggest powderkeg and war practice field due to a military expansion scheme led by the United States and its followers," its foreign ministry said in a commentary carried by state news agency KCNA. Recent moves by South Korea and Japan showed that a military build-up by the United States and its followers was crossing the danger line and this could not be tolerated, it added.

The comments follow the United States and South Korea's announcement that they plan to conduct large-scale military exercises from March 13-23 to strengthen the allies' combined defensive posture, including focusing on what they called North Korean aggression. North Korea says such joint military exercises are proof that the United States and its allies are hostile and bent on regime change in the North.

Macron's mission to counter Russia in Africa

PARIS (BBC): Libreville, Luanda, Brazzaville, Kinshasa - France's President Emmanuel Macron is on a whirlwind tour of African capitals as he tries to shift French policy on the continent away from military involvement.

He can hardly be accused of ignoring Africa - this is his 18th presidential trip - but this comes at a time of ever-increasing competition from China and Russia, and growing resentment of the close economic ties between France and its former colonial, which some see as a form of continued exploitation. And he insists that he will come back, again and again, to a continent that he regards as a crucial partner for Europe in tackling major global issues over the decades ahead.

Although Ukraine inevitably dominates the international diplomatic agenda, Mr Macron believes that Paris and Brussels cannot afford to neglect Africa. It presents challenges and huge development opportunities, with a youthful dynamism that, he argues, will be a huge contributor to Europe's own future growth. France's president is also acutely aware of how other nations are seeking to extend their own influence south of

the Sahara.

Russia, hoping to rebuild the influence it had lost since the Cold War decades, is offering security support to governments that feel under threat or isolated from the international mainstream: mercenaries from the Kremlin-linked military contractor Wagner are now operating in Mali and the Central African Republic, where they have been accused of human rights abuses. China is a massive funder and builder of infrastructure, albeit on terms that Mr Macron fears could trap some countries in debt crisis. Turkey and India are increasingly active too.

And across the region, popular anti-French sentiment is fanned by lively social media messaging to which Paris has so far found no effective response. In a lengthy speech on Monday evening, to prepare the ground for his latest tour, the president reasserted his own strategy to sustain a role for France in this increasingly competitive arena. It was a message addressed both to Africans and to his own domestic audience.

He does not think the French should try to match the Russian secu-

urity effort by re-expanding its own military presence to match what Moscow offers. In any case, that would hardly be an option when Paris has been forced to pull its troops out of Mali and Burkina Faso, where the military juntas now in charge are seeking to distance themselves from the former colonial power in both countries.

Instead, he aims to re-orient French support to focus more on training and technical back-up for African armed forces, with troop numbers reduced and programmes of military collaboration tailored to the specific requests of individual countries. And this week Mr Macron took that policy a step further, announcing that the remaining French bases in Africa - in Senegal, Ivory Coast and Gabon - would now be co-managed and shared with the forces of the host nations, and even available to welcome other external partners if those governments wished. Only the base in Djibouti, strategically located at the mouth of the Red Sea will remain exclusively French.

He pointed out that the base in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, is well positioned for training troops from the various West African states now col-

laborating in efforts to prevent jihadist groups in the Sahel from pushing south towards the coast. But he is also anxious to pursue the diversification of French engagement across a much broader canvas, touching culture, history, immigration, trade, development and even reform of the CFA franc - a currency used by 14 countries and pegged to the euro under a guarantee provided by Paris.

There is growing opposition to the use of this currency, which some see as a form of neo-colonialism, although its supporters say it helps ensure financial stability. Mr Macron first launched this approach in a high-profile Africa speech back in November 2017, in front of an audience of students in a lecture theatre at Ouagadougou University in Burkina Faso.

And he has pursued it over the past five years, in an effort to transform perceptions from both sides. Previous governments in Paris, particularly in the 1990s, had already sought to move away from the old network of mutually complacent vested special connections between African and French elites encapsulated in the term "Françafrique", shifting instead towards stronger support

for democracy and grassroots development.

However, Mr Macron has gone further in confronting the painful and sometimes shameful episodes of the past, commissioning historians to produce reports unsparing in their examination of France's track record in the war over Algerian independence and the events surrounding the Rwandan genocide of 1994. A programme of returning treasures looted during the colonial era has already seen the return home of a totemic Senegalese sword and part of a Malagasy royal throne, while artefacts looted from the kingdom of Dahomey have been sent back to Benin and arrangements have been made for the return of an iconic Ivorian drum.

In parallel with this effort at reconciliation over past history, Mr Macron has been seeking to deepen today's cultural connections and exchange of ideas. He has announced schemes to promote sports training and to ease access to visas for Africans to pursue post-graduate study in France. However, the public impact of these initiatives, particularly in the eyes of African public opinion, has been largely lost during

years when the most prominent dimension of French engagement has been the military struggle against militant groups in the Sahel.

Growing controversy came to surround the operations of the French force Barkhane, finally withdrawn from Mali in August last year. This has fuelled an upsurge in populist nationalism in some countries and a more generalised resentment of France across most of Francophone West and Central Africa, particularly among urban youth. Having instigated a shift towards a lower profile and more collaborative military approach, Mr Macron is trying to use this week's four-country tour to reinvigorate this broader reform and change agenda.

But even this trip will be beset by familiar political complications. There have been anti-French demonstrations in the Democratic Republic of Congo ahead of his visit. Furthermore opponents of Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba and DR Congo's President Félix Tshisekedi have been complaining that Mr Macron's visit could be read as interference to bolster the image of these incumbent rulers in what is an election year for both countries.

The Frontier Post

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Peshawar.

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Court battle for overseas votes

RECENTLY, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has sought a progress report from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding the technical and legal aspects concerning overseas Pakistanis' right to vote in the upcoming general election in the country. According to the details, a three-member bench of the apex court is currently hearing the pleas of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Muslim League (AML) seeking a declaration for ex-pats' rights to vote in the future general elections.

Overseas Pakistanis are an important asset of Pakistan which always played a vital role in national building, economic development, and growth, along with rendering all possible assistance in achieving foreign policy objectives in other nations. Similarly, well-off overseas Pakistanis stood by their countrymen during the wars, natural calamities, and economic challenges in the past. Presently, over 9 million Pakistanis are residing abroad in the Middle East, America, Europe, East Asia, and Oceania, who pleasure and grief with their countrymen and tremendously contribute to national growth by sending foreign remittances of an average rate of \$ 2 billion per month that help supports Pakistan's budgetary needs during this highly volatile period of time.

Over the decades, Pakistani expatriates could not participate in the electoral process and never exercised their right to vote because of no provision of the Internet and electronic voting mechanisms in the past. However, with the invention of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the availability of Internet voting facilities, multiple nations across the globe are successfully using these technologies to facilitate public participation in the democratic process. Presently, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are widely used in most nations of the world including the US, the UK, Canada, France, German, Kenya, the Philippines, Australia, and several others to ensure transparency and strengthen public belief in democracy.

Unfortunately, this legal and technical issue had been made a political dispute by contesting political groups in the country. Pakistan's election Act-2017 categorically endorsed the overseas Pakistanis' right to vote but it could not be materialized in the past due to the non-availability of necessary infrastructure, and institutional provisions. Later, the PTI government approved the legislation for the use of EVMs and I-voting for overseas Pakistanis through a constitutional amendment in 2021. Last year, the coalition government overrode the Election Amendment Act-2021 and approved new legislation namely Election Amendment Bill-2022 calling for organizing pilot projects on the use of EVMs and Internet voting in the upcoming general election to confirm their validity ahead of full implementation of the new technology.

In fact, both political factions support the idea of overseas Pakistanis' right to vote but each of them wanted to earn credit for this magnificent endeavor, meanwhile, the coalition parties also fear a political setback due to PTI's substantial presence abroad. Presently, a court battle is continuing, and both factions are focused on reaffirming their political gains in the upcoming general elections either way instead of securing the fundamental rights of the expatriates. At the time, multiple African nations are using modern technologies and EVMs to augment public belief in the electoral process but Pakistani leaders run out of patience and are embattled for instant political gains.

Seemingly, electoral victory and setbacks are part of politics but leaders must act in the greater interests of the country, public, and democracy that will improve their public image and support their politics in the future.

Rishi Sunak's next problem

EVERY now and again, something strange happens between the UK and EU: erstwhile adversaries become allies. It happened when Theresa May returned from Brussels with a deal in 2018. And it happened again on Monday as Ursula von der Leyen and "dear Rishi" appeared together in Windsor. The prime minister has taken a huge political and electoral gamble. And only time will tell whether it will pay off.

First things first. This is a clever deal that addresses many of the UK's concerns about the operation of the existing Northern Ireland protocol in a manner that is acceptable to the EU. That is no mean feat. Clever solutions have been found to apparently intractable problems, whether these pertain to medicines or sausages. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean much. May's deal was a masterpiece of circle squaring, for all the good it did her. And, beneath the spin, there are aspects of the deal that are not all they're portrayed to be. The "Stormont brake" is unlikely to be used that much. The government itself admits it is the "last mechanism available" to deal with updated or replaced EU acts that will (in the EU's words) have "significant impact specific to everyday life of Northern Ireland in a way that is liable to persist". Its use will, moreover, trigger a lengthy process of negotiation, and can prompt the EU to legitimately take "appropriate remedial measures". A curious kind

of brake.

All that being said, I have to admit I underestimated the prime minister. Whether through luck or judgment or a combination of both, he has brought home his deal at a moment when opposition within his

Anand Menon

tages of this approach are clear. It allowed him to "get Brexit done" in a way none of his predecessors managed. It also cuts what Brexit ground there was from under Labour's feet. It

tial for a fruitful (if only in rhetorical terms) summit with President Macron another. Longer term, the normalisation of relations (remember, the European Commission had told staff

benefit from being seen to focus on the issues that do matter to them, rather than waging a war with Brussels over an issue few outside Northern Ireland care about.

Yet with opportunities come risks. Sunak's strate-

All that being said, I have to admit I underestimated the prime minister. Whether through luck or judgment or a combination of both, he has brought home his deal at a moment when opposition within his party has largely evaporated. Whether because of boredom with Brexit, a perception that this leader cannot be replaced, or the prevalence of other concerns (net zero, China, tax), the fire seems to have gone from many Brexiter bellies. Sunak's strategy is clear. He is setting himself up as the practical prime minister practising grown-up policies aimed at getting things done. The potential advantages of this approach are clear. It allowed him to "get Brexit done" in a way none of his predecessors managed. It also cuts what Brexit ground there was from under Labour's feet. It is now hard to manoeuvre the proverbial fag paper between the Tory and Labour positions on Brexit - don't hold your breath waiting for "We'll sign a sanitary and phytosanitary measures agreement - they won't" election posters. Third, resolution of the standoff over the protocol opens the way to some easy wins. Re-admittance to the Horizon research programme is one. The potential for a fruitful (if only in rhetorical terms) summit with President Macron another.

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to limit their meetings with their British counterparts) will allow for more effective collaboration across the board, not least when it comes to dealing with the war in Ukraine. And finally, of course, the British people don't really care about the protocol. They no longer even care that much about Brexit - which has fallen out of the top 10 issues of concerns to the public. Sunak will probably

gy is designed around the implicit message that Boris Johnson really was a bit useless. That style over substance is no way to govern. That the British people need someone serious in charge to get things done and address their priorities. He seems to have got away with it so far, but it will only inflame opinion among Johnson allies on the benches behind him. And there are struggles to

Stripping away the Covid secrecy offers a unique insight into the health crisis of our time

WHEN the pandemic first hit, it was feared that hospital patients would be the most vulnerable - but care homes soon turned out to be the real killing fields. Within a few weeks, their residents were accounting for a third of all Covid deaths. Early theories that the virus had been seeded by Covid patients discharged from NHS hospitals in a panic turned out to be untrue. The problem, it seemed, was those coming in from the local neighbourhood - or "the community" - who it was advised should be tested. The puzzle is why Matt Hancock overruled advice to say that they should not be tested.

Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, had proposed to test everyone going into care homes - but Hancock thought this was too much. This exchange on the WhatsApp group, one of 100,000 messages seen by The Telegraph, is instructive. Hancock declared that testing everyone who goes into care homes somehow "muddies the waters". It appears this was a political decision.

For all the claims to be "following the science", the Lockdown Files show how often the dictates were political guesswork masquerading as science. Normal public health safeguards had been the first casualty of the pandemic. No one, before Covid, could make up public health policy on the hoof. Even adverts on sugar and salt were assessed for every possible unintended consequence with all aspects weighed and discussed. As they should be when lives are at stake.

You can see the dilemma. When a pandemic was hurtling towards Britain with credible estimates that 250,000 could be killed, there was no time to assess every policy. The WhatsApp policy cauldron was intended to decide things fast. If you need to move urgently, you cannot wait for a study. But then again, with no studies, what's to stop major mistakes being enforced upon millions? Moving quickly was always going to have to mean making policy mistakes. The trick would be to spot and correct them as soon as possible. But the big flaw to this theory is

psychological: politicians do not like to admit to mistakes. If they have made a big gamble, they find it hard to accept that they were wrong. Decades of studies show this trend plays quite a big role in politics: a state of denial sets in early. New evidence suggesting you did the right thing is seized on as very important; evidence to the contrary is dismissed as unreliable, biased or just wrong. This struggle against cognitive dissonance is human nature, but is especially acute in politicians. In this way, mistakes can become embedded.

Over the next few days, the Lockdown Files will show how much political concerns shaped policy - with "the science" used, all too often, as verbal dressing. If you suddenly find out that people don't need to self-isolate for as long as you once thought, what do you do? Apologise, and let them away earlier? Or delay sharing the advice to avoid embarrassment? The closed-loop decision-making process, the confidence that no one might ever know, encouraged all kinds

of political misbehaviour. The instinct to avoid political embarrassment - or simply duck a difficult argument - is shown to be a crucial factor in several lockdown decisions. While shocking, this should not be so surprising. How else would politicians act, if they were convinced that no one would ever find out? When the Opposition party decides not to oppose, when broadcasters define "public service" as amplifying the government message, who is there to challenge? And yes, there will be a Covid inquiry, but it seems to be moving at the same pace as the Bloody Sunday inquiry and may serve as a device to obscure rather than uncover the truth, rather than disclose it.

That's why the Lockdown Files matter. We can see, with a degree of transparency never before offered to journalists or historians, how some crucial decisions were made. This transparency can, right away, lead to reflection as to whether we still have a system that is fit for purpose when (and it will be when) the next pathogen is

identified and the next panic starts. The historian Andrew Roberts told me recently about the problem caused by the death of diaries: historians rely on them, yet no prime minister since Macmillan has kept daily notes. So how are we to learn from the steps and missteps of the recent past if it's all lost to memory? The difference, Roberts said, would be WhatsApp messages - the forum now for so much of government discussion. "WhatsApp will be the Alan Clark diaries of the future," he said. "They'd offer an immediacy that historians have never had before - if we would ever come into possession of them." He didn't see a way in which we would.

That moment has now arrived: 2.3 million words from the messages of those who decided the fate of millions at a time when they probably felt they'd never have to answer to anyone. No one really thought that they were in the process of building the most comprehensive real-time glimpse of government documentation that has ever been made public in a Western democracy. Similar conversations will

have happened the world over, but only in Britain do we have a chance to see what those conversations were. There's an old saying that there are two things that you never want to witness being made: laws and sausages. So any X-ray into the political process was never going to be edifying. But no one can argue that publishing the Lockdown Files is voyeuristic or intrusive. The decision made behind WhatsApp encryption dictated the most private affairs of everyone in this country: it criminalised much of human contact, from worship to visiting partners to children's sleepovers. Those affected are richly entitled to know about the decision-making process, about the evidence (or lack thereof) that went behind those decisions.

Those whose children were ordered out of school or told to wear a mask, those banned from visiting or mourning dying relatives, those whose self-isolation period was extended not for public health reasons but to save political blushes: they all deserve answers. The Lockdown Files should provide them.

This deal could have been struck in 2021 - but the last thing Brexiter wanted was to get Brexit done

IS the grievance factory about to shut up shop at last? The Northern Ireland protocol is the last outpost of the once mighty manufacturing empire that produced, in industrial quantities, self-pitying narratives of Britons oppressed by Brussels. Now, perhaps, that assembly line has finally juddered to a halt.

The paradox of the Brexit project for its own advocates is that its very success has cut off the pipeline of complaint that fed their teeming springs of outrage. The protocol was the last excuse for throwing the old shapes, the one remaining arena in which the grand game of Euro-bashing could be played. It is not surprising that there are those - Boris Johnson, much of the European Research Group (ERG), part of the Democratic Unionist party - who can't bear to part with it. The most obvious thing about the deal announced at Windsor on Monday is that it shows that there was always a deal to be done. As far back as October 2021, the EU formally accepted that the way the protocol was being implemented had to be changed. It made no sense for goods destined to stay in

Northern Ireland to be subjected to the same checks as those that were going on to the Republic and hence entering the EU.

Pretty much everything that has now been agreed was there to be negotiated two years ago: the sharing of advance data on exports, red and green lanes, flexibility on VAT and state aid rules, an enhanced role for the assembly in Belfast in scrutinising new single market regulations. All that was ever required was normal diplomacy at the high level and needs lower down to do the nuts-and-bolts stuff. So why was this not done? Why was this row allowed to become a stand-off that paralysed politics in Northern Ireland, when everyone knows from bitter experience that its political vacuums are filled by malign forces?

First, because of the inability of the Brexit ultras to wean themselves off the "Those Eurocrats don't like it up 'em" mode of international relations. The complete failure of bluster and posturing in the negotiation of the overall withdrawal agreement taught them nothing. They remained convinced that the way to get foreigners to do what you want is to shout louder. Hence Boris

Johnson's idiotic Northern Ireland protocol bill. It said, in essence: scrap the protocol that Johnson himself begged you for or the UK will start a trade war with the EU, alienate the US, override its own most basic democratic procedures and declare its contempt for international law even while attacking Vladimir Putin for the same sin. This was never going to work, but it gave the zealots the thrill of one more excursion to the cliffs at Dover to shake their fists at the continent.

There was, though, an even more profound reason to avoid realistic negotiations on the protocol. The miasma of craziness that occludes this whole terrain emanates from the inconvenient truth that the protocol is, in horse-breeding parlance, by Johnson, out of the DUP. It was the DUP that made it inevitable by helping to bring down Theresa May, whose "backstop" agreement would have prevented the need for any controls on goods crossing the Irish Sea. And it was Johnson who, with his usual mastery of cynical opportunism, double-crossed the DUP, created the protocol,

and used it to win an election. But all of this had to be denied. The Frankensteins had to disown their monster. And the way to do that was to indulge in the fantasy that what they had done could somehow be undone. This mirage was conjured from two impossible demands: that the protocol be scrapped and that the European court of justice should cease to be the final arbiter of EU law as it applied to Northern Ireland's operation of the single market. The beauty of these demands, for those who wished to drown the whole story in obfuscation and amnesia, was that they were so fantastical. They pushed the reality of what Johnson and the DUP had achieved - a serious weakening of the union - into a parallel universe of high dudgeon and glorious defiance.

Rishi Sunak deserves credit for rejoining the reality-based community. The relative speed with which the deal has been done shows the benefits of trying to function like a normal government and seek mutually beneficial solutions to common problems. But part of the reality

he has faced is that one part of the UK - Northern Ireland - has a very different kind of Brexit to all the others. Agreeing to make the protocol work is accepting the immutable fact that a hard Brexit means that Northern Ireland will become ever more a place apart within the UK. That's very difficult for the DUP to accept and all the more so because it is to a very large extent its own doing. It is hard to think of a worse strategic error by any political party in these islands in modern times than the defenders of the union doing so much to undermine it. It is tough to come to terms with this outcome and reasonable to give the DUP time to adjust to the fact that it has been fighting, not a losing battle, but a battle that was irretrievably lost when it put its fate in the hands of Johnson.

Yet what alternative does it have? The deal is a very good one for Northern Ireland, most of whose people will have little patience with a rear-guard action against it. Sunak has called the bluff of the DUP's allies in the ERG and their hand is in fact very weak - not least because, in the end, few people in Britain care very

much about the protocol. The prospect of a Labour government will further diminish the DUP's influence at Westminster. The only place it can exercise power is in Belfast. The protocol deal, with its "Stormont brake" on new EU regulations, gives the assembly real powers to block EU regulations - but only if there is an assembly in the first place. There are a thousand other reasons why the DUP should fulfil its responsibilities and allow Northern Ireland's political institutions to get back to work - but that has to be, from its own point of view, the most compelling.

Exporting Brexit grievances to Belfast was always much madder and more pernicious than sending coals to Newcastle. Northern Ireland has its own superabundant supply, flowing through both green and orange lanes. The heedless exploitation of that trade has been one of the ugliest aspects of the Brexit debacle. Now that the last drops of performative affront have been squeezed out of this tawdry drama, perhaps Britain and Ireland can get back to the slow and undramatic business of reconciliation.

From displacement to homecoming: Dispatch from Nigeria

Mohamed Yahya

IT was a typically hot day in northeastern Nigeria's Borno State. Temperatures soared past 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) as I sat in a makeshift tent in the town of Ngarannam in October last year. The occasion was special: As many as 3,000 people were returning to their town after living for seven years in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps in Maiduguri, 50km (31 miles) away. They had fled their town as it was razed to ashes by the Boko Haram armed group.

Among them was Dana Adam, a widow who lost her husband to a cholera outbreak in the IDP camp and who is now the sole provider for her three children. Adam is one of millions for whom the conflict has had a catastrophic impact. But there is now some hope. Like the others, she now has a new home in a rebuilt community that has a school and police station, market stalls, solar-powered streetlights and water boreholes commissioned by the Borno state government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and partners as part of a joint initiative to rebuild the Lake Chad Region. For thousands including Adam and her children, it is a chance at a beginning, an opportunity to reclaim what was taken from them: their memories, a sense of belonging and their dignity.

Yet as I took the stage to give the welcome address, I found myself overwhelmed with mixed emotions. One of satisfaction over what we have achieved together but also my own reawakened memories of loss and incompleteness. I was forced to leave my maternal home in Somalia when I was just three years old. Political repression in early 1980s Somalia forced my family to flee and move more than 300 miles (483km) away to the Kenyan coastal town of Malindi. While I have little recollection of the events or circumstances that brought us to Kenya, I do know

that they are the same ones that would later morph into the full-blown conflict and political instability that persists to this day. It deprives me and millions of other Somalis of the opportunity for renewal and reconnection with a long and fractured relationship

While I have little recollection of the events or circumstances that brought us to Kenya, I do know that they are the same ones that would later morph into the full-blown conflict and political instability that persists to this day. It deprives me and millions of other Somalis of the opportunity for renewal and reconnection with a long and fractured relationship with home. Ngarannam shows that an alternative, brighter future is possible for those displaced by violence like my family once was. It is a prototype community and one of eight areas we are developing through the Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad region across the four conflict-affected countries of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The idea is not just to restore the destroyed buildings and infrastructure, but to create a sense of pride and belonging, dignity and independence. Being involved in a project that allows communities to start healing the psychological scars of displacement has been a sort of catharsis for me.

with home.

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four conflict-affected countries of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The idea is not just to restore the destroyed buildings and infrastructure, but to create a sense of pride and belonging, dignity and independence. Being involved in a project that allows communities to

architect, Tosin Oshinowo, was brought on board.

They ensured that the ideas and needs of Adam and other returnees like her were central to the design. Because to return home after fleeing violence and destruction, one needs more than rebuilt physical infrastructure. A sense of security and fresh ways to make a living are critical, too. For the families returning to Ngarannam, it meant the challenging and overwhelming process of starting from scratch. So the town's revival roadmap has also focused on helping families build sustainable sources of income. That includes resources like grants and training to start businesses; the construction of shops for traders; and cattle for herders. The idea: To help the community, including women, not only restart their lives but to do so with pride. Rediscovering self-reliance after years of receiving handouts in IDP camps was never going to be easy. But, despite these challenges, many in Ngarannam have now successfully made the transition. Determination is winning out over the fear of starting over. Adam and women like her were delighted to return home and get their life and livelihood back.

"Now we are back to our village and living in peace," Adam said, "that alone is an achievement to me". As the UN collectively continues to support and find sustainable solutions for displaced people, we are guided by the UN Secretary-General's action agenda on internal displacement. This reminds us all of our collective obligation to support displaced people's return to their places of origin voluntarily and with dignity. Welcoming the people of Ngarannam to their homes brought me an immense sense of pride. It is my hope that one day I, too, can walk freely around my place of birth with the joy and promise I saw in the eyes of the people of Ngarannam.



After a year of military failure

THERE was perhaps only one truth spoken during Vladimir Putin's two-hour state of the nation address: that Russia would suspend its participation in the New Start treaty with the US. The rest was yet another a trip down the rabbit hole into the Russian president's parallel universe.

Those who were anticipating a major revelation in a speech that had been postponed from December were disappointed. In the absence of any groundbreaking advances on the military front, many expected Putin to finally admit that Russia was at war in Ukraine. But no, the "special military operation" is ploughing on "step by step". Not only did he fail to offer any reassurance to those who dared hope he was considering making some concessions to the truth that the operation is not going well, but he also left the radical pro-war faction hungry for a more aggressive approach.

The president stayed within well-trodden terrain: the war was started by the west, and Russia needs to protect itself from the war-mongering decadent west that opened the door to nazism in the 1930s and where today pedophilia is the norm and God is gender neutral.

He promised financial benefits to war widows and the wounded, and praised the Russian economy's robust performance under sanctions, in a country where automobile production is down 67% year on year and biometric passports can no longer be issued because of the lack of chips. He praised the dramatic drop in unemployment while businesses are suffering from a dire lack

Samantha de Bendern

of human resources due to the twin blows of mobilisation and exile.

Then, at the end of the speech, while some members of the audience were visibly struggling to stay awake, he delivered the punchline: Russia is suspending its participation in the New Start treaty, the only remaining arms control agreement between the US and Russia. It limits the number of nuclear warheads each side is allowed to have, and provides for bilateral inspections of each other's nuclear facilities.

While this sounds dramatic, it only formalises a situation that has been playing out between the two nuclear superpowers since the end of 2022, when Russia cancelled a meeting with the US to discuss the revival of mutual inspections that had stopped since Covid. The official closure of the main forum for dialogue on nuclear weapons is regrettable, and increases the chances of a new nuclear arms race - but at least all sides know clearly where they stand.

Putin continues to make veiled nuclear threats, and did so again in this address when he stated that western declarations on ensuring a strategic defeat for Russia were an existential threat "to which we know how to react". Threats to the existence of the Russian state allow for a first-use nuclear strike in Russia's military doctrine.

Each time Putin makes these threats, the aim is clear: frighten western public opinion into pressuring governments to stop arming Ukraine and force Zelenskyy to the negotiating table. It is impossible to know whether Putin will

carry out his threats. But one thing is knowable: it is impossible to negotiate with someone who uses lies and blackmail to force his opponent's hand, because nothing he says can be trusted. In his speech, Putin mentioned his efforts to bring the west to the negotiating table in late 2021 by the publication of two so-called security treaties - one between Russia and the US, and one between Russia and Nato. These were in fact ultimatums, insisting that Nato withdrew to its 1997 borders.

Beyond the fact that Putin knew from the outset that these conditions were not acceptable to the US or to Nato, when one discusses a treaty the presumption is that both parties were involved in negotiating it, and both parties actually knew that a treaty was being drafted. By framing his 2021 ultimatum as a fake treaty (that he knew was untenable), Putin is in fact engaging in a sophisticated disinformation campaign. It laid the ground for his relentless attempts to recast the war in Ukraine as a war with Nato - which is now the main reason why the Russian population is not rising up against the war as the body bags start to come home.

Although today's address by Putin lacked the drama of his address to his security council last year, during which he recognised the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics and publicly humiliated his foreign intelligence chief, it is no less dramatic in what it portends. Putin has cemented Russia's withdrawal from the international order - and the imprisonment of more than 140 million Russians in an empire built on lies and bloodshed.

All but one of Scotland's cabinet ministers have been white

Nasar Meer

WHO is going to win the campaign to replace Nicola Sturgeon as leader of the Scottish National party (SNP) and first minister of Scotland? There are various facts and qualities we can look to. For instance, the Scottish health secretary, Humza Yousaf - recently tipped as the frontrunner - has won more elections and held more ministerial posts than the finance secretary, Kate Forbes, and the former community safety minister, Ash Regan.

Evidence suggests that this kind of ministerial track record can both help and hinder prospective candidates in party leadership elections. But Yousaf also enters the contest being the only cabinet minister in the entire 24 years of Scottish devolution who is not white - the impact of which is harder to quantify. There are already clues to how this may play out - in distortions of a speech that Yousaf made while the cabinet secretary for justice, in which he lamented how "for 99% of the meetings I go to, I'm the only non-white person in the room". Social-media users, many of them seemingly not Scottish, have spun the speech as though he were "anti-white", rather than describing social realities during a parliamentary debate about antiracism.

Over the years, Yousaf has not been afraid to publicly call attention to structural racism in Scotland. The evidence supports him: across different levels of government in Scotland, minority representation is well below the broader ethnic and racial minority share of the population. What's more, ethnic and racial minorities

in Scotland are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, and there is a substantial employment gap and, for those in work, a pay gap - white Scottish workers earn, on average, 10% more. It might look paradoxical from England to see Yousaf talk about racism in Scotland given that he's a "nationalist", but in Scotland it makes perfect sense.

Take this anecdote that Yousaf has shared about his father. "My dad just assumed that Scotland was independent," he says, "and it was only when he was told that we're not, he thought, 'Well, that's not right', and so decided to join [the SNP]." As far as origin stories go, especially for someone with an ambition to lead a nationalist party, it is conspicuously free of flag-waving love-of-country sentiment, but appeals to a sense of responsibility all the same. It is less "nationalist" in the exclusionary sense when contrasted with similar stories from ethnic and racial minority ministers in the UK government. Suella Braverman, for example, has often used her family's story of arrival to the UK to justify keeping others from doing the same. Or note that Yousaf launched his campaign last week in Clydebank, somewhere synonymous with the heyday of heavy industries (especially shipbuilding) and characteristic of the good and ill of regeneration efforts. These are not markers of ethnicity or ways of reassuring Scottish voters that he will be "tough" on migrants. They hint at what the sociologist David McCrone has

long argued is the role of "space", not merely the role of "tribe", in contemporary Scottish nationhood.

This is not to say symbolism is unimportant. When in 2011 Yousaf was first elected an MSP, he made his oath of allegiance in Urdu wearing traditional Pakistani clothes, and a band of Partick Thistle FC tartan pinned to his lapel. His arrival in Holyrood more broadly corresponded with a certain confidence in the SNP about its appeal to ethnic and racial minorities in Scotland, and the wider project of national identity that it wanted to cultivate. In research I conducted at the time, one SNP MSP told me they had "captured nationalism and made it something positive, and made it civic". The implication was clear: as it formed its very first government, the SNP would pursue a broadly inclusive "big tent" nationhood that did not anchor itself in ideas of blood and soil associated with other minority nationalist parties.

True to the vision, the SNP in office has broadly maintained its aversion to the drive for assimilation found in other comparable parties, such as in the Parti Québécois, with its controversial charter of values. Hence the white paper Scotland's Future, which set out the case for independence, insisted that "a commitment to multicultural Scotland will be a cornerstone of the nation on independence". We always need, however, to distinguish between the identities of political parties and people's national identities. Academics such

as McCrone have long shown that national identities in Scotland don't mobilise people in a purely party political fashion, and repeatedly established that there is no straightforward relationship between feeling Scottish and an aspiration for greater national self-determination (either in terms of greater devolution or indeed independence).

Yet Yousaf's trajectory into nationalist politics does chime with the phenomenon of Scottish ethnic and racial minorities consistently identifying themselves in surveys with the Scottish nation (either as Scottish only, or Scottish-British, or Scottish plus something else). Scottish-Pakistanis, in particular, are twice as likely to identify themselves as Scottish than their counterparts in England are likely to identify as English. Though, as my university colleague Ross Bond has shown, this does not prevent them identifying as British too. This last point is the first to be made by Labour's leader in Scotland, Anas Sarwar, who is buoyed by the prospect of a resurgent Labour party in Westminster. Should Yousaf win the SNP leadership contest, it would see the case for Scottish independence being made and contested by two different kinds of nationalists (one favouring independence, the other the union) who have a shared record of antiracism. As the SNP leadership contest picks up and the racism that each has encountered in public life becomes even more febrile, we may well come to remember this election as a defining moment for race in Scotland too.

The Guardian

Russia must end state terror before it can hope to gain freedom

William Courtney & Philip Wasielewski

IN ordering the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his ex-KGB cohort in the Kremlin have invited disaster on Russia. For centuries, Russia's secret police have caused the country harm and terrorized its people. Only by easing its deadly grip might Russians gain freedom.

Since Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century, Russian rulers have relied on organized terror to enforce autocratic rule. Ivan had his oppressive bodyguard corps, the Oprichniki; later the Romanov Tsars had their Okhrana. The Soviets had the Cheka, which was later renamed the KGB. Today Russia has its successor organization, the FSB, whose agents - and Putin himself - are often referred to as Chekists. The use of terror through various enforcement agencies helped propel Russia from tsarist authoritarianism to Stalinist totalitarianism. Under the last three tsars, the Okhrana executed 14,000 people. The Cheka killed over 140,000. Repression peaked in the 1930s when Stalin's NKVD shot some 700,000. Later, the KGB tortured opponents in psychiatric hospitals, killed Ukrainian poet Vasily Stus, human rights advocate Anatoly Marchenko, and many other heroic dissidents, and exiled the inspi-

ration nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov, widely considered to have been the Soviet Union's greatest moral authority.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin made bold political and economic reforms, but only reshuffled the KGB. He even reversed tentative reforms of the organization, a tragic error. The KGB's notorious Fifth Directorate, responsible for censorship and security against political and religious dissent, was merely relabeled in the FSB. As in the Soviet era, dissent is brutally crushed in Russia today. The country is now more repressive internally and more aggressive externally than at any time in its modern independence.

The extent to which Russians seem in thrall of - or at least tolerant of - abusive secret police is striking. A poll in 2018 by Russia's independent Levada polling center found that only 20% of respondents thought the function of the feared Cheka was political control. An apparently more gullible 60% saw its purpose as fighting saboteurs and crime. Polls also reveal naive perceptions of today's security organs on the part of the Russian population. A Levada poll

in 2018 showed, incredibly, that 10 times more Russians blamed British intelligence for the poisoning of former Russian spy turned double agent Sergey Skripal and his daughter in the U.K. earlier that year than blamed the Russian intelligence services. In 2020, a poll found that Russians saw the FSB and other secret services as more important to society than the government, the media, or the judiciary.

These indicators do not bode well for Russia's imminent transformation into a society based on the consent of the governed and the rule of law. Some observers are more optimistic. Exiled Russian magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky and former world chess champion Garry Kasparov say Putin is living on "borrowed time" and that the moment is "ripe for a transition to democracy." Democracy is unlikely, however, without wholesale disbandment of the elements of the security system used against Russia's own citizens. One model might be the abolition of East Germany's hated Stasi secret police after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. This quick action, and permission for citizens to read their own Stasi files, helped former East Germans confront an

ugly past.

If a new leadership in Russia were to pursue a more democratic path, it might open secret police archives so that Russians could finally know the truth of their oppression. An independent commission could investigate and reveal the history of the secret police and their horrors, from the Okhrana to the FSB. Finally, an open debate might help Russians define the kinds of accountable security institutions they want for the future. While any nation-state requires a foreign intelligence and counterintelligence service, this function might be separated from law enforcement in a more democratic Russia. Both institutions also could benefit from robust parliamentary and judicial oversight. In the US, this is performed by well-informed intelligence committees in Congress and by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

Noted Soviet political prisoner Lev Timofeyev observed, "society will heal only when the KGB is destroyed." He may have been right. By eliminating the country's repressive security organs, Russians might overcome their pervasive fear and Russia might no longer pose a threat to its peaceful neighbors.

The Moscow Times

A total Russian collapse is surprisingly close

AS Moscow's latest offensive in Ukraine slowly but bloodily cranks up, the next phase of this ghastly war has well and truly arrived. Contrary to expectations, the Ukrainians are bravely, and successfully, resisting the tens of thousands of fresh Russian recruits being thrown at them. Nevertheless, according to many Western observers, the chances of a total Russian collapse in the coming year are slim.

I am less certain; we could be surprised. Far from being cowed, Zelensky's government is emboldened. Kyiv is openly preparing its own major thrust against Russian ground forces in the spring. Vadym Skibitsky, Ukraine's deputy military intelligence chief, said this week that this counter-offensive will aim to "drive a wedge" between Crimea and the Russian mainland. The Ukrainians are determined to, in his words, "liberate all occupied territories - including Crimea".

Now, General Ben Hodges, former commander of US forces in Europe, has devised a strategy he believes would not only enable Ukraine to retake Crimea, but would precipitate a total Russian military implosion. His suggestion is as follows: isolate the peninsula by precision strikes against the two land routes connecting it with Russian territory - the Kerch bridge and the corridor that runs along the Azov sea. Then follow up with a large-scale armoured drive towards the Azov, penetrating Russian defences north of

Richard Kemp

Crimea, bringing rocket and artillery systems into closer range. Russian air, ground and naval forces in the peninsula would then be reduced by precision strike and bombardment, until the point when Ukrainian forces could launch a ground offensive along the Perekop Isthmus and into Crimea.

This concerted attack against the peninsula - isolating it, neutralising and inflicting severe damage against its military infrastructure by long range strikes - would be a major blow for Russian morale. In the absence of decisive battlefield success elsewhere, it would represent a defeat for Moscow that it could not disguise, and could lead to collapse of Russian forces in the field and even to Putin's downfall. I agree that this is desirable. But - as so often in this war - without boosting our support, it is unachievable. Even this more limited operation would demand massively increased Western assistance, including many more tanks than have been promised, much larger quantities of ammunition, as well as long-range missile systems which so far have not been provided at all. This additional support would have to be sustained and that would mean stepping up defence industrial production in the US and Europe beyond what has been contemplated so far in this war. To achieve this is a question of political will on the Continent, one that remains shaky. There are signs now of European leaders pushing Zelensky towards

peace talks with Russia rather than the defeat of Moscow's invasion. That was the message delivered directly to the Ukrainian leader in Paris recently by President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Both their countries have said they will not be providing new types of weapons this year. All talk at the moment is of future security assistance and guarantees to Ukraine from Nato after the war ends, as a means of pressuring Zelensky into an accommodation.

Putin recognises this wavering of Western support for Ukrainian offensive action and will be encouraged to press forward his own offensive to maximise territorial gains in advance of any potential negotiations. He is unlikely to achieve his full objectives on the battlefield, but neither will he willingly surrender what he now holds, which is significantly greater Ukrainian territory than when the war began. With Ukraine denied the resources for decisive success, the scene would then be set for a period of relative quiet followed by the next round of Russian aggression. General Hodges's plan for Crimea may be overly optimistic, but he is absolutely right to suggest that long-term peace is contingent on Russian battlefield defeat. The scenario that Nato leaders are now planning equals the vanquishment of the West and the emboldenment of both Russia and China. It is a crying shame when the possibility of a total Russian collapse remains within reach.

The Telegraph

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Ambassador of Turkiye calls on Finance Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye to Pakistan Dr Mehmet Pacaci Saturday called on Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar and discussed future potential areas for strengthening relations especially on business and investment between both the countries.

SAPM for Finance Tariq Bajwa, Special Secretary Finance, Nurettin Demir, Turkush Commercial Councillor, Ali Battal Country Manager Turkish Airline, Farhan Akram CFO Dawlance and senior

officers from Finance Division and FBR attended the meeting.

The finance Minister expressed sympathies on human and material losses in the deadly earthquake in Turkiye.

He said that government and people of Pakistan are saddened at the loss of precious lives and properties in the devastating earthquake and stand with the people of Turkiye in its difficult time. He further said that Government of Pakistan is ready to further extend relief support to Turkiye.

The minister minister

highlighted the future potential areas for strengthening relations especially on business and investment front and extended maximum facilitation to the Turkish investors.

Speaking on the occasion, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye expressed gratitude for providing immediate relief support and necessary to Turkish brethren in its difficult time.

The Turkish Ambassador shared that the Republic of Turkiye has strong bilateral ties with Pakistan and apprised the finance minister

of certain issues related to Turkish companies operating in Pakistan.

The two sides further exchanged views on the long-standing religious, cultural, political, economic and social ties between Pakistan and Turkiye.

The economic, trade and investment cooperation between the two countries was also discussed in the meeting.

Ambassador Dr. Mehmet Pacaci, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye thanked the Finance Minister for support and cooperation.

Pak-China tissue culture lab to boost local potato production

BEIJING (INP): Pakistan-China tissue culture lab will help to boost potato local production. According to China Economic Net (CEN), "Most of the potato seeds in Pakistan highly depend on imports, hence the price of local high-quality seeds is expensive, unaffordable for many low-income farmers.

Our tissue culture laboratory is committed to producing high-quality potatoes locally, reducing our dependence on foreign seeds," Dr Babar Ijaz, person in charge of overseas projects, Shandong Rainbow Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd, told the reporter in an exclusive interview with China Economic Net.

Potato is one of the rare cases in which Pakistan is not just self-sufficient for domestic use but also an exporter. Last year, floods have devastated many kinds of crops in Pakistan, while potato production soared to 7.937 million tonnes in FY22 from 5.873 million tonnes in FY21, up by 35 percent as floods did not hit Punjab which is a hub of potato production. By contrast, Pakistan imports 20,000 tons of potato seeds every year.

"Potato is not a crop for

poor people because its initial cost of production is high. 35-40 percent of the cost goes to seeds," said Syed Ijaz ul Hassan, Director of the Sahiwal Potato Research Institute.

Facing such a status quo, Pakistani and Chinese enterprises have been working hard to find opportunities for cooperation.

"In addition to seed production, related potato by-products are also welcome Chinese invests. Besides, mechanized harvesting, pest control are also full of opportunities," Dr Babar Ijaz added.

"The most common potato diseases in Pakistan include early blight, stem rot and so on. In contrast, Chinese varieties are more resistant to pests and diseases with higher yields, which is exactly what Pakistan needs to learn to improve our own potato germplasm."

"As early as 2018, Rainbow had signed a

memorandum of understanding with Pakistan's Beaconhouse Group. This year, most of our work that was delayed due to the epidemic began to accelerate," said Fan Changcheng, Deputy General Manager of Rainbow.

"In order to build Pakistan's largest potato tissue culture lab, Shandong Academy of Agricultural Sciences has also invested in our plan. At present, a small-scale tissue culture facility of the first phase of the lab is under planning, with a goal of producing 500 mu (33.3 hectares), equivalent to about 1,500 tons of potato seeds, and the second phase will be expanded to 10,000 tons," Mr. Fan added.

As Mr. Fan said, since the current situation that Pakistan's potato seeds are dependent on imports, increasing the supply of local seeds can save precious foreign exchange reserves and increase the

income of farmers.

If Pakistan can realize the large-scale production of local high-quality potatoes, in addition to meeting domestic needs, it can also export products to other countries, such as Arab countries.

"At present, Rainbow and Qatar's vegetable institutions also have in-depth cooperation. Such a long-term plan not only help Pakistan potato producers get rid of import dependence, but also earn foreign exchange," Mr. Fan stated.

Such viewpoint was echoed by Dr Babar Ijaz, "First of all, we must ensure the localized production of high-quality seeds, and at the same time improve planting technology and mechanization level.

Then we might be able to export potatoes to other countries. We have a huge potential for countries that have smaller land areas or don't produce much of their own potatoes."



SARGODHA: Federal Minister for Industries and Commerce Tasneem Ahmed Qureshi addressing to Chamber of Commerce.

Withdrawal of power sector subsidy to hit exports

LAHORE (APP): Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) has expressed apprehension that withdrawal of power sector subsidy would put country's exports on further decline.

The FPCCI President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh told media here Saturday that exports had for the last six months been decreasing i.e. August 2022 - February 2023 as per the data released by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

He added that according to latest statistics, Pakistan's exports had declined by a hefty 18.67 per cent in February 2023 on a YoY (year on year) matrix from US \$ 2.83 billion in February 2022 to

US \$ 2.31 billion in February 2023, which called for emergent measures to cope with trend.

Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said that power subsidy had to end by June 2023 with a tangible possibility of renewal or renegotiation. However, the government had withdrawn it for export-oriented industries as well.

FPCCI President said that textiles and its allied products had lion's share in the country's exports and they had achieved the number of US \$ 19.3 billion exports in FY 22 through their hard work, entrepreneurship, competitiveness and resilience in the face of COVID-induced challenges as well.

On this occasion, FPCCI

Senior Vice President Suleman Chawla said that textile industry was suffering on multiple counts: (i) unavailability of sufficient quantities of domestically produced cotton due to floods and continuously reducing crop area (ii) import of cotton on a more than 50 percent devalued rupee in a short-span of less than one year; which accounted for 60 per cent of the total cost of production of textiles (iii) unavailability of dollars to settle import LCs for raw materials & machinery (iv) demurrage, container and terminal charges (v) acute shortages of raw material of cotton; resulting in closure of many textile units (vi) additionally, the withdrawal of power subsidy.

The meeting was attended by Group Leader Surgical Association Jahangir Babar Bajwa, Chairman of Pakistan Sports Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PSGMEA) Arshad Latif Butt, Chairman Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association Musharraf Ahmed Khawaja, Chairman Pakistan Gloves Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PGMEA) Ejaz Chaudhry and the business community.

Meeting held at SCCI to discuss issues

SIALKOT (APP): A meeting was held at the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) under the chairmanship of President Abdul Ghafoor Malik here on Saturday.

In the meeting, trade bodies and the association were called in to discuss issues faced by the Industry.

During the meeting, it was resolved that a joint agenda pertaining to issues of the Industry of Sialkot would be taken up with the government.

Presiding over the meet-

ing, President Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Abdul Ghafoor Malik said that a common agenda related to problems of Sialkot industry would be shared with the federal government and hoped the government would take steps to resolve problems.

He said the main purpose of inviting chairmen and representatives of all associations to the Sialkot Chamber was to come up with a collective plan for promotion and protection of the export industry.

The meeting was attended by Group Leader Surgical Association Jahangir Babar Bajwa, Chairman of Pakistan Sports Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PSGMEA) Arshad Latif Butt, Chairman Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association Musharraf Ahmed Khawaja, Chairman Pakistan Gloves Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PGMEA) Ejaz Chaudhry and the business community.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Republic of Turkiye Dr. Mehmet Pacaci meeting with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar at Finance Division.

Gold prices dip by Rs.1,600 to Rs, 200,000

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,600 and was sold at Rs.200,000 on Saturday against its sale at Rs.201,600 the previous day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,372 to Rs.171,468 from Rs.172,840 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold decreased to Rs.157,179 from Rs.158,436 respectively.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained unchanged at Rs.2,140 and 1,834.70 respectively. The price of gold in the international market increased by US\$8 to \$1,856, the association reported.

China's road logistics price index up in Feb

BEIJING (APP): China's road logistics price index went up in February amid sound recovery of the transportation sector, industry data showed.

The index came in at 103.4 last month, up 5.2 percent year on year, according to a survey jointly conducted by the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing and the Guangdong Lin'an Logistics Group.

The sub-indices for all types of vehicles rose from the same period of last year, with that for full truckload logistics, which mainly measures bulk commodity and regional transportation, rising 4.5 percent year on year, said the survey.

It attributed the price growth to the stronger vitality of market entities and better market supply and demand as the country's economic operation continuously improved.

The survey was also upbeat about the performance of the sector in the future, emphasizing the further expansion of domestic demand amid China's strong economic rebound.

China crucial to mobile industry's ecosystem

BARCELONA (APP): Chinese companies are crucial to the ecosystem of the entire mobile industry, experts from GSMA, an industry group representing the world's biggest mobile phone operators, told Xinhua in recent interviews.

During the Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2023 in Barcelona, some media questioned whether Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE were eligible to participate following the "entity list" issued by the United States. A spokesperson for GSMA, organizer of the congress, told Xinhua that the association was fully allowed to conduct activities with companies such as Huawei and ZTE.

"Part of our role, as a global industry association, is precisely to align technological developments for the benefit of people, industries and society in a fragmented geopolitical environment," the spokesperson said. Companies such as Huawei "have always been important partners of GSMA and an important part of our ecosystem. We will not shut out Huawei and ZTE," said Lara Dewar, chief marketing officer (CMO) for GSMA.

Ambassadors show keen interest in RCCI Education Summit, Expo

RAWALPINDI (APP): Foreign ambassadors have shown keen interest in Saturday's two-day international education summit and expo organized by the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI).

Syrian Ambassador Dr Rameez Al-Rai, Indonesian Ambassador Adam Togyu and Moroccan Ambassador Mohamed Karmoune visited the stalls set up by various universities at the Education Expo and took the information.

Speaking on the occasion, Indonesian Envoy Adam Tugio said that Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) programme was being offered to Pakistani students, and added that it would provide an opportunity for local students to pursue post-graduate degrees in Indonesian universities.

The RCCI International

Summit and Expo bring an excellent opportunity for all interested students to gain first-hand information on various Indonesian scholarships and international programs, he added. Adam Tugio said that students would be acquainted with all the relevant information on the scholarship programs of their preference.

Earlier, Chamber President Saqib Rafiq said, "we have to bring such an education system that attracts young people towards business, and they can get jobs." The government must increase the education budget and make policies according to the demand of the industry.

Earlier, Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chatha inaugurated the summit and visited different corners established by different universities and education institutes. In his address, he said that it is a

great initiative and effort of the Rawalpindi Chamber to conduct an international educational summit.

He said that education is a way to identify oneself and plays a vital role in the development of a nation and society. Laiqat further said that such expos were important for career counselling too.

A panel discussion was also held on the occasion of the conference in which the speakers emphasized increasing the communication between the industry and academia.

The conference's purpose was to increase communication between industry and academia in view of contemporary challenges, to discuss and find solutions to problems related to emerging technology and employment opportunities, e-commerce, scholarships, expensive education and industry demand.

Chairman PEMRA assures ICCI of issuing Radio, TV licenses on priority basis

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) led by President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari held a meeting with Chairman PEMRA Muhammad Saleem Baig in his office and discussed with him the plan of starting an ICCI radio and TV channel. Wakil Khan, Director General Licensing, PEMRA was also present on the occasion.

Addressing the delegation, the Chairman PEMRA appreciated the plan of ICCI to start its own radio and TV channel and assured that he would issue their license on priority basis after fulfilling the documentary requirements.

He further assured that he would fully cooperate with the ICCI for the completion of this important project, as it would benefit the business community and the economy.

He said that the ICCI should coordinate with

foreign universities for providing quality business education to students to meet the needs of businesses and industries.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI briefed the Chairman PEMRA about the aims and objectives of starting radio and TV channels.

He said that these channels would educate the young generation about the importance of exports promotion, which the country desperately needs at this time. He said these channels would promote business role models for youth to motivate them to launch business start ups and create jobs for others.

He said that Pakistan's business and economic potential will be highlighted to attract local and foreign investment to Pakistan. He said that prominent business leaders and economists will be invited on radio and TV

channels to discuss the key issues of economy and find their optimum solutions.

He said that these channels will create better awareness in the business community about various business & economic issues to facilitate them in business development.

He said that the channels will focus on expanding the tax base and identifying new exports markets for Pakistan. He hoped that with the support of PEMRA, ICCI would soon be able to start its own radio and TV channel.

Engineer Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI, said that many TV channels normally highlight negative aspects of Pakistan while the ICCI radio and TV channels would highlight the positive aspects of Pakistan to promote a soft image of the country. He said self-made business persons would be promoted by highlighting their achievements.

Tesla recalls 3,470 Model Y vehicles over loose bolts



WASHINGTON (Reuters): Tesla Inc (TSLA.O) said it is recalling 3,470 2022 through 2023 Model Y vehicles in the United States because bolts securing the second-row seat-back frames may not have been securely tightened, according to a filing made public Saturday.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administ-

ration (NHTSA) said a loose seat frame bolt may reduce seat belt system performance, increasing injury risks during a crash.

Tesla told NHTSA it has identified five warranty claims since December that may be related to these conditions. Tesla said it was not aware of any injuries or deaths that may be related to the recall issue.

Tesla will inspect bolts securing second-row driver-side and passenger-side seat back frames to the lower seat frames and if needed tighten them to specifications. In December, a Tesla supplier implemented improved process controls along with improved training and supervision to ensure bolts are torqued to specifications, the automaker said.

Court Notices

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No.14/1. Institution 17/1/2023. Date of hearing. 8/3/2023. Hamza s/o Zafar Khan VS Mezullah Khan etc. Notice to no 2. Zahidullah. 3. Amer. 4. Abdul Samad Khan. 6. Mushtaq sons of Saifullah resident of Torwarsak tehsel Daggar district Buner.

Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 8/3/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte.

Given under my hand and seal of this Court. *****

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No.360/1. Institution 4/10/2021. Date of hearing. 11/3/2023. Gul Baz Khan VS Bakht Zamen etc. Notice to no 13/1.Mst Banu widow Amanullah Khan. 13/2. Liaquat Ali.13/4. Murad Ali sons of Amanullah resident of Krapa tehsel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 11/3/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte.

Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Lost & Found

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



BN Polo face FG Polo in final of 2nd President Polo Cup

LAHORE (APP): BN Polo will vie against FG Polo in the title clash of the prestigious 2nd President of Pakistan Polo Cup 2023 tomorrow (Sunday) here at the Jinnah Polo Fields. President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi will grace the final as chief guest and will witness and enjoy the enthralling and exciting final.

This was announced by Secretary of Jinnah Polo Fields, Major Ali Taimur (R), sponsors Takmeel Square CEO Dr Kamran Fazal, Saira Fazal, Director Marketing Agha Ali Hussain and foreign players of all the teams were also present on the occasion. Team BN Polo, one of the finalists, includes Baber Naseem, Roberto Arias, Hamza Mawaz Khan and Tito Ruiz Guinazu while Team FG Polo, the other finalist side, includes Mian Abbas Mukhtar, Saqib Khan Khakwani, Ramiro Zavaleta and Raul Laplacette. Maj Ali Taimur (R) said that the eight top teams in the tournament competed against each other for two weeks, after which the top two teams – BN Polo and FG Polo – qualified for the main final.

He said that both the umpires are from England, while each team has two foreign players of Argentina, Spain and England. Dr. Kamran Fazal, CEO of Sponsors Takmeel Square, said that he is very happy to promote and support the historic sport of Polo, the game of kings and knights. "Polo has been gaining popularity with each passing day and we will continue to support this beautiful game."

Shaheer wins Asian Continental boxing title

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistani boxer Shaheer Afridi has won the Asian Continental title by defeating the Thai boxer. Shaheer Afridi won the Middleweight World Boxing Council silver belt title in the third round. Thai boxer Sampoth Seesa could not defend his title.

He was challenged by Shaheer Afridi. Shaheer announced his title to be named after the martyrs of the Karachi Police Office attack. Shaheer belongs to Sindh Police Rapid Response Force (SPRRF). After winning the competition, Shaheer Afridi in his message dedicated his victory to the martyrs of the Karachi police office and the Peshawar attack.

Wimbledon to scrap Russia player ban: reports

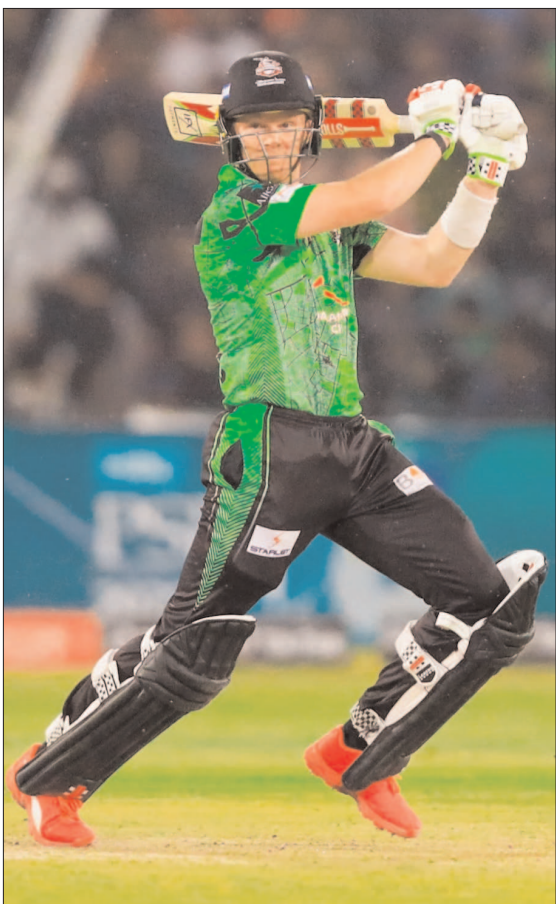
LONDON (Agencies): British tennis chiefs are set to abandon their controversial ban on Russian and Belarusian players ahead of this year's Wimbledon championships, it was reported.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, the UK's governing Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) came under pressure from the British government to impose a ban.

Russian and Belarusian players were eventually barred from all five ATP tournaments staged by the LTA, including the long-standing Queen's Club event in London. The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC), which runs Wimbledon, imposed a similar suspension. But Britain's Daily Telegraph reported Friday: "All expectations suggest that the AELTC will lower the ban on Russians and Belarusians".

However, it added players from those countries may need to sign a declaration promising they will not "promote or glorify" Russia president Vladimir Putin's war in any way during the tournament.

Jon Wertheim, of the US-based Sports Illustrated magazine, tweeted: "Hearing that @Wimbledon and the LTA will NOT repeat last year's decision to prohibit the Russians/Belarusians from competing."



LAHORE: Sam Billings scored a half-century.

Billings, Abdullah, Rashid lead Lahore Qalandars' 21-run victory

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Table-toppers Lahore Qalandars put another fantastic performance on Saturday night at the Gaddafi Stadium to defeat Multan Sultans by 21 runs.

Sam Billings' maiden half-century of the season and Abdullah Shafique's 48 helped Lahore Qalandars to 180 for nine after which a splendid show with the ball, in which Rashid Khan stood out with three for 15, restricted Multan Sultans to 159 for seven.

Lahore Qalandars lost Fakhar Zaman on only third ball of the match after Shaheen Afridi elected to bat. Abdullah made his intentions clear from the

first ball as he drove Sameen Gul down the ground for a boundary. The right-hander has been in good touch this season and his bat continued to ooze runs as he added 50 runs for the second wicket with Mirza Tahir Baig (17 off 11) and 69 for the third with Billings in an innings of 35 balls in which he smashed six fours and a six.

Billings smashed six fours and two sixes in his 35-ball 54 before he became Kieron Pollard's second wicket. The all-rounder had caught and bowled Abdullah earlier. Anwar Ali, Ihsanullah and Abbas Afridi also took two wickets each.

Multan Sultans had a

slow start to the run chase than they would have liked and they faced first blow in the seventh over when Shaheen took a brilliant catch to send back Shan Masood (19 off 20) off Zaman Khan. They sent in Usama Mir at one-drop, but that gamble did not pay off, as the leg-spinner could only muster 17 off 11 – hitting one six and a four.

Mohammad Rizwan was trapped in front by Sikandar Raza in the 10th over, but the actual turning point came when Rashid dismissed Usama and David Miller in a span of four balls in the 11th over. The leggie bowled Rilee Rossouw in his next over – 13th of the innings – to reduce Multan

Sultans to 87 for five.

Pollard did put up a show with the bat towards the end, but by then, it was all too late. The West Indian hit three sixes and two fours in his 39 off 28.

Rashid finished with incredible figures of three for 15

Scores in brief:

Lahore Qalandars 180-9, 20 overs (Sam Billings 54, Abdullah Shafique 48; Kieron Pollard 2-16, Anwar Ali 2-21, Abbas Afridi 2-25, Ihsanullah 2-33)

Multan Sultans 159-7, 20 overs (Kieron Pollard 39, Mohammad Rizwan 30; Rashid Khan 3-15)

Player of the match – Rashid Khan (Lahore Qalandars).

Arsenal stage thrilling fightback to maintain five-point lead over Man City

MANCHESTER (Agencies): Arsenal recovered from conceding the second fastest goal in Premier League history as Reiss Nelson's stoppage-time strike gave the Premier League leaders a thrilling 3-2 win over Bournemouth after title rivals Manchester City beat Newcastle 2-0 on Saturday.

Mikel Arteta's side were trailing by two goals with just over half an hour left.

But the Gunners showed they can cope with the pressure of the title race with a remarkable comeback that kept them five points ahead of second placed City.

"I'm incredibly happy. It was just mad. It was a really special win and it took until the last second to earn it," Arteta said. Arsenal hadn't even touched the ball when Philip Billing gave second-bottom Bournemouth the lead after just 9.11 seconds with a clinical finish from inside the Gunners area.

The quickest goal in Premier League history was scored by Shane Long after 7.69 seconds for Southampton against

Watford in 2019. Arsenal fell further behind in the 57th minute as Marcos Senesi escaped Thomas Partey to glance a header past Aaron Ramsdale from a corner. Partey made amends for his slack marking five minutes later when he reduced the deficit with a close-range finish from Emile Smith-Rowe's header.

Underlining their desire to win a first title since 2004, Arsenal seized the momentum and equalised through Ben White's powerful finish from Nelson's cross in the 70th minute.

Nelson completed Arsenal's incredible revival in the seventh minute of stoppage-time when the substitute produced a superb finish from 20 yards to spark scenes of wild celebration all around the Emirates Stadium. "They never gave up. We want to stay there (at the top) for as long as possible," Arteta said.

Earlier on Saturday, City rode their luck in a 2-0 win over Newcastle at the Etihad Stadium. Phil Foden and Bernardo Silva scored

the goals for the champions, who were let off the hook by a series of glaring misses from the visitors.

Sean Longstaff, Callum Wilson and Joelinton were all guilty of not even forcing Ederson into a save as fifth placed Newcastle suffered another blow to their hopes of a top-four finish.

"It was an incredibly good result for us because it was a tricky game," City boss Pep Guardiola said.

- Potter gets a break -

Wesley Fofana eased the pressure on Chelsea boss Graham Potter as the French defender sealed a 1-0 win against Leeds at Stamford Bridge. Fofana put Chelsea in front with his first league goal for the club seven minutes after half-time, the former Leicester centre-back rising to head home from Ben Chilwell's corner. It was Chelsea's first goal in 396 minutes and just their second in seven games in all competitions.

The 10th placed Blues held on for just their third win in their last 16 games in all competitions.



MANCHESTER: Newcastle's Jamaal Lascelles heads the ball over Manchester City's Jack Grealish during the English Premier League soccer match.

David Warner wants to know when he can join PSL

PERTH (INP): David Warner, Australian opener, known for his aggressive batting style expressed his eagerness to play for Lahore Qalandars in the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Commenting on an Instagram post shared by Qalandars' spin maestro Rashid Khan hailing the heat of the LQ's game against Quetta Gladiators, he wrote, "When can I play".

Last year during Australia's tour to Pakistan, Warner, while talking to the virtual press conference, had revealed the reason behind his not participating in the marquee event so far. "We are often playing international cricket during the window of the PSL. That is the reason why I could not take part in the tournament," he said.

Medvedev wins in Dubai for third title

DUBAI (AP): Daniil Medvedev won his 18th tour-level title and third in a row by beating Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-2 in an all-Russian final at the Dubai Championships on Saturday.

The former No. 1 extended his winning streak to 14 matches in a run that started on Valentine's Day and included back-to-back trophies in Rotterdam and Doha.

Medvedev, on the second longest winning streak of his career, broke Rublev twice in each set and won the last five games on the hard court. Rublev was the defending champion but quickly fell behind as he couldn't hold his serve in the opening game.

"It's amazing because the start of the year was not perfect," Medvedev said on court after defeating his good friend. "So I was doubting a lot, and now it just feels better."

Medvedev gave top-ranked Novak Djokovic his first defeat of the year in the semifinals.

Football event continued for second consecutive day in Wana



TANK (APP): The competitions under "Football Championship" continued for the second consecutive day.

A communiqué, issued from Wana Scouts Stadium, states that Ghwa Khwa Combine Football Club made it into the finals while scoring 4 goals against A.S. Football Club Wana. Large numbers of people from different walks of life including students and sports lovers thronged the Wana Scouts Stadium to enjoy the match.

The event was reported of full excitement and curiosity as the participant's teams throughout the tournament exhibited excellent skill and performance.

More than 50 teams/clubs including 14 locals are participating the tournament, organized by Pak Army. The residents lauded the efforts of the Pak Army for providing sports opportunities to inhabitants.

Not taking wickets cost us the game: Rossington

ISLAMABAD (APP): Karachi Kings' wicketkeeper-batter Adam Rossington believes the inability to get wickets in the middle overs was the reason behind their close six-wicket defeat against Islamabad United in the 19th match of the Pakistan Super League.

Rossington, who played a crucial 20-run knock up the order, spoke to the media here and expressed his disappointment over the Kings' six-wicket defeat against United before asserting that the game got away from his side in the wicketless middle period.

"It is disappointing obviously to lose another game on the bounce. I think we probably got to a par score and our captain played really well," said Rossington after the end of the match

on late Friday.

"And then, a few early wickets got us into the game, I think it was just that middle period in which we couldn't take wickets, that's where the game got away from us and those two lads [Azam Khan and Faheem Ashraf] played really well and didn't really give us a chance," he said.

Rossington then went on to term Kings' total a roundabout par after a slow start before asserting that the ordinary bowling cost them a crucial match.

"I think it was probably roundabout par from where we were especially, we lost early wickets and still took it to 202. Obviously, our captain played brilliantly again today to get us to what was probably a par score or maybe we could

have added 10 more," said Rossington.

"I think we've been pretty good on the hold with the bat so far, it's just with the ball, other day we were a bit expensive at the death and today it was the middle period, not taking wickets. I think it's one of the things that if you can take wickets and get new batters coming at the crease, it's always easier to slow down the score," he said.

It may be mentioned that the Kings remained at the fifth position with four points in eight matches in the PSL 8 standings with a narrow six-wicket defeat against Islamabad United.

Kings' skipper Imad's brilliant knock of 92 runs off just 54 balls went in vain as Azam Khan's quickfire 72 sealed the deal for the United.

10 foreign players from seven countries named in squads for women's matches

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board today unveiled the two women's squads for the three Women's League exhibition matches, which will be played ahead of the HBL PSL 8 matches in Rawalpindi on 8, 10 and 11 March. The women's matches will start at 2pm and will be followed by the men's matches at 7pm.

Bismah Maroof will captain Amazons, which include Ireland's Laura Delany, England's trio of Lauren Winfield-Hill, Maia Bouchier and Tammy Beaumont, and Australia's Tess Flintoff. Nida Dar will lead the Super Women, which will also comprise Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu, Danni Wyatt of England, Jahanara Alam of Bangladesh, South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt and Lea Tahuhu of New Zealand.

This means world's 10 leading foreign players from seven countries will be represented in the three matches, which are billed as soft launch of the Pakistan Women's League, which is tentatively planned for September.

These 10 foreign stars will be accompanied by Pakistan's 20 elite players, four U19 players who featured in the recently held ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup (Areesha

Noor, Eyman Fatima, Shawaal Zulfiqar and Syeda Aroob Shah) and two emerging cricketers (Fatima Khan and Syeda Masooma Zahra).

The 36 cricketers have been equally divided into two sides with the playing line-ups to include a maximum of four and minimum of three foreign players and a minimum of one emerging or U19 player. Of the 10 foreign players, eight cricketers recently featured in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 in South Africa with Delany and Athapaththu captaining Ireland and Sri Lanka, respectively.

South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt is one of the biggest stars in women's cricket. She was selected in the Team of ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 and is the sixth-ranked batter in the world. Similarly, Danni Wyatt is one of the recognisable names in women's cricket following her 1,776 ODI and 2,369 T20I runs. Along with Suzie Bates of New Zealand, Wyatt is the second most capped T20I player with 143 matches, eight matches behind India's Harmanpreet Kaur.

In the ICC rankings for batters, Athapaththu is ranked 11th and is followed by Wyatt (16th), Beaumont (44th) and Delany (61st). Tahuhu is the highest-ranked foreign bowler in eighth

position, followed by Jahanara (60th).

Pakistan's high-ranked players in the field are Bismah Maroof (33rd), Nida Dar (38th), Aliya Riaz (56th) (all batters); Sadia Iqbal (19th), Nida Dar (21st), Nashra Sandhu (26th), Anam Amin (37th) and Tuba Hassan (39th) (all bowlers).

Australia's Tess Flintoff and Beaumont missed out on last month's event. 19-year-old Tess is knocking at the doors of international cricket, 31-year-old Beaumont is already an established star cricketer after representing England in seven Tests, 103 ODIs and 99 T20Is, scoring a total of 5,493 international runs with 10 centuries.

Amazons' captain Bismah Maroof: "I am delighted to lead Amazons team in the three exhibition matches of the Women's League. This is a great opportunity for our players to express their talent. The involvement of foreign players in the exhibition matches will provide a perfect opportunity to our players to learn from them."

Super Women captain Nida Dar: "I am excited to lead the exciting bunch of players from Super Women. The exhibition matches will provide a perfect platform to the emerging players to exhibit their talent. The foreign players' participating in these matches and their

experience will provide a great learning to the local players."

Squads: Amazons - Bismah Maroof (captain), Aliya Riaz, Anam Amin, Areesha Noor, Eyman Fatima, Fatima Khan, Fatima Sana, Ghulam Fatima, Gull Feroza, Kainat Imtiaz, Laura Delany (Ireland), Lauren Winfield-Hill (England), Maia Bouchier (England), Nashra Sandhu, Sadaf Shamas, Tammy Beaumont (England), Tess Flintoff (Australia) and Umm-e-Hani



Super Women - Nida Dar (captain) Aimen Anwar, Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka), Danni Wyatt (England), Iram Javed, Jahanara Alam (Bangladesh), Laura Wolvaardt (South Africa), Lea Tahuhu (New Zealand), Muneeba Ali, Natalia Parvaiz, Omaira Sohail, Sadia Iqbal, Shawaal Zulfiqar, Sidra Amin, Sidra Nawaz,

Syeda Aroob Shah, Syeda Masooma Zahra and Tuba Hassan



Schedule: 8 Mar – 1st match, 2pm, Pindi Cricket Stadium. Shozab Raza and Saleema Imtiaz (on-field umpires), Tariq Rasheed (third umpire) and Humaira Farah fourth umpire. Mohammad Anees (match referee)

10 Mar – 2nd match, 2pm, Pindi Cricket Stadium. Shozab Raza and Humaira Farah (on-field umpires), Tariq Rasheed (third umpire) and Saleema Imtiaz (fourth umpire). Mohammad Anees (match referee)

11 Mar – 3rd match, 2pm, Pindi Cricket Stadium. Tariq Rasheed and Saleema Imtiaz (on-field umpires), Shozab Raza (third umpire) and Humaira Farah (fourth umpire). Mohammad Anees (match referee)



In brief

One Covid case reported

RAWALPINDI (APP): One more person was diagnosed with fatal Coronavirus during the last 24 hours, raising the district's tally of confirmed cases to 47,768. As per the latest data released by the District Health Authority here Saturday, the infected cases included 44,122 from Rawalpindi and 3,646 from other districts. The report added that the new case had arrived from the Mandi Bahaudin area while one confirmed the patient was quarantined at home. The report further updated that 7,006,011 people, including 44,790 health workers, had jabbed themselves against the lethal Coronavirus (COVID-19) across the district since the vaccination administering drive launched on March 10, 2021. District Health Authority added that during the last 24 hours, 303 samples were collected, out of which 302 were declared negative, while the positivity rate was recorded at 0.33 per cent.

IRSA releases 96,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (INP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 96,600 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 52,900 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1451.50 feet and was 53.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 17,600 cusecs while outflow was 55,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1106.85 feet, which was 56.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded at 18,700 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 62,000, 43,400, 32,800 and 8,300 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 8,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

PSH organizes two-day blood camp

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Sweet Home (PSH) with the collaboration of Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal (PBM) organized two-day blood donation camp for Thalassemia-affected children at National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad. A large number of students, professors, faculty members and other staff of NUML varsity donated blood for a noble cause to save innocent lives of children suffering from Thalassemia, said a press release issued here on Saturday. On the occasion, Chief of Pakistan Sweet Home Zamrud Khan paid a visit to the blood camp and thanked the students and other staff for donating blood to root out the deadly disease from the country. "Youth are a great asset of Pakistan who always vigorously participated for humanity and their welfare." He appreciated the students, faculty members and management of NUML for supporting him and his team for the great initiative to save the lives of children. The Sweet Home being an NGO was not only changing the lives of thousands of orphans but it was also the hope of millions of innocent children who are constantly in dire need of blood donations, he added.

PPP ready for elections, Kundi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Faisal Karim Kundi Saturday made it clear that his party is ready for elections in the country and his party is not running away from the election but everything will be done according to the constitution. Talking to a private news channel, he said it was the duty of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to announce the date

of the elections, adding, no single man will be allowed to impose his will "on the basis of might".

"The decision of elections will not be taken on the dictation of one person," he added.

He said "a person deprived of power" was threatening state institutions according to a "planned agenda" and criticizing opponent parties to get his personal interests.

"Constitution, democracy and the current system

cannot be enslaved on the basis of bullying and propaganda", he added.

Replying to a question, he said previous 4 years regime of Khan, the institutions were badly used to fulfil his personal ambitions and tried to make national institutions controversial by making hue and cry over sensitive issues.

He said the PPP did not believe in the politics of abuse and victimization but the democratic norms.

Rasheed's exemption plea accepted in Murree case

RAWALPINDI (NNI): A district and sessions court has accepted Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed's exemption plea on medical basis in a case registered against him by Murree police for manhandling a law enforcement officer during arrest.

As per details, the AML chief Sheikh Rasheed's counsel Sardar Shehbaz appeared in additional sessions judge Irfan Naseem's court.

The plea was filed in sessions court by the prosecution to suspend Sheikh Rasheed's bail. Furthermore, the hearing of the case registered by

Murree police against AML chief Sheikh was adjourned till March 18.

On Feb 8, an Islamabad court handed over Awami Muslim League (AML) Chief Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed to Murree police on one-day transit remand. After hearing arguments, the court had approved Rasheed's one-day transit remand and directed police to present him before the relevant court on next hearing.

The FIR The first information report (FIR) was lodged against former interior minister Sheikh Rashid at a police station in Murree for interfering in official

affairs. Sheikh Rashid threatened the police personnel and stated that he would not spare them, according to the FIR. The FIR was registered under Section 154 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Pakistan.

The FIR stated that the former minister physically pushed and abused the police officers and threatened them with serious consequences at gunpoint.

The Awami Muslim League (AML) chief was arrested from his Rawalpindi residence on Feb 2 in a case of levelling allegations against Asif Ali Zardari.

Six members of criminal gang arrested for looting houses

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad capital police Robbery and Dacoity Unit police team apprehended six accused including two women allegedly involved in looting houses and recovered gold ornaments worth nine million rupees from their possession, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to elim-

inate the crime from the city.

Following these directives the Robbery and Dacoity Unit police team worked hard and arrested a former jailbird gang of six persons including two females who were allegedly involved in looting houses in the guise of house maids.

The Police team also recovered gold ornaments worth nine million rupees from their possession. The accused were identified as Robina alias Rubi (gang leader), Sumaira, Muhammad Kashif, Muhammad Faheem,

Shahzad Hassan and Muhammad Waseem.

During the investigation, they confessed to having looted houses in Margalla and Ramna police station Jurisdiction. Cases have been registered against them and further investigation is underway. CPO/DIG Operations Islamabad Syed Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari has appreciated the performance of the police team who arrested these thieves.

He has appealed to the citizens to verify the bio-data of domestic servants before employing them.

'Her Hunar' to sharpen entrepreneurial skills of women: SAPM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Commerce Malik Ghulam M. Raza Rabbani Khar while underlining the importance of women's empowerment on Saturday said 'Her Hunar' would provide an opportunity for the participants to sharpen their entrepreneurial skills and acquire much-needed knowledge of the global market.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the "Her Hunar" exhibition, he said that it would also provide a platform for women to kick-start an idea, label, brand or production house.

He said we could not grow as a nation if only half of the population was working. Women's empowerment was an essential component for growth in developing nations like Pakistan for lifting millions of families out of the poverty cycle, he said.

Ghulam Rabbani said

encouraging women entrepreneurs would be strongly assistive in a positive growth trajectory and assist in meeting the objectives of the United Nation's Sustainable Development goals.

He said the presence of female entrepreneurs at the 'Her Hunar' exhibition was a unique opportunity for Pakistani women entrepreneurs hailing from the North of Pakistan to market their 'hunar'.

The SAPM said such exhibitions would provide a platform for women entrepreneurs to explore the international market for their beautiful and unique products. Additional session on the protection of Intellectual Property Rights was another commendable step, he added.

Congratulating the Ministry of Commerce and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) for organizing the

exhibition, he expressed the hope that the ministry and TDAP would take further initiatives to promote women entrepreneurs.

In the welcome address, Secretary TADP Fareed Iqbal Qureshi said that the exhibition would provide an opportunity to translate 'hunar' of the women. It would also help sharpen the skills of women entrepreneurs to expand their businesses globally. He said in future more events would be organized for women of the South of Pakistan.

Earlier, the SAPM inaugurated the exhibition and distributed souvenirs among the participating women entrepreneurs from across the country.

Ambassador of Turkmenistan and Dean of Diplomatic Corps Mr. Atadjan Movlamov and Chief Secretary Gilgit Baltistan Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani were also present on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistants to the Prime Minister Malik Ghulam Raza Rabbani Khar addressing during the inauguration ceremony of "Her Hunar" at Pak China Friendship Center. —APP Photo

Mushaal urges world to take notice of gruesome HR violations in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairperson of Peace and Culture Organization Mushaal Hussein Mullick on Saturday said that the fascist Narendra Modi regime is snatching ancestral lands of Kashmiri Muslims to make a way for Hindu settlements under the nefarious plan to change the demography of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

In a strong reaction to the Indian notorious government's ongoing drive to evict the local residents of their lands and render them homeless, Mushaal said that Modi's Hindutva regime started attaching properties of the Kashmiris in the occupied valley to put pressure on them to give up their legitimate struggle for internationally recognized right to self-determination, said a press release.

She revealed that the occupation authorities attached two more Kashmiris' houses under draconian law Unlawful activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in Srinagar and Sopore, besides 168 properties of Kashmiris in Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri and Poonch district in last few days.

Mushaal, wife of incarcerated hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, said that supremacist Hindutva regime got inspiration from Zionist government

in Israel, which encroached upon Palestinians properties through various brutal tactics and Modi government was replicating the same model in the occupied Kashmir, which would be resisted at all fronts.

She went on to say that occupation authorities hell-bent on rendering Kashmiris homeless in their own homeland on one pretext or another, demolishing their houses and snatching their ancestral lands to make way for non-residential settlers in the occupied territory and snatch the Muslim identity of the territory.

The chairperson noted that attaching properties of Kashmiris was a sheer political vendetta on part of the Indian regime and was meant to bully them to shun the legitimate struggle to break the shackles of Indian slavery.

She expressed her surprise that notorious Modi regime gave a free hand to over nine hundred thousand brutal Indian troops to commit atrocities on the people of the occupied territory to terrify them through different tactics to silence the dissenting voices in IIOJK. Mushaal stated that in the wake of repealing the special status of IIOJK, Indian fascist government issued domicile certificates to thousands of Indian Hindus and

was now evicting them of their lands so as to render them homeless.

The Chairperson said that Indian authorities were confiscating properties of Kashmiris to punish them for their affiliation with freedom movement, adding that occupation troops were regularly destroying Kashmiris' houses during violent military operations. She said that Killing of Kashmiris in fake encounters and destroying their properties was a norm in the occupied valley, as Modi regime was planning not only to render Kashmiris homeless but to deprive them of their identity as well.

Mushaal stated that Indian government was using every brutal and highhanded tactic to stifle the freedom voice of Kashmiris. However, the Hurriyat leader vowed that Indian machinations would not deter the Kashmiris from taking to legitimate struggle to its logical ends.

She lamented that the world power and human rights organizations observed a criminal silence in this human rights violations and fundamental rights of Kashmiris. Mushaal urged the world powers and UN bodies to wake up from their sweet slumber and take notice of the Modi regime's brutal actions in the occupied valley.

RPO takes notice of substandard food

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Regional Police Officer (RPO) for the city Syed Khurram Ali has taken notice of complaints regarding the substandard and unhygienic food being served to police personnel deployed during Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket matches at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Expressing his dismay over the issue, the RPO has directed the City Police Officer Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani to take strict departmental action against those found responsible for serving substandard food.

Furthermore, he has instructed that a proper menu should be devised in consultation with the police force and the Superintendent of Police (SP) Headquarters Rawalpindi.

To ensure the quality of food being served, surprise inspections of the police mess are to be carried out on a daily basis.

Additionally, the RPO has emphasized that the police force should be provided with all necessary facilities during matches.

The RPO has made it clear that negligence in this regard will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

The authorities concerned have been urged to take all necessary steps to ensure that police personnel deployed during

Meanwhile, 5,000 cops are deployed for PSL's security, while 347 traffic wardens and officers were also deployed to regulate traffic in the circle.

The spokesperson added that the authorities concerned had been directed to ensure the best possible security arrangements for the cricket matches.

The arrangements were finalised keeping in view the convenience and safety of the players and fans of the game, he said.

Commissioner directs RWMC to improve city's sanitation

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaqat Ali Chatha on Saturday directed the Waste Management Company to improve sanitation at all public places of the city, especially the Murree road.

While visiting the control room of the RWMC, he said that efforts were underway to make the Murree road a role model free from encroachments and waste.

Liaqat directed the officials to devise an effective plan in collaboration with Municipal Corporation, Murree, to maintain the natural beauty of the hill station. He directed to place waste bins of the

same colours outside every hotel in Murree.

The Commissioner added that provision of a hygienic environment was the priority of the government and directed the officials to ensure the cleanliness of bus stands and all union councils of the district regularly.

He asked the RWMC officials to repair the non-functional machinery and establish more transfer stations in the city to facilitate the transportation of garbage to the landfill site.

On the occasion, the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar briefed the Commissioner that the company came into being in

2013 and carrying out cleaning operations in various tehsils of the district, including newly established district Murree, Gujjar Khan, Taxila, Kahuta, besides Rawalpindi city.

He updated the Commissioner that RWMC has eight sub-departments and eleven members of the Board of Directors.

He informed that RWMC staff comprising 4,785 members worked in three shifts and owned 325 vehicles and four canals of land at the Liaqat bagh transfer site. He said the garbage was later shifted to 600 kanal landfill site on Chakbeli Road from the transfer station.

Pakistani universities contribute over Rs. 500 Million for earthquake relief in Turkiye

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani universities have pledged an amount of Rs. 500 million for earthquake relief activities in Turkey.

A 34 member high-level Pakistani delegation from 18 universities participated in the Eurasian Higher Education Summit in Istanbul under the auspices of Private Sector Universities Pakistan (APSUP).

The universities pledged more than 500 million for the earthquake-affected areas of Turkiye which would be spent on relief, rehabilitation, and scholarships for students from the affected areas.

During the summit, the Pakistani Pavilion was set up, and the Chairman of APSUP, Prof. Dr. Abdul Rehman, along with Rector Superior University, Prof. Dr. Sumaira Rehman, handed over a cheque of

400,000 Turkish lira to Elif Aydin, Vice Chairman of the Board Anatolian Education and Cultural

Foundation Turkiye.

The President of Eurasian Universities Union, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Aydin, expressed his gratitude to APSUP and the Pakistani nation for their continued support to the Turkish people, especially during hard times.

Several universities in Pakistan extended their support to the earthquake-affected people of Turkey.

The University of Lahore donated one million US dollars in the form of 150 tons of edibles, fire-proof and waterproof tents, blankets, and medicines.

The University of Faisalabad donated 110 hundred dollars for community services, and a 20-member team from the University of Faisalabad participated in rehabilitation activities in the affected areas.

The University of Sialkot and the International Institute of Science, Arts, and Technology Gujranwala

jointly announced scholarships worth 10 million Pakistani rupees for Turkish students affected by the earthquake.

Under the University of Management and Technology Lahore Scholarship Program for Turkey, scholarships worth one million dollars will be awarded, with special preference given to students from the affected areas.

Additionally, the Coordinator General of COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Chaudhary who was also part of the Pakistani delegation, offered fully funded scholarships and research fellowships to Turkish nationals severely affected by the earthquake in collaboration with APSUP and member universities of COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence.

The APSUP member universities remain committed to extending all possible assistance to the earthquake-affected people of Turkiye.



ISLAMABAD: Heavy machinery is being used during construction work of IJP Road as development work in the city. —APP Photo

An ISIS member arrested

JOWZJAN (Agencies): A member of Daesh group was arrested by the security forces in the city of Shaberghan, the center of Jowzjan. Jowzjan chief of police said reporter that this member of Daesh was arrested during an operation conducted by the security forces. The detainee was planning to travel to Faryab, while he was arrested by the security forces, in the center of Jawzjan, according to the sources some documents were also recovered from him.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 12, 1444 — Sunday, March 05, 2023

TB treatment facility opened

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. 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.

Six Daesh affiliates killed in Herat city

HERAT (TOLONews): Six people affiliated with Daesh group, including a woman, were killed during a security forces' operation on a hideout in Herat's PD14, Herat security authorities said.

The operation occurred last night, and one of those killed was a foreign national, according to Herat's security command.

"The security command forces went to the area, after a quick fight between them, six of the Daesh members who lived in the house were killed," said Abdullah Insaf, spokesman of Herat security command.

Security officials added that the Islamic Emirate

forces had also taken several weapons from people affiliated with the Daesh group.

Meanwhile, Herat residents asked the Islamic Emirate to take steps in ensuring the safety of the residents of the province.

"It is not called life when every night we sleep in fear, when you don't know what is going on in the neighborhood," said Ahmad Shah Ferozi, a resident of Herat.

"We ask the Islamic Emirate to prevent these terrorists, so that people live in a safe and peaceful environment," said Sharif Ahmad, another resident of Herat.

Some military experts consider the presence and

activities of people affiliated with Daesh in the cities to be worrying.

"Daesh is considered a serious threat, especially inside Afghanistan," said Mohammad Naem Ghayor, a military expert.

This is the third military operation against Daesh affiliates in Herat city in the previous six months.

Five people affiliated with the Daesh group were killed in an operation by the security forces in the northern part of Herat city over four months ago. Before that incident, three members of Daesh were killed during intelligence force operations in PD4 of Herat city.

Mine collapse killed 2 gold miners in Badakhshan

BADAKHSHAN (Agencies): Two people died and one other was injured in the collapse incident of the gold mine in the Yahwan district of Badakhshan province.

The provincial Information and Culture department head Mazuddin Ahmadi told this news agency that in the collapse incident of the gold mine, two people died and one other was injured in the Qatarbada village in Yahwan district of Badakhshan province.

He said that the bodies were taken out from under the debris by the security officials of the district with the cooperation of the local residents and the injured were taken to the health center for treatment.

Minister asked for Turkey's cooperation

KABUL (Agencies): The Acting Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Minister, Mawlawi Ataullah Omari, in a meeting with Cihad Erginay, Turkish ambassador to Kabul, discussed bilateral cooperation between two countries.

Minister Omari, said that Turkey has a wide experience in the agriculture sector, asked for that country's cooperation in this sector.

For his part, ambassador Erginay, sharing his experience traveling to several provinces of Afghanistan, he termed Afghanistan a suitable place for agriculture.

Poppy land eradicated; arrest 7 drug traffickers

KABUL (Agencies): Police arrested 7 drug trafficker in Takhar, Jowzjan, and Sar-e-Pul provinces, 4 acres of poppy land eradicated.

The counter-narcotics officers eradicated 4 acres of poppy farms and arrested 7 individuals on charges of drug trafficking in the aforementioned provinces, said Saturday the Interior Minister in a statement.

From the detainees 3 arrested on Sar-i-pul, 3 others arrested in Takhar and one other arrested in Jowzjan, 4 acres of poppy land eradicated in these 3 provinces.

Stability in region tied to stability in Afghanistan

KABUL (Agencies): Afghan Ambassador in Islamabad Sardar Ahmed Shekib met with UAE Ambassador Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zabi on the growing relations between Kabul and Abu Dhabi and Afghan citizen's problems in terms of visas in UAE.

Mr. Shekib said that Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan seeks positive relations with the world based on mutual respect.

On his part, Ibrahim Al-Zabi, UAE envoy to Pakistan said that stability in Afghanistan meant stability in the region.

He stressed that UAE is committed to cooperating in the stability of Afghanistan.

Minister Khairkhah meets EU Special Political Envoy



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Information and Culture Minister, Mullah Khairullah Khairkhah, Saturday met with the European Union special political representative, Thomas Nicholson, and his accompanying delegations in his office.

Minister Khairkhah,

thanked European representatives for their cooperation, discussed on the interested issues of the country, including the political developments in Afghanistan, according to a statement received by this news agency.

Minister of Information and Culture said that free-

dom of expression supported based on the Islamic values and national interests of the country, adding historical heritage preserved.

He asked the European Union's representatives to support media and journalists financially.

Nicholson exchanged

views on the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, freedom of expression, mainly the activity of the Commission on Media Violation (CMV).

In the end, Minister Khairkhah, assured addressing the problems of media in the country and full cooperations.

McCaul seek documents related to Afghanistan withdrawal

KABUL (TOLONews): House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul once again called for information from the Biden administration about the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan.

The committee issued a letter saying that if the department's noncompliance persists, the committee will be forced to proceed with "compulsory process."

"House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul sent a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the department's ongoing failure to produce documents and information requested by the committee pertaining to the

Biden administration's disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal. To date, the State Department has produced only 236 pages of documents, most of which were already publicly available or included substantial redactions.

If the department's noncompliance persists, the committee will be forced to proceed with compulsory process," the letter reads. The Islamic Emirate said that the US forces' withdrawal was beneficial for both Afghanistan and the US.

"The withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan had a benefit for America as well. It ended a very costly and long war, and the Ameri-

cans could not continue this war," said Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman of the Islamic Emirate.

Some political analysts have different views about the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan.

"The positive aspect of the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan was that Afghanistan felt more independent, and the long conflicts in Afghanistan were lessened," said a political analyst.

Previously, House Republicans in US Congress sent a series of letters to senior leadership at the White House, Department of Defense, State Department, and others requesting a

tranche of documents related to the end of America's longest war. The chairman of the House Oversight Committee said that the Biden Administration was unprepared for the Afghanistan withdrawal.

"The Biden Administration was tragically unprepared for the Afghanistan withdrawal and their decisions in the region directly resulted in a national security and humanitarian catastrophe, every relevant department and agency should be prepared to cooperate and provide all requested information," said James Comer, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee.

Human rights crisis worsens in Afghanistan, says Bennett

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Islamic Emirate has rejected the latest report of the UN special rapporteur Richard Bennett that the human rights crisis in Afghanistan has worsened during the last six months of 2022 despite some encouraging developments.

In his report presented to the UN recently, Bennett said the systematic violation of the human rights of women and girls had deepened even further and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of peaceful assembly and association, expression and the rights to life and protection against ill-treatment had increasingly been flouted.

He said the authorities had instituted hudud and qisas punishments, measures indicative of a revival of the policies of the 1990s.

The Special Rapporteur was deeply concerned that,

increasingly, the Taliban

were ruling Afghanistan through fear and repressive policies aimed at suppressing communities, and women in particular.

In mid-November 2022, the authorities banned access of women and girls to parks, gyms and public baths and on 21 December, they announced the immediate suspension of women from universities. Three days later, on 24 December, women were barred from working for domestic and international NGOs, with a consequent severe negative impact on the life-saving humanitarian services they provide, the report said.

The report further said Afghanistan continued to grapple with a serious economic and humanitarian crisis affecting almost the entire population.

It said durable peace and reconciliation required an inclusive administration, represented by all political, religious and ethnic groups.

The 2004 Constitution remained suspended, and the authorities say that they were currently drafting a

new constitution based on sharia law.

Both houses of parliament have been abolished, as has the Electoral Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The judiciary has been replaced. The media is muzzled. In sum, checks and balances on power are severely compromised, the report said.

The report also highlighted a few encouraging developments.

Senior Islamic Emirate officials held substantive discussions with the Special Rapporteur, who continued to meet with representatives of the reinstated Human Rights and Women's International Affairs Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An interministerial technical and coordination committee, tasked to address recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms, has been established.

Discussions have begun on implementing some recommendations made by the



Special Rapporteur in his initial report. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has continued to provide technical advice and awareness-raising sessions to the Office of Prison Administration. The Special Rapporteur was informed of encouraging cooperation with regard to cultural heritage institutions.

However, deputy spokesman for the Islamic Emirate Qari Mohammad Yusuf Ahmadi told Pajhwok Afghan News about the report: "We strongly reject their claims. Alhamdulillah, our system is committed to human rights."

He added everyone in Afghanistan enjoyed their right.

West not optimistic Afghan women will return to classes

KABUL (TOLONews): The US special envoy for Afghanistan, Thomas West, said that the Islamic Emirate's promise to reopen schools and universities for women has not been fulfilled.

In a special interview with TOLONews, West added that the issue of women's education and work is among the very first issues that US will continue to raise in the international forum, with the Islamic Emirate and with major powers in the region.

"If a decision is made by the Taliban to see girls to return to schools, to see women return to university, to see women return to work, to move freely, all of those decisions will be certainly welcomed by the international community, but they will make that decision for internal Afghan reasons, not because the international community is making this request. It has been a consistent call of Afghans from across the country to see these decisions made," West said.

As the new academic year is approaching, Thomas West said that he is "frankly not hopeful" that in the new year females will be allowed to go to schools and universities.

"Even in the weeks fol-



lowing the March 23rd decision last year to ban girls from secondary schools, we heard promises that they would be back in school soon. Frankly those promises fall flat at this point, and we need to see delivery," he further stated.

Meanwhile, UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed asked the international community to remain united in to addressing the educational needs and rights of Afghan girls.

"For more than 500 days the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan have denied secondary school girls their basic right to an education, this must end immediately," Mohammed said.

"It is unfortunate what is happening in Afghanistan, when we are not talking about digital education, how do you make sure that girls get digital education, that they get computational

education so that they can participate meaningfully in the digital world-- that in other parts we are faced with the situation where there is not even education for girls," Mathu Joyini, Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations and Chair of the Committee on the Status of Women, told a press conference.

However, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, Zabihullah Mujahid, said that the current government is not against the work and education of women, and due to preparations, this work has been suspended until further notice.

"This issue belongs to the two ministries, which are that of education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, and whenever they are ready, it will be allowed," Mujahid added.

Treatment of addicts one of IE priorities: Hanafi



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Vice and Virtue Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Khalid Hanafi said in a 3-day training seminar for 3,500 drug addicts that the treatment of drug addicts one of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan priorities.

On the starts of the seminar, Minister Hanafi said that the Ministry of Vice

and Virtue striving to eradicate this bad phenomenon once and all from the country.

The religious scholars of the Ministry of Vice and Virtue will show you the basic rules of Islam so that you can be physically and spiritually find your health back and be able to returned to their homes he added.

The Deputy Minister of Interior for Counter-Narcotics on the opening of the seminar that said the Islamic Emirate is committed to a serious fight against drugs and that efforts are being made to treat drug addicts.

He called on international charities and organizations to cooperate with the Islamic Emirate in this respect.

Ministry: Fuel prices lowering for consumers in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The Minister of Industry and Commerce said that according to the oil export agreement with Russia, the price of fuel has decreased by 10 percent, and efforts are ongoing to also reduce food prices.

"We are trying to reduce the prices, as you see prices have been decreased for

gas, petrol and wheat," said Akhund Zada Abdulsalam, spokesman for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

In recent days the price of oil has decreased by 5 afghani in Kabul markets.

Meanwhile, some residents of Kabul welcomed the decrease in prices and asked officials to reduce the price of oil even more.

"Oil prices have decreased compared with past weeks and months but now it's better," said Fakhruddin, a taxi driver.

"The government has to control the prices because now the prices are different at every pump station," said Sharif, a driver.

Some fuel sellers said the price is now reduced

and the price of one liter of petrol went from 70 to 65 afghani and the price of one liter of diesel from 80 to 75 afghani.

"We are happy but if it decreases to 50 afghani that will be good.

Earlier, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry signed an agreement with Russia.

Commerce Dept revenue of Kunduz up by 48%

KUNDUZ (Agencies): Local officials in the Department of Industry and Commerce of Kunduz said that the revenue of the office is increase by 48 percent.

The department has collected over 11.8 million Afghan, while this figure was 6.3 million last year, local officials of the department said.

The provincial head of Kunduz Industry and Commerce, Mawlawi Mohammad Rahim Sirat, told this news agency that the revenues were collected from the distribution or



renewal of licenses of

tradesmen. According to the department, there are one hundred

and sixty five different companies operating in Kunduz, which employ hundreds of people.

SJC moved against top court sitting Justice Naqvi

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): While invoking jurisdiction of the Supreme Judicial Council on Saturday PML-N lawyers forum Punjab urged to initiate an investigation against top court Justice Mazahar Ali Naqvi for allegedly committing misconduct in view of certain viral audio clips released on social media recently.

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) is a body of top court and high courts judges, empowered under Article 209 of the Constitution of Pakistan to hear cases of misconduct against judges of high courts or Supreme Court.

Filing the complaint to head of the SJC Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Umar Ata Bandial, the lawyers requested to initiate an investigation in the matter, alleging Justice Naqvi has deviated from the code of conduct and passed inconsistent orders in the same matter.

"This attitude and action runs

counter to the basic spirit of Code of Conduct according to which a judge is expected to avoid treating similar causes differently," stated in the complaint. Substantiating their claim, the applicant lawyers attached transcripts of the audio leaks with the complaint saying "it is this backdrop that we feel obligated to bring to your kind notice the violations of judicial code of conduct, Constitution of the Law by Justice Naqvi who is presently functioning as a judge of the SC".

They further alleged Justice Naqvi "has misused his authority as a judge of the apex court in the most obvious manners". The controversy surrounding top court judges began with two audio clips ascribed to former chief minister Punjab Pervaiz Elahi which had left the Supreme Court facing calls to open an investigation into the matter and dispel the alarming impression that brings the judiciary

"under the question mark".

Soon after, a new audio clip allegedly featuring PTI leader Yasmin Rashid and Lahore Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Ghulam Mahmood Dogar emerged on social media where the male voice was heard saying that he had "his man" at the top court. It is pertinent to mention that a day earlier, a fresh audio leak purported to be of a telephone conversation between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Fawad Chaudhry and his brother Advocate Faisal Chaudhry surfaced adding fuel to the ongoing controversy involving the country's senior judges.

In the alleged conversation between Fawad and Faisal, the names of three judges - Chief Justice Lahore High Court Muhammad Ameer Bhatti, Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial and Supreme Court judge Justice Mazahir Ali Naqvi come up allegedly.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf addressing the participants of Annual Conference of Pakistan Medical Association.

Governor, five others shot dead in Philippines

MANILA (Agencies): A provincial governor in the central Philippines and five others have been shot dead by unknown gunmen in the latest attack against local politicians. Police said six suspects carrying rifles and dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by the armed services entered the governor's home in Pamplona town and opened fire.

Roel Degamo, governor of Negros Oriental province, and five others were killed in the shooting, his widow said. "Governor Degamo did not deserve that kind of death. He was serving his constituents on a Saturday," Janice Degamo, who is also the mayor of Pamplona, said in a video posted on Facebook.

Police said in a statement on Saturday that the conditions of the hospitalised victims were unknown. Degamo, 56, is the latest to be targeted in the Philippines' long history of attacks on politicians, and is at least the third to be shot since local elections last year. President Ferdinand Marcos condemned what he described as the "assassination" of political ally Degamo and promised to bring swift justice to his killers.

Last month, the Supreme Court declared Degamo the rightful winner of the contest for the Negros Oriental governorship following a recount that unseated his local rival, who had previously been proclaimed the victor. Mamintal Adiong, governor of the southern province of Lanao del Sur, was shot and wounded in February in an attack that killed his driver and three police escorts.

That same month, the vice-mayor of the northern town of Aparri, Rommel Alameda, and five other people who were travelling with him were shot dead in a highway ambush. The leaders of a powerful southern clan and about two dozen followers were sentenced to life in prison for a 2009 attack on supporters of a gubernatorial election rival in Maguindanao province. The attack left 58 people dead, including the politician's wife and relatives, along with 32 journalists and media workers.

Storms in southern US kill 9 people

WASHINGTON (Agencies): Storms producing tornadoes and heavy rains have rolled through parts of the southern United States, killing at least nine people and leaving more than one million customers without power, according to authorities. The National Weather Service said the powerful storm had mostly left the south of the country by late Friday and was moving to the northeastern US, where it was forecast to cause heavy snow and sleet from southeastern Michigan east to New York state. Parts of central New York and southern New England may see more than 30cm (a foot) of snow by Saturday afternoon.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said at least two tornadoes sparked by the storm system ripped through the western part of his state on Friday. The governor said on social media that at least three people were killed in the severe weather, though he did not provide any more details.

China parliament to vote on state reform plan

BEIJING (Agencies): China's legislature will vote in the coming days on a plan to reform institutions under the State Council, or cabinet, and decide on a new cabinet lineup for the next five years, including a new premier, an agenda showed on Saturday.

The annual National People's Congress (NPC) will also review a series of reports including the current premier's government work report, parliament spokesman Wang Chao told a news conference. Draft amendments to the country's Legislative Law, which governs how laws are enacted, are also on the agenda of the meeting that is due to start on Sunday.

In the latter half of the NPC, which runs until March 13, the nearly 3,000 members of the largely rubber-stamp parliament will elect and endorse a new lineup of top government officials. Xi Jinping is widely expected to secure his third five-year term as

president when legislators vote on March 10.

He renewed calls this week for the "intensive" reorganisation of state and Communist Party entities, adding that part of the reform plan pertaining to state institutions would be presented before parliament. Lawmakers are also due to vote on the State Council's institution reform plan on March 10.

The call for institutional reforms comes after China's economy grew 3 percent last year - one of its lowest rates in nearly half a century - weakened by strict COVID-19 curbs championed by Xi that were lifted in December. On Sunday, the government work report due to be delivered by Premier Li Keqiang at the start of parliament will unveil the official 2023 economic growth target, among many other social and economic objectives.

The gross domestic product (GDP) target could be as high as 6 percent,

compared with a 4.5 percent-5.5 percent range proposed in November, sources told Reuters this week. A new premier for the next five years will be decided by parliament on March 11. A day later, it will decide on a new batch of vice premiers, state councillors, ministers as well as the governor of the People's Bank of China.

Among the amendments to China's Legislative Law set to be reviewed at the meeting is a proposal that would allow the NPC Standing Committee to pass laws in the event of an "emergency" after a single review. The committee, which enacts and amends laws when parliament is not in session, voted in June 2020 to adopt landmark laws on national security in Hong Kong. That legislation was put to the vote after two rounds of deliberation. Legislators will vote on the draft amendments to the Legislative Law on March 13.

Imran says ready to 'forgive attackers'

LAHORE (Agencies): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan said Saturday that he is ready to "forgive" those who had orchestrated an "attack" against him — in November last year — as he launched the election campaign in two provinces — Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

Khan was shot in the legs on November 3 as he waved to crowds from a truck-mounted container while leading a protest march to Islamabad to pressure the government into announcing an early election. The rally was cut short in Rawalpindi, where Khan announced his plan of dissolving the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab assemblies — which materialised last month.

The PTI chief — whose government was overthrown in April last year — had blamed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, and a military officer for being involved in the alleged assassination plot. Ever since his ouster, the PTI chief has kept criticising the military, the Pakistan Democratic Movement-led government, and other institutions

for being involved in an alleged plot to remove his party from power.

But toning down his rhetoric in a speech to workers via video link, the deposed prime minister — who has called incumbent rulers "dacoits" — said he was ready to "mend fences with everyone". Sharing his willingness to negotiate, Khan said that a politician talks to everyone; however, he spoke against an agreement with those who steal the country's money.

"General Bajwa asked to give them NRO [National Reconciliation Ordinance]. Who am I to forgive them for stealing people's money?" the former prime minister asked. But he then went on and said he is "ready to talk to everyone". Comparing himself to former South African president Nelson Mandela, Khan said he knows all those involved in the assassination attack against him but is ready to forgive them.

"Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison, but he forgave everyone," he said. Considering the country's situation at present, the politician insisted on unity and stressed the need for reforming the judiciary.

Speaking to his party workers and the nation, Khan reiterated that fresh elections are the sole solution to the prevailing crisis being faced by the country. Lauding the Supreme Court, the deposed prime minister said that the apex court took action as the governors and the Election Commission of Pakistan did not announce a date for the general elections in Punjab and KP.

"74 cases have been registered against me so far," Khan said, adding that the establishment had asked his party workers and leaders to join the PML-N as they had marked a cross on him. Stressing the need for fresh elections, Khan said that instability would not end until a public-mandated government is elected in the country.

"After the Supreme Court verdict, I was sure that they would conduct general elections. Polls are the first step towards getting out of this quagmire," he said adding that political stability will come from elections and economic stability will follow. People's confidence, Khan said, will increase when a government comes into power with a public mandate.

All PTI leaders, activists released from jails

RAWALPINDI, MULTAN, LAHORE (INP): On the Lahore High Court orders, the authorities have released all PTI leaders and workers who courted arrest in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan during the 'Jail Bharo Tehreek' of the party on Saturday.

The PTI leaders including Shah Mehmood Qureshi was released from Attock District Jail, Asad Umar from Rajanpur District Jail and Umar Sarfraz Cheema was freed from Bhakkar Jail. Besides them, Azam Swati was released from District Jail in Rahim Yar Khan and Murad Raas was freed from Central Jail, Dera Ghazi Khan. On this occasion, Haneef Pitafi, Tartaj Gull and Waleed Iqbal were also present.

The supporters of Jail Bharo movement could not even two barracks as only 435 leaders and activists court-arrested throughout Punjab. As many as 75 were

arrested in Lahore, 115 in Gujranwala, 59 in Sargodha, 47 in Rawalpindi and four in Narowal.

Forty-one PTI workers who surrendered to authorities in Rawalpindi were released from District Jail, Hafizabad. Former MPA Raja Khurram Zaman was also among those who were freed. Eight-three party workers including Asad Umar were freed from District Jail, Rajanpur. As many as 24 PTI activists including Umar were shifted to Rajanpur jail from Lahore and 59 party workers were shifted there from Sargodha.

It is to be noted that the PTI activists who courted arrest, were shifted by the authorities to far off places of Punjab where they were to be detained for 30 days under the MPO. Last night, 6 leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf including Zulfi Bukhari and Fayyaz ul Hassan Chohan released

from the Shahpur prison.

Speaking on the occasion, Shah Mehmood Qureshi said crooks could never make New Pakistan, adding that the country's foreign policy should be based on self-respect and dignity. He further said that in 2018, PTI's success remained incomplete but this time, Punjab has given the party a thumping mandate. While talking to media, Asad Umar said that he was proud that the Tehreek-e-Insaf was the party whose leader was the identity of Pakistan and its hope.

He was optimistic that the Hakeeqi Azadi movement which was running under the leadership of Imran Khan would bring success to 220 million Pakistanis. "Decisions made in closed rooms are going to end and now the country will run with the decisions of 220 million people," he added.

Imran's defamation case against Asif adjourned

ISLAMABAD (INP): A local court in Islamabad adjourned on Saturday the hearing of former prime minister Imran Khan's defamation case against Defence Minister Khawaja Asif till March 18 on the request of the PTI chief.

Judge Umeed Baloch heard the Rs10 billion defamation case filed by Imran Khan against Kh Asif for levelling allegations against him regarding misuse of Shaukat Khanum Hospital funds. The judge put off the case without holding any proceedings today till March 18 on the request of Imran Khan.

During previous hearing, the cross-examination of the PTI chief was completed. The former premier had also requested the court to announce an early verdict in the case. Imran Khan admitted before the court that an amount invested abroad by the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust (SKMT) had not been returned to the trust's account when he filed a defamation suit against PML-N leader Khawaja Asif in 2012.

In response to a question whether he knew the investment was made through two offshore companies, Imran Khan replied that he was not aware of decisions taken by the SKMT board. He, however, said he had received the information through an audit report. He denied any loss incurred due to the investment and said that the funds were invested in the "larger interest of the hospital".

'Buzdar remains tactical'

LAHORE (INP): The inside story of former Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar's appearance before the National Accountability Bureau on Saturday and his grilling by the bureau's sleuths has come to light.

According to sources, the combined investigation team of anti-graft watchdog gave Buzdar a 10-page questionnaire. But the former chief minister could not give satisfactory answers to the NAB team's questions. He kept on saying that the matter was sub judice in the court of law. Buzdar expressed his ignorance over several questions and asked for time for legal consultation on some of them.

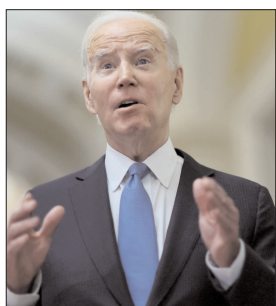
During investigation, the NAB investigators asked Buzdar if he had got property in Spain, too. He replied: "All the record has been submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan. You better check that." The anti-corruption body has sought Buzdar's property record from various departments.

Sources said that there is possibility that the former chief minister would again be summoned by the bureau next week. The NAB Lahore has received a complaint against Usman Buzdar for making assets worth Rs10 billion through corruption. Former Punjab chief minister Usman Buzdar on Friday appeared before the National Accountability Bureau in an assets beyond means case in Lahore. He 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.

Biden had cancerous skin lesion removed successfully

WASHINGTON (Agencies): United States President Joe Biden, 80, had a cancerous skin lesion successfully removed from his chest in February, his doctor has revealed. The lesion, detected during a routine medical examination, was a basal cell carcinoma, which "do not tend to 'spread' or metastasize," Biden's physician, Dr Kevin O'Connor, said in a report made public by the White House.

O'Connor, the White House doctor who has served as Biden's longtime physician, said "all cancerous tissue was successfully removed". "No further treatment is required," he said in the report. Biden, the oldest person ever to be US president, is expected to declare he is running for reelection in 2024 and his health is under scrutiny. His wife Jill Biden has said Biden plans to run, although a formal declaration of the president's intentions has yet to be made.



The lesion was removed during Biden's annual medical checkup on February 16 after which the president was declared "fit for duty", according to the report released on Friday. At the February appointment, Biden completed a series of tests that he began last year at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, a complex in Washington, DC's suburbs with a presidential facility.

O'Connor wrote at the time that the president had spent "a good deal of time in the sun in his youth" and that he had already been treated regularly for removal of localised, non-melanoma skin cancers.

"The site of the biopsy has healed nicely and the president will continue dermatologic surveillance as part of his ongoing comprehensive healthcare," O'Connor said in Friday's report. "President Biden remains a healthy, vigorous, 80-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency, to include those of as Chief Executive, Head of State and Commander in Chief," O'Connor said in February following Biden's medical examination.

Basal cell carcinoma is a slow-growing cancer that is usually confined to the surface of the skin. Doctors can almost always remove it all with a shallow incision and it seldom causes serious complications or becomes life-threatening. Basal cells are among the most common and easily-treated forms of cancer, especially when caught early. The Bidens have long been advocates for fighting cancer. Their adult son Beau died in 2015 from brain cancer.

Hundreds evacuated as Pertamina fire kills 17

JAKARTA (Agencies): Residents have searched through the remains of their charred homes after a fuel storage depot fire in Jakarta killed at least 17 people, including two children. The fire, which started at approximately 8pm (01:00 GMT) on Friday from a fuel pipe at Pertamina's Plumpang fuel storage depot in capital Jakarta, quickly spread to nearby houses and sent residents in the densely populated area into a panic.

Sixty people were injured, with many severely burned, while hundreds more living in residential areas near the depot had to be evacuated. The North Jakarta Red Cross said 342 people had been evacuated and that four tents were set up for the displaced. Three people were still missing after the blaze, with Indonesian officials the next day calling for an audit of "all fuel facilities and infrastructures" in the country.

Vice President Ma'ruf Amin visited the scene on Saturday and confirmed 17 people were killed and 60 more injured. He suggested

the depot should be moved away from residential neighbourhoods. "I hope this depot can be relocated ... so it will be safer and this area will be rearranged so it meets the requirements of a proper neighbourhood in the capital," he told reporters.

Footage broadcast on Friday night showed people screaming and fleeing through narrow roads with an inferno lighting up the sky behind them. A fireball could be seen across the skyline of north Jakarta with sirens wailing in the background. Abdul Syukur, who also lives nearby, told Kompas TV that residents said they could smell the fuel about 30 minutes before the fire. "The smell was so strong there were people throwing up and some nearly fainted," he said. Another witness, Swastono Aji, told AFP news agency that the smell "was so strong that we could hardly breathe". "We were leaving this area when we suddenly heard a very loud explosion."

"It was like a bomb, like a mini apocalypse. It was unimaginable," witness

Jamilul Asror, 45, told AFP, calling on authorities to relocate residents farther away. National Police chief Listyo Sigit, speaking at the site, said at least three people were still missing. Top officials have called for a probe into the fire's cause and an audit of the country's energy facilities after several recent blazes.

"After we had multiple fires ... it is clear that we must audit all fuel facilities and infrastructures, especially tanks and refineries," Sugeng Suparwoto, head of the parliament's energy commission, told local broadcaster Metro TV on Saturday. In 2021, a massive blaze broke out at the Balongan refinery in West Java, also owned by Pertamina.

That same depot saw fires in 2009 and again in 2014 — when the flames spread to 40 houses nearby. No casualties were reported in either of those cases. The morning after the blaze, homes stacked up against the barbed-wire fences of the Pertamina facility were gutted and blackened, with rows of cars burned out.

WHO urges states to reveal intelligence on Covid origins

GENEVA (Agencies): The World Health Organization has urged all countries to reveal what they know about the origins of COVID-19 following claims by the United States that the virus was likely leaked from a Chinese laboratory and which has led to furious denials from Beijing.

US Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray told Fox News this week that the FBI had assessed the source of the COVID-19 pandemic was "most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan", the Chinese city that hosts a virus research laboratory and was the location of the first COVID infections in late 2019.

"If any country has information about the origins of the pandemic, it's essential for that information to be shared with WHO and the international scientific community," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus said on Friday. "Not so as to apportion blame but to advance our understanding of how this pandemic started, so we can prevent, prepare for and respond to future epidemics and pandemics," the WHO chief said.

The WHO has not abandoned efforts to identify the source of the pandemic, he said. "WHO continues to call for [China] to be transparent in sharing data and to conduct the necessary investigations and share the results. To that effect, I have written to, and spoken with, high-level Chinese leaders on multiple occasions, as recently as just a few weeks ago." The WHO chief also said that "all hypotheses on the origins of the virus remain on the table".

Chinese officials have angrily denied the FBI's claim of their country being the origin of the pandemic, calling it a smear campaign against Beijing. Wray also

told Fox News television that China had thwarted efforts to identify the origin of the virus. "I will just make the observation that the Chinese government ... has been doing its best to try to thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we're doing, the work that our US government and close foreign partners are doing," Wray said.

Politicisation of the search to identify the origin of the virus was making the scientific work harder and the world less safe as a result, Tedros added. Tedros said there was a moral imperative to find out how the pandemic started, for the sake of the millions who lost their lives to COVID-19 and those living with long COVID. Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, said the organisation had reached out to the US mission in Geneva for more information regarding the FBI chief's claims.