

Bail of PTI leaders extended

LAHORE (INP): A district and sessions court in the Punjab capital approved extension in interim bails of several leaders of the PTI in a case regarding the death of a PTI worker Ali Bilal alias Zille Shah. Additional Sessions Judge Muhammad Bilal Baig has extended the bail for Dr Yasmin Rashid, Mahmoodur Rashid and other PTI leaders, who also appeared in the court, till April 13.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visits free flour distribution points established as part of PM's relief package for deserving families.

12 killed during ration distribution in Karachi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: At least 12 people died and five were injured Friday amid a stampede inside the premises of a factory at the Naurus intersection in Karachi's SITE area, the latest incident in which people lost their lives to seek free edibles.

The incident occurred while people were gathered at a dyeing factory in the city's industrial area to collect ration — which is part of charity drives that Karachiites hold every Ramadan to help the needy. Those killed in the incident include eight women and three children, rescue sources and police officials told media.

Six people also fainted during the stampede, rescue sources told media. Meanwhile, police officials stated that a huge number of people were gathered at the site when the ration was being distributed. A lot of people who died, as per rescue sources, fell into a nullah at the factory. Also, eyewitnesses told the media outlet that people were called for Zakat distribution.

Updating about the number of deceased individuals, Edhi sources said that nine bodies were taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, while two were taken to the Civil Hospital. All deceased, according to the Edhi sources, brought to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital were women among which three were younger girls, Faisal Edhi said.

Taking notice of the incident Governor Sindh Kamran Tessori has sought a report from the Karachi Commissioner Muhammad Iqbal Memon. The governor also expressed grief over the loss of precious lives in the incident. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah also took notice of the stampede and sought a report from the commissioner. "Administration should duly report about distribution of ration and welfare efforts," CM Murad said.

PM orders removing issues in CNIC verification at flour points

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday directed the authorities at the flour distribution centres to remove the hurdles faced by citizens in the verification of their Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs).

The prime minister stated this during his visit to a flour distribution centre, where the federal government is providing free-of-cost flour bags to needy persons. PM Sharif asked the relevant authorities to chalk out a facilitatory mechanism for the person who could only present the photocopy of his CNIC in case the original card was gone missing.

The prime minister, in this regard, sought a report to be presented to him by evening suggesting an alternative way. He directed setting up a priority in the distribution of flour bags among aged persons and women.

It was also decided to give away two flour bags instead of one so that the people do not need to visit the distribution centres frequently. Flanked by Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, the prime minister took a round of the flour distribution centre and interacted with the people waiting to receive the free flour bags.

He lauded the commis-

sioner and deputy commissioner of Islamabad for the excellent arrangements made at the flour distribution centre. He expressed satisfaction with the proper seating arrangement for the people to avoid making them stand in long queues. The prime minister lauded the Commissioner and deputy commissioner of Islamabad and expressed confidence that all related operational issues would be addressed on an urgent basis.

UAE's investment company delegation meets Shehbaz: Sheikh Ahmed Dalmoock al Maktoum, Chairman of Hayat Bio-Tech and a member of the ruling family of the UAE, alongwith a delegation called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here in Islamabad on Friday. Welcoming the delegation, the Prime Minister said that the brotherly relations between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are deep rooted in history. He underlined that Pakistan attaches great importance to further expanding brotherly ties with the UAE in diverse fields including trade and investment.

The Prime Minister welcomed the keen interest of Hayat Bio-Tech to invest in Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector, especially in vaccine manufacturing. He also invited the visiting delega-

tion to invest in the renewable energy sector and assured that foreign investors will be provided all possible facilitation.

Sheikh Ahmed Dalmoock al Maktoum said they are aware of huge investment potential of Pakistan and UAE was looking forward to further expanding its footprint in the energy and health sectors. He expressed keen desire to further expand UAE's investment portfolio in Pakistan. The dignitary also briefed the Prime Minister about their ongoing 1200 MW power plant project undertaken in collaboration with the Government of Sindh which would be a hybrid power plant of solar and wind energy. Federal Minister for Finance Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for National Health Services Abdul Qadir Patel, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi and senior officials of the concerned government departments also attended the meeting.

Moreover, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the efforts to develop Teleschool App were now bearing fruits as more than 10,000 downloads and 5500 enrollments have been done, and 17000 videos have been viewed in just a week. "Glad that the efforts to develop Teleschool Pakistan App are now bearing fruits.

Petrol price to remain stable for next fortnight

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Pakistan has decided to keep unchanged the price of petrol and diesel for the next fortnight, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced Friday.

"...we got the recommendation of increasing the price of petrol and diesel from the regulatory authorities," the finance minister — who took charge in September last year — said during a televised address. But FinMin Dar said his ministry has decided to keep the price of the two most used petroleum products stable after consultations with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

As the government saw some "room" to provide relief to the masses, it has decided to reduce the prices of kerosene oil and light diesel oil by Rs10 per litre, to Rs177.73 per litre and Rs174.68 per litre, respectively. The prices will come into effect at midnight and remain effective till April 15.

The decision comes as the masses are suffering from historic inflation, which stands at 31.55%, a nearly 50-year high, making it difficult for people to make ends meet. The price of petroleum products stands at record-high levels as Pakistan meets its oil needs through imports, and the rupee has been hitting new lows against the dollar, resulting in higher fuel prices.

Sikh gunned down in Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Sikh shopkeeper was shot and killed by an unknown assailant in the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday, according to police.

The police confirmed that the victim — Dayal Singh — was shot while he was at his general store and died on spot. The law enforcers collected 30 pistol shells and other evidence from the crime scene. They also confirmed that CCTV footage from the site is being obtained. However, the motive behind the murder is not yet known and police have not ruled out the possibility that the incident was motivated by a personal grudge.

Following the incident, SSP Operations Haroon-ul-Rashid Khan went to the residence of the Sikh businessman to express his condolences to the deceased man's relatives. During the meeting, he briefed the relatives about the investigation so far and assured them of arresting the killers at the earliest. Singh has left behind a widow and three children.

The Frontier Post

Terrorist gunned down F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The security forces on Friday killed a terrorist and injured two in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted in Noshman area of Sibi district, said Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). According to the ISPR, the security forces had initiated an IBO from March 30 onwards to intercept a group of terrorists operating in Noshman, South of Sibi.

Punjab and KP election delay case SC turns down govt's request to form full court

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The newly constituted three-member bench of the Supreme Court on Friday rejected the government's request to form a full court on the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa election delay case.

A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial, comprising Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan and Justice Munib Akhtar, rejected the request put forward by Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan on behalf of the government. The initial five-member bench comprising CJP Bandial, Justice Ahsan, Justice Akhtar, Justice Amin-Ud-Din Khan, and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail was formed to hear the case. It held three hearings on the matter from Monday to Wednesday.

The three-member bench was formed on Friday after two of the five judges of the original five-member larger bench recused themselves. Justice Khan was the first member to recuse himself which led to the dissolution of the bench. When the court met on Friday, Justice Mandokhail also recused himself from hearing the case. But before the election case hearing was set to resume, the Supreme Court "disregarded" the judgment authored by Justice Isa through a circular issued by SC Registrar Ishrat Ali.

"The observations made in paras 11 to 22 and 26 to 28 of the majority judgment of two to one travel beyond the lis before the Court and invokes its suo motu jurisdiction," observed CJP Umar Ata Bandial in the circular issued on Friday. It noted that the "unilateral assumption of judicial power" in such a manner violated the rule laid down by a five-member judgment. "Such power is to be

invoked by the Chief Justice on the recommendation of an Honourable Judge or a learned Bench of the Court on the basis of criteria laid down in Article 184(3) of the Constitution. The said majority judgment therefore disregards binding law laid down by a larger bench of the Court," read the circular.

When the bench assembled on Friday, AGP Awan came on the rostrum to speak but CJP Bandial told him that Justice Mandokhail wanted to say something. The judge, while recusing himself from hearing the case, remarked that he was awaiting the order after Justice Khan's recusal from the case. "I received the order at home. I had written a separate note on the order," said Justice Mandokhail. He then asked AGP Awan to read out his note.

After the AGP read out the note written in the order, Justice Mandokhail remarked that he was a member of the bench but he was not consulted while the order was being written. "I believe I am a misfit in the bench. I pray whichever bench is formed in this case gives a verdict that is acceptable to everyone," said Justice Mandokhail. He prayed for his institution, adding that he and his fellow judges were bound to follow the Constitution. "I wanted to say something yesterday as well, perhaps there was no need for advice from me while writing the judgment," noted Justice Mandokhail. He added that the other three members of the bench did not find him "worthy" of giving advice.

After this, Justice Mandokhail tried speaking but was stopped by the CJP. He instead thanked the judge for his note. "Whatever decision is made on the formation of the bench will be announced in the court in a while,"

remarked CJP Bandial. Later, the court announced that a three-member bench will resume the hearing at 2pm. After the hearing resumed, Pakistan Bar Council Executive Committee Chairman Hassan Raza Pasha came to the rostrum to speak up and urged the court to form a full bench on the case. However, CJP Bandial said that they will hear the bar later.

But Pasha stated that the bar was not in support or against anyone. He added that if a full-court bench could not be made then a full-court conference should be summoned. "We are thinking about this," said CJP. He added that the relations between the judges were fine. The top judge also stated that the media at times would also say things which were not true. "I will hold some meetings after the hearing. It is expected that Monday's sun will rise with good news," remarked the CJP.

At this point, AGP Awan came to the rostrum and CJP Bandial asked him to speak. The government's top lawyer requested the court to let the political temperature come down, adding that it needed to be done all over the country. The CJP asked the AGP what he had done regarding the directives to lower the political temperature. "Only time is needed. [Political] temperature can only decrease down with time," said AGP Awan. CJP Bandial observed that the 90-day limit for holding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was ending in April. He added that the president gave the date for elections after the 90-day limit ended. "If the president had an idea about the situation then he would not have given the April 30 date," said the CJP.

(Continued on Back Page)



KARACHI: Relatives mourning on the dead body after factory incident.

Full court SC bench vital to avert crisis: Marriyum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday urged the Supreme Court to form a full court bench to hear a case regarding polls in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for averting any constitutional crisis in the country.

The proceedings of the case regarding the polls' delay started with a nine-member bench, whose strength had now been relegated to three judges only, the minister said while talking to the media outside the Supreme Court. Marriyum said Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan, who had recused himself from hearing the sou moto case regarding the polls delay, should not be part of the bench hearing the contempt case.

She said the Pakistan Democratic Movement member parties had already called for the constitution of a full bench for the case as the three-member bench had become "controversial". There was an impression that the three-member bench had lost its credibility, she added. Referring to the circular issued by the SC registrar, she said it was the "decision of one person".

Castigating Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan, the minister said a "mentally sick per-

son" wanted to set the whole country on fire by creating chaos and anarchy. In the first place, he concocted the story of a cipher while waving a paper in a party rally and then illegally dissolved the National Assembly to prevent his ouster from power in the wake of the no-confidence motion moved by the then-opposition.

"This mentally sick person also forced the speaker and deputy speaker of the National Assembly to take unconstitutional actions," she said, adding Imran Khan's false narrative of the "regime change conspiracy" had been fully exposed before the people. Marriyum said Imran Khan gave shelter to the terrorists at Zaman Park, who attacked the police who were trying to implement the court orders. The PTI leader in fact wanted rioting and "dead bodies" as his sole objective was to create chaos in the country, she added.

She accused Imran Khan of using money received as charity for his politics and stealing watches from the Toshakhana. "The people are witnessing that Imran Khan has been threatening judges and attacking courts," she said. The Constitution, however, could not be made subservient to the whims of only PTI, she added.

The minister said Imran

Khan was running away from the elections. Democratic parties would contest the election and field their candidates after the completion of the constitutional terms of the assemblies, and then Imran Khan would be voted out of politics by the people, she added. To a question, she said anyone involved in unconstitutional actions must be brought to book irrespective of his status so that deterrence for the future could be established and all institutions should remain in their ambit.

Imran's warrants converted into bailable

ISLAMABAD (INP): A local court in Islamabad on Friday converted a non-bailable arrest warrant issued against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan into a bailable one in a woman judge threatening case.

Additional District and Session Judge Sikandar Khan announced the verdict after hearing arguments on warrant review petition filed by the former premier. The session judge also ordered the PTI chairman to submit surety bonds worth Rs20,000.

Sepoy embraced Shahadat



F.P. Rport

RAWALPINDI: A firing exchange took place between terrorists and security forces in general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District. Own troops fought bravely and effectively engaged the terrorists' location.

However, during intense exchange of fire, Sepoy Irshad Ullah (age 29 years, resident of District Karak), having fought gallantly, embraced Shahadat. Sanitization of the area is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area.

Pakistan's Security Forces are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

Meanwhile, the Namaz-e-Janaza (funeral prayers) of Sepoy Irshad Ullah Shaheed was offered at District Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and later was laid to rest with full military honour.

Sepoy Irshad Ullah embraced martyrdom while fighting bravely during an exchange of fire between terrorists and security forces' troops in the general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

It added that senior serving and retired officers, soldiers, relatives, and a large number of people attended the funeral. "Armed Forces of Pakistan stand resilient against terrorism and reaffirm the resolve to eradicate this menace of terrorism at all costs," the ISPR said.



PESHAWAR: Adviser to Finance and Energy Himayat Ullah Khan called on KP Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan.

Entry to Pakistan for Afghans becoming lucrative source of income

Shamim Shahid

BELIEVE it that getting Pakistani visa for the Afghan nationals both in or outside Afghanistan becoming too much hard and expensive whereas continuous silence on the part of Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Emirate Islami Afghanistan leadership generating stock of questions. It seems that under well planned strategies, now the US lead allies especially spy agencies of Pakistan are bent upon economic assassination of already war devastated Afghans. These US lead allies are also making attempts to force the Afghans to abandon their motherland as this mountainous region connecting South with Central Asia still maintaining its strategic and economic importance's, which would play a key role in next phases of global wars for power, perks and resources.

At the moment, issuance of visa's to the Afghan nationals even those who are in possession of US, UK, EU and other foreign countries passports is considered most lucrative source of income not only for Pakistan's diplomatic squads throughout the world but also for some of spy agencies and NADRA, personnel dealing heals and deals regarding war devastated Afghanistan. Couple of days back, a family belongs to eastern Afghanistan reached in Peshawar from Afghanistan. Five members of the family had got On Line visa at cost of Eight US dollars each but the score was settled with three others by issuance Pakistan single entrance visa

for one month after getting 3600 US dollars (each 1200 US dollars.)

This issue is not confined to a single family or an individual but it is a common feature for almost Afghans who wants to visit either for a single day or trip or for a prolong stay. On Wednesday evening, a female with four children was forced to pay 40,000 Afghanis just for entering Pakistan at Torkham. Ironically, all those Afghans who wants to go back to their motherland from Pakistan are not only bound to surrender Proof Of Registration (POR cards issued to them by NADRA and UNHCR couple of years back) but they are being forced to pay bribe from RS 5000 to RS 10000 at all crossing points especially at Torkham.

Though Pakistan has made hard the policies for issuance of visa's to Afghan nationals soon after starting fencing of Pak Afghan border, also called Durand Line somewhere in end of 2015 last with financial support of US but soon after empowering of Taliban on August 15th 2021 it was further tightened. All those Afghans who intends to visit Pakistan either from Afghanistan or from rest of the world are bound to attach an invitation from a Pakistani national through a Stamp Paper. Each member of the family is bound to attach separate Stamp Paper with visa application. Filling and stamping this stamp paper costing from RS 1000 to RS 1500. But it doesn't mean approval as the approval authorities are certain mysterious high ups in Foreign Office, Intelligence agencies, responsible for Afghanistan and NADRA offices. However, the procedure become a

major source for minting money or getting bribes for the personnel of all these departments and institutions.

Unfortunately, in reaction some of the diplomatic personnel of Afghanistan in its missions are also demanding bribes from Pakistani nationals even students frequently visiting Afghanistan. Apparently, Taliban are portraying themselves "unhappy" from Pakistan but internally all of Emirate Islami leaders including acting Prime Minister and Foreign Ministers are playing silent role over maltreatment of the countrymen for Visa's and visits to Pakistan. The Afghans not only from inside Afghanistan but also scattered throughout the world, through social media are not only denouncing step mother attitude on the part of Pakistan but even they making appeals to higher authorities like Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Chief Of Army Staff Gen. Asim Muneer to take its early notices as Afghans are considering Pakistan as their second motherland. Likewise, these policies and restrictions also affecting relations between thousands of families.

In the light of heavy prices of visa's and unprecedented bribe demands of personnel at Torkham, Foreign and NADRA offices at Islamabad, visits or travelling from Afghanistan to Pakistan is on decline from last several months. Declining travelling and visits also posing bad impacts on bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries. Now it is the time for both Islamabad and Kabul to set across a table, for settling all such issues and hardships.

Cloudy weather with scattered rains predicted

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Friday predicted that mainly cloudy weather is expected over most districts of the province.

However, scattered rain-thunderstorm with gusty winds and isolated heavy falls/ hailstorm is likely to occur over Chitral, Lower & Upper Dir, Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torghar, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Hangu, Kurram, Karak, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, North & South Waziristan and Dera Ismail Khan districts. During the last 24 hours rain-thunderstorm occurred over most districts of the province.

Rain recorded (in mm): Mirkhani 07, Ghalanai & Dir (each) 05, Chitral & Kakul (each) 04, Drosh, Risalpur & Tirah (each) 03, Malam Jabba, Balakot & Landi Kotal (each) 02, Takht Bhai, Kohat & Bajaur (each) 01, Peshawar city, Peshawar A/P, Bannu, Dikhan and Mamad Gut (each) Trace.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar City 24/12, Chitral 14/09, Timergara 21/13, Dir 15/06, Mirkhani 21/05, Kalam 13/03, Drosh 14/04, Saidu Sharif 23/10, Pattan 23/15, Malam Jabba 11/03, Takht Bhai 26/14, Kakul 20/08, Balakot 25/11, Parachinar 15/00, Bannu 22/13, Cherat 14/05, D.I. Khan 24/14. The minimum temperature recorded in the province was 0°C in Parachinar.

Govt to encourage teachers: Mayor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Mayor Peshawar, Zubair Ali has said the city district government was according highest priorities to promotion of female education, and all the teachers showing good performance in students' academic results would be encouraged.

Addressing the annual day function of the city district government degree college for women Peshawar here, the mayor said education was the cornerstone of his policies with special focus on encouraging female teachers on showing excellent performance, provision of furniture to women colleges and transport facilities for female lecturers and girls' students.

He announced to shift the city district government degree college for women Peshawar to solar energy to facilitate girl students. The city district government degree college for women was working under the aegis of the capital metropolitan government and its conversion on solar energy would help provide an uninterrupted power supply to the students especially in summer. The mayor also announced a pick and drop facility for female lecturers, bus service for students, new furniture and promotion to faculty.

RTS summons DPO Dir to appear, six complaints upheld

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Public Services Commission (RTPSC/RTS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa summoned District Police Officer (DPO) Lower Dir and Station House Officer Talash police station to appear before the commission.

RTS Chief Commissioner Muhammad Salim Khan and Commissioner Judge (retired) Muhammad Asim Imam heard six public complaints facing hurdles in obtaining public services while directed Deputy Commissioner Buner to ensure ancestral transfer within 30 days.

According to details, Majid Ullah has filed complaint seeking registration of First Information Report (FIR) for his beating by rival while police didn't file case while DPO Dir Lower already stated that

opponent shouldn't liable to be charge in the case. However, RTS had summoned DPO along SHO Talash to appear before commission but they didn't appear while RTS provide last chance for appearance.

A resident of Buner namely Muhammad Ismail filed complaint against hurdles faced while obtaining transfers of ancestral property following death of his father. RTS ordered DC Buner to resolve grievance of complainant within 30 days. A citizen Salim Khan made request for demarcation and limitation of public's pathway, however, RTS write a letter DC Swabi to address the issue in public interests after consultation.

RTS granted last chance to SHO and Additional SHO Peshtakara police station to amend sections in

FIR as per applicant directives while the commission has already attached salaries of the policemen. RTS directed applicant namely Pervaiz Khan to provide record before commission regarding his complaint in which he claimed that police didn't registered FIR against culprits grabbed his land and constructed shops while torture and beaten him. RTS ordered applicant Muhammad Umar to appear before to proceed his complaint for registration of FIR.

Chief Commissioner RTS said that the commission is committed to ensure delivery of services within stipulated timeframe to made public's servants accountable. He added that commission is hearing public complaints on weekly basis to ensure good governance.

KPBC welcomes Lawyer protection, SC bills

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council (KPBC) Lawyer Protection & Welfare Bill and Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Bill 2023 while declared the legislation as protection for legal fraternity as well as strengthen Apex Court for dissemination of justice.

In this regard KPBC vice chairman Zar Badshah and Executive Committee chairman Syed Mubashir Shah issued statement to media

demanding amendments in Pakistan Army Act 1952 to protect rights and privileges of citizens. KPBC also demanded legislation stop appointment of retired Bureaucrats, Generals and Judges in different public sector institution because it is creating sense of deprivation among law abiding citizens.

KPBC paid thanks to Federal governments and Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarrar for passing Lawyer Protection and Welfare Bill which was core demand of

legal fraternity of the country since long. KPBC also appreciated amendments in Supreme Practice and Procedure 2023 while stating that it will provide chance of appeal against Sou Muto notices. KPBC also lauded withdrawal of curative appeal against Justice Faez Isa while argued to amend 175A and Article 209 of constitution to make more fair evaluation of Judges to constitutional courts and speed-up proceedings at Supreme Judicial Council respectively.

CS visits HMC to inspect medical services

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry on Friday visited Medical Teaching Institution Hayatabad Medical Complex (MTI-HMC) Peshawar where he reviewed services at the OPD, Accident and Emergency, Radiology Department, Patient Facilitation Center and various other wards. He met the

patients and attendants and inquired about the facilities and issues.

On the occasion of the visit, the Chief Secretary met the hospital administration and medical staff where he was given a detailed briefing on the facilities being provided in the hospital, development issues and financial resources and constraints. Commissioner Peshawar Division Muhammad Zubair Khan, Hospital Director Dr.

Shahzad Faisal, Medical Director MTI-HMC Prof. Dr. Shahzad Akbar, Nursing Director Awal Khan, Director Finance HMC and officials were present on this occasion.

The Chief Secretary expressed satisfaction over the facilities and quality care provided to the patients in the hospital and said that both the hospital and the patients are benefiting due to Institution Based Practice (IBP).

PBC employees demand pay scale revision

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan broadcasting corporaation employees protest on friday against the recent government pay scale adoption in Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation. The protestors said that due to the current government scale, employees from grade one to sixteen were demoted, while officers from grade 17 to 20 were promoted.

They said Radio Pakistan is a corporation and it is illegal to apply government scale here. This scale is done only to benefit the officers. They also said In era of inflation, our salary should be increased and the old pay scale should be restored, otherwise we will be forced to protest strongly.



PESHAWAR: A student of class three Rimla Shah got first position in class at Government Girls Primary School Nahqi.

Simultaneous elections: A panacea of all problems

PESHAWAR (APP): Hardly recovered from the whopping USD 40 billion floods' losses last year, Pakistan's economic woes were likely to persist this year as huge financial resources would be required for holding of the general elections, experts say.

"The PTI has pushed the country into economic and political quagmire after prematurely dissolving the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab assemblies on the whims of one person bent upon to pitch national institutions against each other and create chaos in the country to achieve his own political gains," said Ikhtair Wali Khan, PMLN KP spokesman and former member provincial assembly while talking to APP on Friday.

"Separate elections in provinces and centre would further aggravate economic situation with hardly any chances of political stability despite early polls," feared Ikhtair Wali, saying that ECP has demanded Rs20 billion only for Punjab and KP assemblies' polls. "Can Pakistan, that was put under huge loans burden due to PTI's poor policies, afford additional Rs20 billion for holding elections in

Sindh and Balochistan later this year," he questioned and said that only simultaneously elections backed by all political-religious parties could steer the country out of existing political and economic challenges.

Citing reports, he claimed that PTI, from August 2018 to December 2021, had taken about \$43.4 billion loans including a bilateral loan of \$3.22 billion besides \$14.5 billion through the commercial banks on high interest rate, thus pushing the nation and coalition governments in the hot waters. He said early elections in KP and Punjab assemblies seemed to be a futile exercise with more chances of confrontation and chaos besides rigging allegations by the political leaders as witnessed after 2013 general elections and supported ECP's decision for postponing general elections in these provinces till October paving the way for simultaneous elections in Pakistan. "I question Imran Khan whether he is ready to accept PMLN victory in case of early polls in Punjab and KP," he added.

"Free and fair election backed by all political parties was panacea of all problems," said Dr Zahid Anwar,

Professor Political Science Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP. He maintained that free and transparent elections not only reinforce the stability and legitimacy of the political governments but link citizens with each other and thereby confirm the viability of the polity besides facilitating social and political integration.

He said the primal principle of democracy was the worth and dignity of the individual besides respect to people mandates rather dragging state institutions into politics, provoking people and giving rhetoric statements. He said political parties bring people closer during the elections and strengthen the democratic government system. "Election is a process of evolution that gives strength to democratic system and prevents bloody revolutions," he said, adding simultaneous elections bring political stability and acceptability to polls results.

In a parliamentary system, he said the doors of political dialogue among political parties were always opened, adding that wrangling among political forces for power in the past derailed democracy four times in the

country. ANP leader Wajid Ali Khan suggested a broad-based political consensus and unity among all religious and political elites including PMLN, PPP, PTI, ANP, MQMP, JUIF and others ahead of elections to ensure political and economic stability in the country.

He said that if the political parties did not shun their differences and initiate a dialogue, the country would continue to be embroiled in political instability having an adverse effect on the already-fragile economy despite holding of elections in KP and Punjab. He said on one side PTI has prematurely dissolved the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab assemblies in a bid to politically destabilize Pakistan and on other side is demanding early elections in the wake of economic quagmire and rise in terrorism cases, especially in KP to please their enraged supporters.

Except PTI, he said all political parties were unanimous about collective elections in all provinces including KP and Punjab and centre in October-November, upon the completion of five-year term of the existing assemblies in August this

year. He said that even the tribal elders of newly merged areas have also opposed early elections in KP and Punjab provinces. He questioned how people would trust the fairness and legitimacy of the general elections in October-November this year when there would already be elected governments in place in the KP and Punjab provinces with all key departments under their control. The ANP leader said it would be very difficult for PTI to form its government in Punjab this time due to the lack of Jehangir Tareen factor and poor performance of the Imran and Buzdar governments. He feared that Imran Khan would likely start more confrontation and rigging allegations like he did after 2013 general elections against the centre, ECP and Punjab caretaker government if PDM won the early election in Punjab.

The anti corruption slogans of Imran stand exposed after his party government itself closed down their own Ehtesab Commission in Peshawar to hide their alleged corrupt practices, he remarked and said that NAB has started a probe into alleged

corrupt practices in the billion trees project. Wajid Ali said that PTI wasted huge taxpayer money in BRT project by completing it at four-time high cost as compare to the Lahore and Islamabad metro projects.

He said Rs 417 billion were provided to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2010 under the NFC award including the period of 10-year of PTI but the champion of so-called 'change' has failed to execute any single project of public welfare including safe city project, setting up of forensic and DNA labs to counter terrorism. He said that PTI has failed to address the long awaited problem of overcrowding of prisoners in jails and provide relief to prisoners. The experts welcomed the adoption of SC (Practice and Procedure Bill) 2023 by the parliament as historic as it would give right of appeal to all the people affected by the judgments decided under Article 184 (3) of the constitution. They said political stability was imperative for economic stability and if all state institutions work under its constitutional domain Pakistan can achieve a new height of prosperity and development.



In brief

Police arrests two dacoits F.P. Report

PABBI: Police has arrested two dacoits allegedly involved in murder of lawyer and killing a citizen during robbery while stolen items along with weapon used in the offense was recovered on the identification of culprits, on Friday. This was disclosed by Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Pabbi while addressing media personnel and claimed that the culprits were trace in two different First Information Reports (FIRs) one of dacoity on 03-9-2022 in which one man was murdered on resistance and other of killing of lawyer namely Sajid Wasim Advocate in the premises of Jalozai police station. DSP claimed that the alleged culprits had confessed to their crimes during interrogation and disclosed information as well as spaces used for stolen items and weapons.

Food Authority conducts actions Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority on Friday conducted major operations in Nowshera and Peshawar and seized 5,715 kg of non-standard food including mutton liver and meat. According to the KP Food Authority spokesman, the food authority destroyed the seized sub-standard food. He added that 'kaleji' (mutton liver) and meat were being supplied from Punjab to Peshawar, Mardan and Nowshera. The spokesman said that different localities in Nowshera and Peshawar were raided in the operations by the inspection teams. The Nowshera team, in an operation in Shireen Koto, seized 1,080 kg of non-standard butter and malai from a vehicle and destroyed it, he said. The Nowshera Food Safety Team also imposed heavy fines on the owners, he added. Whereas, acting on a tip-off, Peshawar Food Safety Team checked several warehouses on Ashraf Road. The team seized more than 1,700 liters of fake spirits from a warehouse and destroyed them on the spot, the spokesperson said, adding that the team sealed the godown and imposed heavy fines on the owners.

Three dacoits arrested

FAISALABAD (APP): Police on Friday claimed to have arrested three members of a dacoit gang and recovered weapons, cash and other items. According to a police spokesman, a team of CIA conducted a raid and arrested Muhammad Jameel of Ahmadpur Sharqiyya, Ali Raza of Chak No. 369-JB and Khalid of al-Noor Colony who were wanted to police in a number of dacoity, robbery and other cases. The police recovered weapons, cash, mobile phones and other items from the accused.

Two injured in road mishap

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): Two people were injured in a collision between a motorcycle and a Mazda truck on Friday near choke Godar, DG Khan road. According to the rescue official, the accident occurred due to poor visibility. The injured named M. Mursaleen s/o Manzoor Hussain (25) and Abid s/o Manzoor Hussain (28) were shifted to DHQ hospital immediately for medical assistance. Police have registered a case and started investigation.



KHAR: Activists of Jamat-e-Islami holding a banner during a protest against unfair distribution of flour in Ramadan. — F.P. photo

Cleanliness in Kohat main bazaar reviewed

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Muhammad Ali Shah along with Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr Azmat Wazir and Chief Executive Officer of Water and Sanitation Services Company Kohat (WSSCK) Arif Rauf visited the main bazaar and main Hangu road.

The senior officials during their visit reviewed cleanliness of drains, said in a press release issued here on Friday. During the visit to the bazaar, commissioner Kohat Syed Muhammad Ali Shah held a meeting with traders and shopkeepers and talked with them about cleanliness of drains in the Bazaar, especially in drains.

On the occasion, WSSCK CEO Arif Rauf briefed the Commissioner



Syed Muhammad Ali Shah and Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr Azmat Wazir about encroachments that were erected in limits of cantonment and over drains/sewerage lines. During the visit, the Commissioner Kohat Syed Muhammad Ali Shah instructed the WSSCK operation team for special cleanliness of drains and

sewerage lines. The WSSCK Deputy Manager Tahir Hafiz, Manager Media and Communication Asma Ali, Chief Sanitary Inspector Muhammad Sohail, Assistant Manager Sewerage and Drainage Iqra Faiz, Assistant Manager Solid Management Ammad were also present on the occasion.

Employees hold protest against stoppage of salaries

F.P. Report

WANA: The employees recruited for protection of forests as Neghabans (watchers) protested against the non-payment of salaries to hundreds of recruited for the maintenance of the forest department for the last one year, on Friday.

The protestors led by Zahid Noor Wazir, Tariq Wazir and Hayat Wazir, who led the protest in Azam Warsak Bazar, strongly demanded the Secretary Forest Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and District Forest Officer (DFO) South Waziristan to release the withheld salaries of our negahbans/guards, immediate orders should be issued for fund release. On the other hand, DFO South Waziristan Zeeshan has sent a letter to the higher authorities regarding the release of closed salaries of negahbans in this regard.

It is submitted that for the last nine to ten months, there has been no release or

meager release of funds under 10-BTTP which has triggered a difficult situation for this office. There are 375 Enclosures established in this Forest Division under 10-BTTP and subsequently Neghabans (watcher) are employed for the look after of these Enclosures. But it is pertinent to mention that this office is unable to pay their wages due to non-availability of funds.

Similarly, the Chowkidars and laborers employed on other interventions have not been paid since long. As a result, the Chowkidars are agitating for payment of their wages. Recently a collective agitation by the Neghabans, Chowkidars and Laborers held before the media at Wana in which they threatened that their agitation may extend to Peshawar and Islamabad.

It is therefore requested to approach the concerned quarter for early release of funds under 10-BTTP to

resolve the issue of payments to Neghabans, Chowkidars and Laborers. Applications submitted to this Office by laborers are enclosed herewith for your good-self perusal please. The protesters said that the salaries of our (enclosures) keepers have been stopped for the last one year, due to which our stoves have gone cold, therefore, the Finance Division should release the closed salaries for the sake of this blessed month of Ramzan so that the wheels of the kitchens of our homes can run. The protesters held placards in their hands demanding the release of their salaries.

Enclosures/Guards/neghabans talking to the media said that if our salaries are not released soon, we will stage a dharna in front of the forest office along with a polio boycott. If our problem is not resolved here, we will sit in front of the office of the concerned authorities in Peshawar, the sit-in will continue until our salaries are released.

Levies force apprehends proclaimed offenders

QUETTA (PPI): Levies force Jhal Magasi claimed to have apprehended proclaimed offenders in two different operations conducted during crackdown launched against proclaimed offenders and miscreants in Jhal Magasi area of Balochistan province on Friday.

Following the directions of Yasir Hussain, Deputy Commissioner, Jhal Magasi, staff of levies force, Jhal Magasi under the supervision of Risaldar Major, Levies Force, Jhal Magasi, Abdul Hakeem Abro arrested proclaimed offenders namely Khadim Hussain son of Haji Khan, wanted in First Information Report No.07/2022 under section 557-324, and Qadir Khan son of Sultan Khan, wanted in First Information Report (FIR) No. 10/2021 under section 447-504-506, in different operations conducted in district Jhal

Magasi. The accused were shifted to Levies Station, Jhal Magasi and handed over to the Investigation Staff for taking further legal action.

DC Quetta for action against profiteers: Deputy Commissioner, Quetta, Shehak Baloch, has said that all possible measures were being adopted to provide essential commodities to the citizens at subsidised rates.

These views were expressed by him during inspection of "Ramzan Susta Bazar" at Meezan Chowk and Joint Road areas of Quetta on Thursday.

He said that purpose of setting up Ramzan Susta Bazars was to make it possible to provide essential items of daily use to the people at subsidised rates.

He said that on the directives of provincial

government, Ramzan Bachat bazars had been set up in different areas of the province to provide relief to the people, adding that meat, vegetables, fruits and other items were being provided to the people at subsidised rates in the Ramzan Susta Bazars. He added besides setting up susta bazars in different areas of the city, strict action was also being taken against profiteers. On the occasion, he interacted with the citizens and sought information about the prices of items available in the Ramzan Susta Bazar.

He urged people to inform district administration regarding complaint against profiteers so that strict action against the profiteers could be taken. On the occasion, Assistant Commissioner, Quetta, Atta-ul-Munheer was also present.

Cop, woman killed in Swabi incidents F.P. Report

SWABI: A police constable in Naranji area of Swabi district shot dead his brother, who was also a police constable after both had some verbal conflict.

Yar Hussain police informed on Friday that a man, Shamsher Khan lodged a report with police that his sons, Amir Sher and Zar Sher had some verbal clash at home on Thursday. He said after the arguments one of his sons, Zar Sher, asked his brother to come out of the house.

He further said that when his son Amir Sher went out of the house, the sound of firing was heard and when he rushed out of the house, he saw his son Zar Sher had shot dead Amir Sher. The deceased Amir Sher was a constable in Yar Hussain police station while the accused Zar Sher was too a constable deployed at Atla Gadoon police station.

In another incident unknown assailants riding a motorcycle shot dead a woman in Moza Yar Hussain and escaped the scene. Police said motive behind the killing and identity of the assailants were yet to be ascertained.

Child hurts in Bara mine blast F.P. Report

BARA: A minor boy sustained splinters injuries when a mine went off here in Kohi Ghundi hill, Malikdin Khel, subdivision Bara district Khyber last day. According to details, ten years old Aziz Afridi was wandering in a nearby hill when he stepped on mine, hidden by unknown militants.

Resultedly, it exploded with a big bang, wounding the child. Soon after the incident, the locals rushed to the spot and shifted him to the nearest health center for medical aid. Health official said that the child had received wounds on his face, hands and legs, however his condition was out of danger.

As per the residents in the last two decades of militancy in Bara, militants had concealed mines in mountains and hilly areas to halt forces to be followed. But following restoration of peace, the explosive devices were left that posed a visible threat for them. They expressed their due concern and demanded of the security agencies to adopt forthwith initiatives to demining the locality.

Four robbers shot dead by accomplices

RENALA KHURD (APP): Four dacoits were killed by firing of their own accomplices during an encounter with police here on Friday. Police said seven unidentified robbers were looting people at Ram Pershad Pull when, on information, police reached the spot.

On seeing the officials, the accused started firing on them which was returned. Resultantly, four dacoits were gunned down by the firing of their own accomplices while the three others fled away.

Fair distribution of free flour directed

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Provincial Minister Health, Punjab, Dr. Javed Akram said that distribution of free of cost flour among poor and deserving people under Ramazan Package of the government is pro-poor steps of Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif and Chief Minister of the Punjab Mohsana Naqvi while free flour is being given away to one hundred million people under this package across the province.

He expressed these views while visiting flour distribution points at District Council Hall, Sports gymnasium in Hafizabad on Thursday. DC Umer Farooq Warraich, DPO Dr. Fahad Ahmad and other officers were also accompanied by him. Minister reviewed procedure of distribution of flour, security and other arrangements for providing facilities to the people and ensuring distribution of

flour transparently.

Dr. Javed Akram said that the government was started first time in the history of the country to distribution of free flour instead of providing subsidy and three bags of 10 kg was being given to each family under the Ramazan Package which was minimize financial problems of the poor family in the great extent. DC was given briefing to the Minister about providing free flour and arraignments made for this purpose in the district.

Meanwhile, Provincial Secretary for Human Resources and Minority Affairs, Punjab, Ahmad Aziz Tarar visited flour distribution points at Sukheke, Kaleke, Kassoki, Chak Chatha, Soorianwala and Vanike Tarar to reviewed arrangements at the points and process of giving away free of cost flour to deserving people. Deputy Commissioner Umar Farooq Warraich, DPO Dr. Fahad Ahmad and other

officers were also accompanied by him.

While giving briefing to the Secretary, DC informed that distribution of two bags of 10 kg was started so that people could not go the flour points repeatedly for getting flour. He said that free flour was being distributed at 15 points in peaceful atmosphere in the district.

REO inspects Rescue 1122 Hafizabad: Regional Emergency Officer Rescue 1122 Gujranwala Region Syed Kamal Abid visited Hafizabad rescue station and Pindi Bhattian station. DEO Rescue 1122 Hafizabad Engineer Adnan Nawaz presented performance report of Rescue Hafizabad to the Regional Emergency Officer on the occasion. Syed Kamal Abid inspected control room, accounts office, store, repair, maintenance workshop, rescue equipments and fitness of employees and appreciated the good performance of the employees of the Rescue.

PTI to crush PDM alliance agenda: Zulfi

ATTOCK (INP): The Leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Bokhari (Zulfi Bokhari) on Friday has said that the PDM alliance National Assembly has become puppet in the hands of Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif to make legislation of their own proposes and creating hurdles against the smooth functions of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Expressing his views in a news conference on Friday here in Attock, he said that PTI would never allow PDM alliance government to implement their pre-planned agenda launched for their own political gains. Zulfi Bokhari said that the confusion of the Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif during his speech in the parliament

house was vivid on his face. He said that the rulers have bulldozed the Constitution of Pakistan to protect their heinous crimes even they forced to pass amendments in hurry to influence the ongoing court proceedings of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Zulfi Bokhari further said that the rulers have made hostage the system but they would put resistance at all levels despite facing their concocted and fabricated cases with high-handedness of the state agencies. He claimed that the people are stood behind the bold leadership of Imran Khan who would purge the country from the prevailing political economic imbroglio with his political wisdom. Zulfi Bokhari said the sitting government of PML-N

Alliance has lost its popularity in the masses due to its anti-political policies adopted just to settle their scores with the PTI's staunch workers and common people of the country.

They have targeted their senior leaders Mr. Azam Swati, Dr. Shahbaz Gil by twisting the facts besides harassing the social media activists and imposing restrictions on media even they our brave journalist Arshad Sharif lost his breath.

He further said that the present Government has dragged the country into a severe financial crunch bringing the price hike up 50% which will be gradually increased up to 60% if the Government agreed with the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Anti-violence center for women inspected

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Additional Inspector General (IG) South Punjab Maqsood UL Hasan visited Anti-Violence Center for Women Multan and claimed that gender-based violence should be dealt with iron hand, on Friday.

During the visit SP Gulgasht Division Babar Javed Joyia, DSP Gulgasht Umar Hayat Leghari, SHO BZ Inspector Khurram Khan and other officers accompanied Add; IG during his visit. SHO Iram Hanif and Senior Psychologist Salwat Shafi were also present there during this time. Additional IG South Punjab inspected various sectors of the walk.

On this occasion, SHO Walk gave a briefing regarding various sectors. SHO Walk said that the Anti-Violence Center for Women is an excellent platform to provide justice and protection to women victims of violence.

In order to prevent violence against women and to work more effectively for the justice of women who are victims of violence, this organization is also running a campaign to create awareness and awareness among the public. Additional IG South Punjab Maqsood UL

Hasan said that it is very important to control the trend of violence against women in the society.

Incidents of harassment of women should be addressed on priority. He directed the police officers to treat the women who come here with respect and solve their problems by listening attentively.

Additional IG South Punjab Maqsood UL Hasan said on this occasion that WALK (Anti-Violence Center for Women) is a unique organization of its kind which provides moral, legal protection and free medical assistance to oppressed women.

Facilitation desk against domestic violence opened

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: Facilitation desk for women was inaugurated for the first time in Parachinar to provide free legal court facilities for women, support in ending domestic violence, on Friday.

According to details, the facility desk for women was inaugurated for the first time in Parachinar Deputy Commissioner Karam Syed Saif Salam today in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program and

the Directorate of Social Welfare formally inaugurated the Women's Facility Desk at the Social Welfare Office at Army Colony Shlozan Road.

On this occasion District Police Officer Karam Muhammad Imran, Assistant Commissioner Upper Karam Amir Nawaz, Project Manager Mohammad Ijaz Khan, Directorate Social Welfare Project Manager Amjad Khan, Social Welfare Officer Mohsin Bangash, Child Protection Coordinator Tanveer Khan, Women's

Facility Desk Officer Samina and Bashir Khan were also present. Giving a detailed briefing regarding the desk, he said that women are comfortable.

The desk will provide access to physical and psychological health services along with providing support and cooperation in case of domestic violence to the women of Karam district while providing free access to lawyers and other legal facilities, support and services for disabled women and official documents.

Six dacoits shot dead

OKARA (INP): Four dacoits were killed in firing by their accomplices in Okara while two others were shot dead in a police encounter in Kandhkot, police said on Friday.

Four dacoits were shot dead by their accomplices during a police encounter in the jurisdiction of Hujra Shah Muqem police near Ram Parshad bridge, Okara. Seven dacoits were robbing people of valuables on Ram Parshad bridge when a police team arrived. On seeing the police, the accused opened indiscriminate fire.

The police fired back in retaliation. When the firing stopped, the police found four dacoits dead. They had been shot dead by their three accomplices who had managed their escape good.

The identity of the deceased dacoits was yet to be ascertained. The police recovered illegal weapons and two stolen Honda 125CG motorcycles from the crime scene. Search in the area for the arrest of the fleeing dacoits was underway.

In Kandhkot, two

dacoits were killed while an accomplice of them escaped during a shootout with police near B-Section. According to Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Irfan Samo, the dacoits stood on the Indus Highway with the intention of committing a robbery.

They opened fire on a police team as soon as the latter reached the spot. Two dacoits were killed in retaliatory fire by the police while an accomplice of them managed to flee away.



Tsai arrives in US to warnings from China of ‘serious confrontation’

NEW YORK (BBC): Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen has arrived in New York to criticism from China, which warned the US of serious repercussions. Ms Tsai is transiting through the US on her way to Central America, but she may meet with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy on her return leg. China has condemned any such meeting - and says if it goes ahead, it could lead to a "serious confrontation".

In response, the US has said Beijing should not overreact to Ms Tsai's trip. The US hopes to see a "normal, uneventful transit", the White House's national security spokesperson John Kirby said, noting that this is Ms Tsai's seventh transit through the US during her time as Taiwan's leader. "This is a common occurrence...Other presidents of Taiwan have transited the United States. Nothing unusual about this," he said in a press briefing. This will be the 29th US transit by a sitting president in Taiwan since the first in 1994.

Ms Tsai flew into New York, where she was greeted by competing crowds of protesters and supporters outside her hotel. She is due to fly to Guatemala and Belize this week, in a visit to shore up alliances in Central America, before returning through Los Angeles where a meeting with the senior US political leader could take place, US outlets have reported. In response to her arrival in the US, China's senior envoy in Washington accused the US of advocating for Taiwan's independence by allowing Ms Tsai to "make a splash" in their country. "No matter [whether] it is Taiwan leaders coming to the United States or the US. leaders visiting



Taiwan could lead to another serious, serious, serious confrontation in the China-US relationship," said Xu Xueyuan, China's Chargé d'Affaires in a press conference.

By allowing Ms Tsai in the US, Washington "seriously undermines China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Ms Xu said. "We urge the US side not to repeat playing with fire on the Taiwan question," she said. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Taiwan Affairs Office have also strongly condemned the visit, charging that it violates the "One China" principle, whereby China insists Taiwan is an inalienable part of its territory to be reunified one day. "We firmly oppose this and will definitely take measures to resolutely fight back," Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office told

reporters. Ms Tsai is scheduled to return to Taipei on 7 April.

Taiwan considers itself a sovereign state, while China views it as a break-away province that will eventually be reunited with the mainland. Beijing has not ruled out the possible use of force to achieve that goal. Last year, tensions between China, Taiwan and the US reached a high - after Mr McCarthy's predecessor, Nancy Pelosi, flew to Taipei to meet Ms Tsai. Beijing responded to Ms Pelosi's visit with a week of massive military drills in the waters around Taiwan. Ms Tsai's visit to Central America comes after Honduras, a former ally, last week switched sides to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing. This has left Taiwan with the recognition of just 13 governments around the world.

Greek minister to visit Turkey

ATHENS (AP): Greece's defense minister announced that he will travel to neighboring Turkey next week as part of an effort to ease tension between the two NATO members, which have long-standing and often volatile disputes. Nikos Panagiotopoulos told reporters in Athens that he would visit areas devastated by earthquakes in early February with Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar.

An outpouring of support from Greece to help its neighbor last month has led to a de-escalation in disputes centered around boundaries and drilling rights in the eastern Mediterranean. "My counterpart suggested that I visit the earthquake-affected areas ... The aim is to send a symbolic message," Panagiotopoulos said in an interview with Greek private television station Mega. "A de-escalation of tension in the bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey is now evident. It is our country's wish for this de-escalation to acquire permanent characteristics." In the wake of the earthquakes, Greece and Turkey have resumed high-level meetings, including talks attended by senior diplomats on the so-called positive agenda initiative, aimed at boosting trade and other cooperation in areas unrelated to the disputes. The devastating Feb. 6 quake in southern Turkey killed around 50,000 people in the country and neighboring Syria. Panagiotopoulos will visit Turkey and travel to the southern Hatay province, one of the hardest areas hit by the earthquakes, Turkish officials said.

Chile detects 1st case of bird flu in a human

SANTIAGO (Reuters): Chile detected the first case of bird flu in a human, the country's health ministry reported. The case was detected in a 53-year-old man who presented severe influenza symptoms, according to a statement issued by the ministry, but they noted the patient was in stable condition.

The government is also investigating the source of contagion as well as others who were in contact with the patient. Chile has reported cases of the H5N1 bird flu since late last year in wild animals. Recent cases in industrial farms caused the government to halt poultry exports. Industrial cases have also been detected in Argentina, but Brazil, the world's largest exporter of poultry, remains free of the contagion. Chilean health authorities noted the virus can be transmitted from birds or marine mammals to humans, but there is no known human-to-human transmission. Earlier this year, Ecuador confirmed its first case of human transmission. Earlier this year, Ecuador confirmed its first case of human transmission. Earlier this year, Ecuador confirmed its first case of human transmission.

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Mexico arrests 5 after deadly fire

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Five people have been arrested for alleged roles in the deaths of 39 people after a fire at a Mexican migrant detention center this week, authorities said, as pressure mounts to understand why victims appeared to be left in their cells as the area filled with smoke. As part of the homicide investigation, Sara Irene Herrerias, head of the attorney general office's human rights unit, said warrants had been issued for three officers at the government's National Institute for Migration (INM), two private security officers, and the person accused of starting the fire.

She did not clarify which of the six arrest orders remained pending. A private company, Grupo de Seguridad Privada CAMSA SA de CV, was responsible for security at the center in the northern border city of Ciudad Juarez, said Security Minister Rosa Icela Rodriguez.

World Court rules US illegally froze some Iranian assets

THE HAGUE (Reuters): In a partial victory for Iran, judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled Washington had illegally allowed courts to freeze assets of some Iranian companies and ordered the United States to pay compensation but left the amount to be determined later. However, in a blow for Tehran, the ICJ said it did not have jurisdiction over \$1.75 billion in frozen assets from Iran's central bank.

Acting Legal Adviser Rich Visek of the US State Department said in a writing rejected the "vast majority of Iran's case," notably where it concerned the assets of the central bank. "This is a major victory for the United States and victims of Iran's state-sponsored terrorism," Visek added. On its Twitter account, Iran's foreign ministry claimed victory, saying the decision was proof of Iran's "righteousness and the violations by the US government". The ruling comes amid heightened

tensions between the United States and Iran after tit-for-tat strikes between Iran-backed forces and US personnel in Syria last week.

Relations have been strained after attempts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major world powers stalled, and as Iranian drones are being used by Russia against Ukraine. The case before the ICJ, also known as the World Court, was initially brought by Tehran against Washington in 2016 for allegedly breaching a 1955 friendship treaty by allowing US courts to freeze assets of Iranian companies. The money was to be given in compensation to victims of terrorist attacks. The Islamic Republic denies supporting international terrorism. The 1950s friendship treaty was signed long before Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, which toppled the US-backed shah, and the subsequent severing of US-Iranian relations.

Washington finally withdrew from the treaty

in 2018. Nonetheless, the ICJ ruled that it was in place at the time of the freezing of the assets of Iranian commercial companies and entities. "The court has concluded the United States violated its obligations under ... the treaty of amity," presiding judge Kirill Georgiev said. He added that Iran was entitled to compensation and the parties had 24 months to agree on an amount. If that did not work, the court would start new proceedings to determine compensations. The judges also explained that the court had no jurisdiction over the \$1.75 billion in assets from Iran's central bank held by the US because that bank was not a commercial enterprise, and thus not protected by the treaty.

The rulings of the ICJ, the United Nations' top court, are binding, but it has no means of enforcing them. The United States and Iran are among a handful of countries to have disregarded its decisions in the past.

NK executes people for S Korea videos, drugs

SEOUL (Reuters): North Korea executes people for drugs, sharing South Korean media, and religious activities as it stifles its citizens' human rights and freedom, its rival, South Korea, said in a report. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, based the 450-page report on testimony collected from 2017 to 2022 from more than 500 North Koreans who fled from their homeland.

"North Korean citizens' right to life appears to be greatly threatened," the ministry said in the report. "Executions are widely carried out for acts that do not justify the death penalty, including drug crimes, distribution of South Korean videos, and religious and superstitious activities." Reuters could not independently verify the South Korean government's findings but they were in line with UN investigations and reports from non-governmental organisations. North Korea has rejected criticism of its rights conditions as part of a plot to overthrow its rulers. The report gave details of rampant state-led rights abuses in communities, prison camps and elsewhere, including public executions, torture and arbitrary arrests.

Deaths and torture regularly occur in detention facilities and some people were summarily executed after being caught trying to cross the border, the ministry said. The report came as South Korea seeks to highlight its isolated neighbour's failure to improve living conditions while racing to boost its nuclear and missile arsenals. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said the report should better inform the international community of the North's

"gruesome" abuses, saying North Korea deserved "not a single penny" of economic aid while it pursues its nuclear ambitions. The approach by the conservative Yoon is a distinct departure from that of his liberal predecessor, Moon Jae-in, who faced criticism for his less outspoken position on the North's rights as he sought to improve ties and build rapport with its leader, Kim Jong Un.

The Unification Ministry is required by law to make an annual assessment of the North's rights situation. Nearly 34,000 North Koreans have settled in South Korea but the number of defectors has fallen sharply because of tighter border security. North Korean arrivals hit an all-time low of just 63 in 2021, amid COVID-19 shutdowns, before edging up to 67 in 2022, ministry data showed.

‘Russia to offer food for North Korean weapons’

LONDON (BBC): Russia is sending a delegation to North Korea to offer food in exchange for weapons, US national security spokesperson John Kirby has said.

Mr Kirby said any arms deal between North Korea and Russia would violate UN Security Council resolutions. The US has previously accused North Korea of supplying arms to the Russian military in Ukraine and the Wagner group of Russia mercenaries.

Pyeongyang earlier denied the claims. Mr Kirby told a news conference the US had new information about a deal. "We also understand that Russia is seeking to send a delegation in North Korea and that Russia is offering North Korea food in exchange for munitions," he said.

The security spokesperson said the US was monitoring the situation, and the alleged deal, closely. North Korea is one of the poorest countries in the world and has experienced chronic food shortages for decades, including a devastating famine in the mid-to-late 1990s. In February, experts warned the country, which has one of the most authoritarian governments in the world, was facing a critical food crisis due to a significant drop in production - worsened by poor weather, strict border controls and the effect of international sanctions.

Satellite imagery from South Korean authorities shows that the North produced 180,000 tonnes less food in 2022 than in 2021. Earlier, the US Treasury blacklisted a Slovak man in a separate case - for acting

as a broker between Russia and North Korea. The treasury said Ashot Mkrtcheyev, 56, had arranged sales and organise deals that would enable North Korea to ship weapons to Russia in late 2022 and early 2023. In return Pyongyang received cash, commercial aircraft, commodities and raw materials, they said. Featuring on the sanctions blacklist means American businesses cannot have dealings with Mr Mkrtcheyev, and it freezes his US assets.

Western sanctions have significantly affected Russia's ability to replace used up or destroyed weapons in its war on Ukraine. The sanctions have prompted Russia to turn to other countries to source weapons. In December last year the US said Iran had become Russia's top military supporter.

Senegal’s top opposition leader found guilty of libel

DAKAR (AP): Senegal's top opposition leader has been given a two-month suspended sentence after being found guilty of libel. Ousmane Sonko was convicted of spreading false statements and will also have to pay about \$330,000 to Minister of Tourism Mame Mbaye Niang, who accused the politician of defamation and public insults. "This is a historic day for Senegal. Many had said that the trial would not take place, but it did. This is a victory," the Cabinet minister's lawyer El-hadji Diouf told reporters in Senegal's capital, Dakar.

The case stems from accusations that Sonko, 48, made against the tourism minister during a news conference late last year. He had alleged the minister stole \$47 million from a government agency. Security was tight around the courtroom, as small groups of people gathered in support of Sonko. Sonko was not present at the hearing. His lawyers had requested to postpone the trial, saying that Sonko was sick from tear gas fired earlier this month. Sonko's party called the verdict unjust. "The verdict is abnormal ... they decided to force it but they know that it's not normal," El Malick Ndiaye, national secretary in charge of communication for Sonko's Pastef Les Patriotes party, told The Associated Press. Ndiaye said he was not sure if Sonko would appeal the verdict and said that Sonko was meeting with his lawyers to discuss options. Sonko's supporters see the charges against him as the latest attempt to cut short his political career, including his likely presidential candidacy in 2024. Sonko finished third in

Senegal's 2019 presidential election and has called on President Macky Sall to declare publicly that he won't seek a third term. The ruling party says Sall should be allowed to run after a constitutional change in 2016 - made while Sall was president - which changed presidential terms to five years. Along with the defamation trial, Sonko also faces rape charges based on accusations from a female employee who said she was assaulted by him at a massage salon. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison and would be barred from running for president. No date is set for the trial. Conviction won't impact Sonko's ability to run for president, as defamation is not included in the electoral code as one of the reasons that would bar someone from running.

Finland’s Marin in battle over state spending to stay in power

HELSINKI (Reuters): Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, who in 2019 became the world's youngest premier at 34, is battling to stay in power in an election as the country faces a recession and her challengers accuse her government of bloated public spending. Marin, who has appeared on the covers of Vogue and Time Magazine, is considered by fans around the world as a millennial role model for progressive new leaders.

But at home, she has been the subject of mundane political scrutiny, criticised by the opposition for her centre-left coalition's debt-fuelled spending and by the media for her partying at a time when Europe's energy crisis hit Finland hard. Marin says spending on education and health services is key to securing economic growth. Her rivals, Petteri Orpo of the right-wing National Coalition Party and Riikka Purra of the nationalist Finns Party, are calling for

fiscal austerity to restore government finances. The three parties are running neck-and-neck in opinion polls, with the most recent survey showing the National Coalition leading with 19.8% support, ahead of Marin's Social Democrats and the Finns Party at 19.2% each. And while personally popular, it is unclear if her popularity will translate into victory for her party in the parliamentary vote. In 2019, the Social Democrats won very narrowly, with 17.7% of the vote.

In response to neighbouring Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Marin's government overturned decades of military non-alignment and led Finland to apply for membership of NATO, a move supported by almost all members of its parliament. But both challengers say Marin's five-party coalition failed to rein in public finances, and promise to put an end to a cycle of borrowing if they win. With public debt at 71% of

GDP as of the third quarter of 2022, up from 65% when Marin took office in late 2019, mainly due to spending to support businesses and households through the coronavirus pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine, Finland's indebtedness ranked 10th among the 20 euro zone nations, according to Eurostat.

Marin's Social Democrats believe economic growth will help Finland stop accruing more debt and, if need be, prefer raising taxes over spending cuts. Finland's economy survived the COVID pandemic better than those of most European countries, but growth slowed down to 1.9% last year and the country is expected to tip into a mild recession this year, while inflation peaked at 9.1% in December.

Orpo told Reuters his priority was to put debt back on a healthy track, even if that would mean painful cuts to welfare spending, such as unem-

ployment benefits. Any winner will have to form a coalition of several parties to obtain majority in parliament but no ties have been confirmed before the vote. Marin has rejected forming a government with the Finns Party, calling it "openly racist" during a debate in January - an accusation Purra sternly rejected.

"There is nothing to hide, to be ashamed of or obscure in our values. We are a nationalist and patriotic party: we defend Finland and Finnishness," Purra wrote on Twitter at the time. In an interview with Reuters, Purra said her priority was to cut back on immigration from developing countries outside the EU, calling it "harmful" for the country. Her party would also push back Finland's carbon neutrality target which Marin's ruling coalition set for 2035. The polls are due to open, with early results from advance voting, which ended, released when the vote closes at 1700 GMT.

Kenya police, crowds clash in third wave of price rise protests

NAIROBI (Reuters): Protesters threw stones at police in Kenya's capital and attackers set fire to an office run by the president's party in a western town during a third wave of demonstrations organised by his opponents. Thousands joined marches called by opposition leader Raila Odinga against high living costs and alleged fraud in last year's vote. The government has said the vote was fair, defended its economic record and called for the protests to stop.

Violence also marred protests, and the first demonstrations before that, prompting pleas for calm from civic leaders who said they feared a descent into ethnically-charged violence. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua urged protesters to go home. "We are telling our elder Raila

Odinga, the only way to get into government is through the ballot." Earlier in the day, Odinga rode through Nairobi's Pipeline neighbourhood in a convoy with other opposition leaders, as hundreds of supporters marched alongside, waving twigs, saucepans and empty packets of flour.

Steve Odhiambo, a 31-year-old unemployed graduate, said he was demonstrating over the vote, joblessness and high food prices. "We want Raila to tell us (to protest) daily... we won't relent. Even night - we are very ready," Odhiambo said. Odinga has called for protests. The price of 2kg of maize flour, a staple, increased to 179.98 shillings (\$1.36) in February, up from 134.79 in April 2022. Kenya's inflation rose to 9.2% year-on-year in February from 9.0% a month earlier,

largely driven by food and transport prices. The protesters have accused President William Ruto of mismanagement, while his supporters have accused Odinga of using anger over rising prices, a global phenomenon, to press for political concessions and a possible role in government.

The Pipeline procession was mostly peaceful, a Reuters reporter following it said, but some throwers of stones at a police station, leading officers to fire tear gas. Odinga said his car was hit by live bullets, an assertion which Reuters could not verify. The national police spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment and the interior ministry spokesperson referred Reuters to police. In Mathare, a poor neighbourhood in Nairobi, protesters

used improvised catapults to launch stones at police in riot gear, footage on Kenyan television showed. The offices of Ruto's United Democratic Alliance (UDA) party were set ablaze in the western town of Siaya, the party's secretary general, Cleophas Malala, said.

He blamed Odinga's supporters. Odinga's spokesperson Dennis Onyango accused Malala of "ethnic profiling", saying he had assumed the attackers were Odinga supporters because they were from his ethnic group. Siaya county police commander Michael Nyaga declined to comment on the incident. Odinga, who has run for president five times, challenged Ruto's victory in August's election, but the Supreme Court upheld the result unanimously.

Colombian soldiers killed in attack blamed on ELN rebels

COLOMBIA (BBC): At least nine Colombian soldiers have been killed in an attack on an army base in Norte de Santander province. The government says rebels from the National Liberation Army (ELN) launched home-made mortar shells at the base in the municipality of El Carmen. The attack comes as the government and the ELN are engaged in peace talks as part of President Gustavo Petro's plan to bring "total peace"

to Colombia.

Mr Petro said the perpetrators were "still absolutely far from peace". Seven of the nine victims were serving their compulsory military service. Eight soldiers were also injured in the attack. Peace negotiations have been under way between the two sides since November but so far no bilateral ceasefire has been agreed. The area where the incident happened in an area known to

be an ELN stronghold. The attack, the deadliest since the peace talks resumed after a three-year hiatus, is another setback to President Petro's aim to get all of Colombia's illegal armed groups to down their weapons for good.

Last week, the government suspended the ceasefire it had agreed with Colombia's main drug trafficking cartel, the Gulf Clan. Mr Petro is the first left-wing politician to be elected president of

Colombia. His right-wing predecessor in office, Iván Duque, broke off talks with the ELN after the group exploded a car bomb at a police academy in the capital, Bogotá, in 2019. Twenty-two people died in that explosion. Mr Petro has summoned the government delegation and guarantor countries involved in the peace negotiations to a meeting, at which they will discuss the future of the peace process.

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Nation’s resolve against rising terrorism

A DSP and three of his squad members embraced martyrdom while six police officials got injured in a planned terrorist attack on a police station followed by an IED blast on DSP’s vehicle in district Lakki Marwat in the wee hours on Thursday. According to the details, the terrorists first attacked the Sadar police station with modern and heavy weapons but the police guards on duty gave a befitting response and repelled the terrorist's attack successfully. Meanwhile, the DSP vehicle rushing toward Police Station was targeted by the miscreants through IED which resulted in the martyrdom of four Police Personnel including DSP Muhammad Iqbal and his squad members.

A fresh wave of terrorism befell the country while a significant upsurge has been noticed in terrorist activities in settled districts of KP including Lakki Marwat, DI Khan, Bannu, and Tank along with continuous incidents of kidnapping, ransom, and public intimidation in newly merged districts of Erstwhile FATA, Balochistan, and Sindh. The gravity of the situation and volume of the threat was of such a serious nature that the banned terrorist outfits carried out well-planned attacks against high-value targets such as the Peshawar Police Line attack and the recent killing of a serving senior military officer that not only exposed the weakness of security mechanism but also illustrates the access and ingress of terrorist outfits in government departments and LEAs. Ironically, our Security forces are under continuous attacks from terrorists within the country and from across the Pak-Afghan border but the ruling political elite is aggressively pursuing its political agenda and is involved in an unceasing political dogfight. Currently, our brave security forces are fighting the terrorists with courage and gallantry in different parts of the country but the incumbent government has put the long-planned urgently needed All Parties Conference (APC) on the back burner and verbal condemnation of recurrent acts of terrorism had been considered sufficient by the ruling political elite that caused great concerns among the public.

The banned terror outfits reestablished their infrastructure and mobilized their sleeper cells in border regions in the past few years due to no implementation of the National Action Plan in the post-operation Zerb-e-Azb scenario. The terror incidents gained an upsurge in 2019 while this trend witnessed a continued uptick in the coming years with a significant increase in the aftermath of a so-called failed peace deal between the government and banned TTP last year. Realistically, there were persistent calls from the public, civil society, and media regarding the growing risks of a resurgence of terrorism, regrouping, and unlawful activities of the members of banned outfits in KP's border regions but neither the local administrations nor provincial and central governments responded to the outcry of the public until this monster surrounds the least secured and ill-governed border areas in the country.

Presently, the menace of terrorism has again shaped into a grave challenge for the Pakistani nation, while the reports suggest that the miscreants are well equipped this time with the latest weapons left behind by the US military during withdrawal from Afghanistan. The latest disaster had been reinvented by the insane decisions and thoughtless policies of our leaders who not only milked the snakelets for years but brought them back to the country while causing a great challenge to the nation's security and survival. Although brave security forces and Law Enforcement agencies are hunting down terrorists in far-flung areas and major cities in the country, there is a dire need for wholehearted political backing and national resolve against the growing evil of extremism and terrorism to curb its roots within the society. The current political and legal battle between the government and the opposition had reduced the scope for an APC or national consensus on terrorism issues, yet the government must mobilize the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and relaunch the 19-point National Action Plan (NAP) across the country to defeat this evil on its soil. The entire Pakistani nation is behind its valiant security forces to repeat history by defeating the menace of terrorism another time, once and for all.

Amid rising tensions, Taiwan’s ex-President embarks on ‘peacebuilding’ trip to China

FORMER Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou arrived in the Chinese city of Shanghai on Monday, becoming the first past or current president from the self-ruled island to visit the mainland since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949. The visit comes as relations between the two sides have deteriorated to their worst level in decades under current Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen - a sharp contrast to the eight years when Ma served as president, when he brought about an unprecedented improvement in ties between the two longtime rivals from 2008 to 2016.

Speaking to reporters before leaving Taiwan, Ma, 73, who was traveling with his four sisters and around 30 students from his Ma Ying-jeou Foundation, said the trip was not just to pay respects at the graves of his ancestors in China, but to build peace. "Apart from going to make offerings to my ancestors, I am also taking Taiwan university students to the mainland for exchanges with them, hoping to improve the current cross-strait atmosphere through the enthusiasm and interaction of young people, so that peace can come even faster and sooner to us here," he said. In a sign that Beijing sees Ma's visit as significant even though he no longer holds any position in government or in his Kuomintang party, the KMT, high-ranking Chinese officials greeted him at the airport. They included a deputy director of China's Taiwan Affairs Office and the Shanghai Communist Party standing committee's secretary general.

Ma and his delegation are set to hold discussions with Chinese university students and possibly meet with Chinese officials during his multi-city visit. The trip comes as tensions between China and Taiwan reach dangerous levels. China rolled back tourism and other exchanges with Taiwan after Tsai came to power in 2016 and rejected

Such good relations came to an end after the Tsai and Trump administrations built closer relations, with Washington selling more advanced weapons to Taiwan, sending high-ranking officials to visit, and the US Congress passing many acts aimed at strengthening ties with Taiwan as US-China relations deteriorated.

Cindy Sui

of the island and no longer recognizing the median line in the Taiwan Strait separating the two sides. "President Ma is very concerned about the current state of cross-strait relations, so he's using his helping hand to help both sides develop stable relations," said Taiwanese legislator Charles Chen, a former

mild compared to its past comments. With just 10 months to go before Taiwan's presidential election, it needs to win over voters to retain the presidency. And an overwhelming majority of Taiwanese - 76% - favor a reduction in cross-strait tensions, according to the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, citing its survey in March. "Suffice is to say most

sparked hopes by Taiwanese increasingly worried about Taiwan being turned into a battlefield, especially with frequent talk of a possible war by some serving US military officials and former US officials, including one who visited Taiwan recently and advocated one million Taiwanese be armed with weapons and prepared to fight. "We give him [Ma] high praise. He's showing the wisdom of a politician," said a local radio station's commentator, Jieh Wen-chieh. "We also hope he will continue to make efforts and not forget his mission for our land and our people. If we continue to follow the US path, be a pawn of the Americans, I tell you a fierce battle is before us." The visit marks the first time that Ma has been able to travel to the mainland and pay respects to his ancestors, given the hostilities between the two sides and his previous status as a government official.

The son of mainland immigrants, Ma's family suffered through the horrors of the civil war. Lawmaker Chen said Ma's message for this trip is very clear - that peace is still possible if both sides of the strait have regular and frequent exchanges, mutual understanding and interaction. "His visit will show that this place can have peace, we don't have to march towards war, that there are many people in Taiwan who want peaceful coexistence and not war," said Chen. "His message is not only for Taiwanese people, but also for Americans and the whole world. Peace is still possible."

VOA

Beijing responded by conducting a blockade of the island and no longer recognizing the median line in the Taiwan Strait separating the two sides. "President Ma is very concerned about the current state of cross-strait relations, so he's using his helping hand to help both sides develop stable relations," said Taiwanese legislator Charles Chen, a former spokesman for the presidential office when Ma was president. "He feels that since the government is unable to do this, citizens like him can."

the compromise agreement, known as the 1992 Consensus, that Ma had accepted and interpreted as the two sides agreeing there's one China, with each free to define what that is - the People's Republic of China (the mainland's official name) or the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name). Tsai and her pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP, argue the agreement was never written down and that Beijing has never acknowledged Ma and the KMT's interpretation of it.

Beijing, however, had for years tacitly accepted Ma's interpretation, allowing the two sides to put aside the difficult issue of Taiwan's sovereignty and embark on an unprecedented warming of relations that benefited Taiwan's economy and businesses.

ed. Beijing saw such moves as an attempt to change the status quo and responded by stepping up political, military and economic pressure on Taiwan, to prevent the island it hopes to reunify with one day, from moving toward formal independence.

That included flying fighter jets and sailing warships near Taiwan almost daily. China considers Taiwan a wayward province and has often stated it prefers peaceful reunification eventually but has not renounced the use of force to prevent its formal independence. Tensions peaked after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022, becoming the highest-ranking American politician to travel to the island in nearly three decades. Beijing responded by conducting a blockade

spokesman for the presidential office when Ma was president. "He feels that since the government is unable to do this, citizens like him can."

The DPP on Monday accused Ma of going against public opinion by visiting the mainland a day after Beijing "poached" another one of Taiwan's few remaining allies, Honduras, which on Sunday severed ties with Taipei to switch official recognition to Beijing. "Beijing chose the day before he departed on his trip to manipulate Honduras to sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan. As a former president, he should've adjusted his itinerary and expressed his position, such as by delaying his trip by one or two days," said DPP spokesman Chang Chih-hao. The DPP's criticism of Ma is relatively

Taiwanese see peaceful coexistence as the preferred outcome rather than open confrontation, something that could indicate the DPP's 'Confront China to save Taiwan' card that it used so successfully in the 2019-20 cycle might not be working in this coming election," said Paul Huang, a Foundation research fellow. Routinely conducted government surveys consistently found only 30% of Taiwanese people want formal independence, with a majority preferring to maintain the status quo of de facto independence. At the airport in Taiwan, Ma was greeted by mostly supporters and only a handful of protesters from a pro-independence group that opposed his trip, shouting that Ma was humiliating Taiwan and "forfeiting sovereignty."

Ma's trip, however, has

Taiwan tensions fuel anxiety on Japan’s tiny Yonaguni Island

William Gallo

KOTARO Kobari was returning from an all-night fishing expedition in his small boat off the remote Japanese island of Yonaguni in August last year when his phone suddenly lit up with notifications showing phone calls and messages he had missed while at sea. For 15 years, Kobari had made his living fishing for marlin and tuna in the waters near Yonaguni, but he had never seen anything like this - as he returned home, he found throngs of reporters waiting to ask about his close call with disaster.

Kobari did not realize he was in any danger, until journalists and colleagues told him that the Chinese military had fired a ballistic missile over Taiwan and into the waters outside Yonaguni while he was fishing. The Chinese missile, which fell just 80 kilometers from Yonaguni, was one of five that landed that day in Japan's exclusive economic zone, part of Beijing's outburst over then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Now, Kobari, a tough-talking man in his early 60s, shrugs off the incident, though it clearly still angers him. Speaking to VOA while standing on his boat

docked at Yonaguni's main fishing port, Kobari said the "crappy" Chinese missile probably wouldn't have hurt him anyway. "Well, maybe it would have hurt me," he corrects himself.

The missile incident shattered nerves on Yonaguni - a quiet, tropical paradise that has the misfortune of being located in one of the world's tensest geopolitical hotspots. Taiwan is just 100 kilometers away, easily visible on a clear day. Yonaguni is also close to a disputed group of islands that are controlled by Japan but also claimed by China. Traditionally, Yonaguni has been known for its thick rainforests, grassy coastal overlooks where wild horses roam free, and clear waters where divers can swim with hammerhead sharks. But increasingly, the island is drawing more attention because of its military facilities.

Yonaguni is the westernmost in a series of small Japanese islands, known as Yaeyama, that are gradually being transformed into a key line of defense as Japan embarks on its biggest military buildup since World War II. For decades after World War II, the islands were demilitarized. Locals long joked that Yonaguni was a "two-gun island,"

referring to the pair of police substations based there. But Japanese authorities eventually began to realize the strategic significance of the islands, especially as China's military grew stronger and more willing to project force outside its borders.

In 2016, the Japanese government built a military base on Yonaguni - mainly for surveillance. Those facilities have steadily been fortified. Last year, authorities brought a mobile radar unit to Yonaguni to monitor Chinese patrols near the disputed Senkaku islands, which China refers to as Diaoyu. An electronic warfare unit is set to be installed by 2024. In late December, Japan's Defense Ministry announced plans to deploy a missile defense unit - a move some fear could endanger the island during a potential Taiwan conflict.

Shigenori Takenishi, the head of a local fishing cooperative, said he welcomed the establishment of the military base but acknowledges many locals worry about the missiles.

"Residents and islanders are very concerned that the deployment of the missile unit will make the island an offensive target for China, a hostile nation," said

Takenishi. In a 2015 referendum, about 60% of Yonaguni voters approved the construction of the military base. Since then, many locals say support has increased, in part because of China's threatening behavior. The experience of Kobari, the fisherman who was at sea during the Chinese missile incident, is instructive. Kobari said he sees a growing number of aggressive Chinese patrols near the disputed islands. "Even before, they were around, but recently they chase you. They follow you. They approach you - the Chinese coast guard, I think. It's outrageous," Kobari said. "If they hit me, there's no way I can win that contest. It's scary when a boat that big gets so close."

China's coast guard has defended its patrols near the islands, saying it is countering Japanese incursions into what it sees as Chinese territorial waters. The situation has deepened Kobari's animosity toward China. Not only does he support the militarization of Yonaguni, but he says Tokyo authorities should go much further to deter the Chinese Communist Party, which he calls a "cancer." Under plans released in December,

Japan will roughly double defense spending over the next five years and for the first time deploy missiles that can hit military targets in other countries. The policies smash through decades-old taboos in Japan, which has a technically pacifist constitution drafted by the United States following Tokyo's defeat in World War II.

In an interview with VOA, Noriaki Shikata, Cabinet secretary for public affairs at the Japanese Prime Minister's Office, defended the defense buildup, noting Japan's challenging security landscape. "Unless we acquire, for example, counterstrike capabilities, it's not going to be enough to defend ourselves," said Shikata. Shikata said his government is "extremely concerned" about Chinese government patrols near the Senkaku Islands. He also said Tokyo is "opposed to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo" in Taiwan.

While China may be among the top concerns for Tokyo, there are other regional challenges, including North Korea, which is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal, and Russia, whose invasion of Ukraine shocked many in Japan. Many analysts say Russia's invasion of its weaker

neighbor has played a significant role in convincing both Japanese leaders and the public to support a more assertive foreign policy. "There is just one thing that matters - that's location," said Tomohiko Taniguchi, a professor at Tokyo's Keio University who has held numerous high-profile government positions. "If Japan were in a different neighborhood, Japan would have been as pacifist as it was 45, 50 years ago."

Many Yonaguni residents fiercely oppose the military buildup - including Fumie Kano, who runs a tourist hostel in the house where she was born and raised. "We see how useless this military presence is, day after day. Having more military equipment doesn't make us feel more secure. Having military equipment causes war. We shouldn't be doing this here," she said. In Kano's opinion, Tokyo should pay more attention to those in the older generation who experienced war and who oppose spending so much on weapons. If a war broke out, Kano said she would not leave Yonaguni. "I'd die on this island if it came to that. It'd be terrible. I love this island. I want to live here forever. I'm angry at this policy that could ruin our lives," she said.

Boris likely to remain a constant in UK political life

Mohamed Chebaro

I watched and listened in disbelief last week to what Boris Johnson, the UK's former prime minister and chief architect of "Brexit Britain," had to say in front of Parliament's privileges committee, which has been tasked with determining whether or not he deliberately misled the House of Commons, a grave offense for British politicians. If found guilty, Johnson risks losing his parliamentary seat, which would be a blow to his potential political comeback - a desire that is in step with what other offending politicians are doing around the world, from the US' Donald Trump to Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, along with many others.

The problem with Johnson and politicians like him is the rising deficiency of accountability in the modern state system and the seeping impunity. These are facilitated more than ever by the unparalleled scale of erroneous information authorship, distribution

and consumption in a fast-moving, often clickbait-led and driven world (but this may be a subject left for another article). At the end of his questioning, Johnson agreed that the committee was not a "kangaroo court," as some of his allies had claimed. But he reserved his final judgment about its impartiality while the four Conservatives, two Labour and one Scottish National Party committee members consider whether or not to rule in his favor. "I will wait to see how you proceed with the evidence that you have," he said. This reminded me of childish behavior, where the loser in a game bends all the rules and then goes on to question what is right and what is wrong. To my mind, Johnson looked defeated, and a loser on top of that, unable to manufacture the truth to defend himself, despite justifications from the likes of ex-Brexit Opportunities Minister Jacob Rees-Mogg, who referred to a so-called court of public opinion that had acquitted the former PM. Meanwhile, a YouGov poll

showed that the majority of the UK public thinks Johnson is dishonest, while only 13 percent believe he is honest.

However, I am not sure he is finished yet, as some Conservative MPs have been quick to conclude. Caroline Nokes, for example, said that Johnson's political comeback was "finished" after his grilling at the televised hearing, adding that, as far as she was concerned, "Boris Johnson is not coming back as prime minister." I base my uncertainty on watching how ex-President Trump is still rattling America and how Netanyahu is sowing unprecedented divisions in Israel. This all goes to say that we are living in uncertain times, with plenty of space for the propagation of fake narratives at the expense of the factual and the misleading at the expense of the truth. The distorted seems easier on the ears of populists - and their fallacies that support often instinctive biases - at the expense of the more

complex yet revelatory hard truths. From the days when he first chose to support Brexit, it was clear his ability lay in campaigning on the basis of many false claims, painting a rosy economic future for the country and its people outside of the EU family, free of immigrants invading British shores. However, recent numbers and realities have begun to reveal the scale of the damage done by Brexit. Office for Budget Responsibility Chairman Richard Hughes admitted this week that Britain is undergoing the "biggest squeeze on living standards we've faced in this country on record." He said that Brits' spending power will not recover to pre-pandemic levels for another half-decade. Hughes added that Brexit's impact on the UK economy was of the same "magnitude" as the COVID-19 pandemic or the energy price crisis. He said he has "struggled to put it in any kind of sensible context," saying that the UK's gross

domestic product will, "in the long run," be 4 percent smaller than if the country had stayed in the EU.

Four percent could seem small to some, but in economic terms this is a colossal blow. Hughes said the UK's economic growth has been held back by supply constraints related to labor shortages and stagnant investment since 2016. This was in line with estimates previously published by the Centre for European Reform, which found that Brexit cost the UK £33 billion (\$40 billion) in lost trade in the second quarter of last year alone and more than £40 billion in tax losses in the year to the end of June 2022. The same research showed that the UK economy was 5.5 percent smaller in June last year than it would have been without Brexit. Leaving the EU has also cost British households more than £5.8 billion in higher supermarket bills, according to the Centre for Economic Performance. Of course, Brexiters like Johnson have denied these figures have anything to do

with them and Brexit or that the country needs an emergency strategic review to try to limit the damage caused by their misleading of the public, even if that would be in the nation's long-term interest.

Therefore, I tend to agree that, despite the need for an investigation into whether or not he lied to Parliament and under oath to the privileges committee, it is difficult to see Johnson withering away from British public life. As his former boss at The Daily Telegraph Max Hastings has rightly said, it is not possible to write off Johnson "until he is buried at a crossroads with a stake driven through his heart." So, the West should get used to the Johnsons, Trumps and others like them, as people everywhere are becoming more adept at exploiting the empty slogans of populism and its claims of easy fixes, compared to the hard and tough calls needed to govern properly and fix the many ills that have long riddled, poisoned and challenged human existence.

Israelis need to see through biggest lie of all

At the heart of the ongoing turmoil engulfing Israel is a pathological liar and a pervasive lie. The liar has long been exposed, but the lie he and others have long propagated has only now begun to unravel. It is no coincidence that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has thus far lied his way through a crisis of his own creation. He is known among his former and present coalition partners to be a liar - a pathological liar, a serial liar, and his favorite, the "liar of all liars". Even Western leaders, like former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and former US President Donald Trump, thought the man was an unbearable liar.

It is true that, in some of these instances, it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black, but rarely has there been such a wide consensus about a politician, except perhaps Trump. But then again, Netanyahu is a Trumpian politician, lacking in moral scruples and always advancing his interests at the expense of others. In 2022, Netanyahu led a populist campaign of lies against Israel's elites, media and judiciary in a successful attempt to regain the premiership he had lost a year earlier. This self-declared liberal then formed a coalition government of tyrannical fascists and fanatics to take on the old liberal "deep state" and transform it into a fundamentalist "Jewish state".

He has thus far insisted that there is no personal agenda behind his judiciary agenda, which aims to subjugate the courts to the whims of the ruling majority. But in reality, he made a Faustian deal with Israel's most fanatic parties that allows him to stay out of prison and at the helm of state power, despite his indictment on multiple charges of corruption. In return, he is helping them impose their ultrareligious agenda on state and society and further marginalise Israel's Palestinian minority. Netanyahu has proven ready to do anything in his power to hold on to

power, including conspiring with the most rogue and dangerous elements of the Israeli polity to undermine the secular liberal Ashkenazi-dominated establishment that built the foundations of the Israeli state and shaped its development.

Himself secular, Ashkenazi, and morally challenged, Netanyahu commands wide support among the ultra-religious, ultranationalist and Sephardic communities, all of whom helped him become the longest-serving prime minister in the history of the Israeli state. Dubbed the "King of Israel" by his base, Netanyahu probably thinks he also can shoot anyone on Dizengoff Street and still not lose a vote. This Trumpian arrogance led him to force through the Knesset his radical, illiberal and transformative legislative agenda with a very thin majority, ignoring the mounting opposition domestically and internationally, notably from the United States and Europe. That was a mistake; a stupid mistake.

It did not take long for Netanyahu's detractors to conclude that once his judicial "reform" is passed, lifting judiciary oversight and sidelining the Supreme Court, the prime minister and coconspirators will be able to legislate any law regulating any aspect of Israeli life, with no legal means to stop them. In response, hundreds of thousands of secular and liberal Israelis from all walks of life poured onto the streets to protest against his attempts to undo their old liberal Ashkenazi-dominated order and replace it with new autocratic rule. They threatened to paralyse the state, shutting down ports, Tel Aviv airport, and universities, until their demands are met. Under intensified street pressure, Netanyahu finally backed down on Monday and delayed the parliamentary vote over his agenda in the hope of defusing tensions. His promise to reach a national or parliamentary consensus has thus far been downplayed by the

Marwan Bishara

protestors as no more than a ploy to kick the can down the road.

But some among the opposition leaders, like his former coalition partner, Benny Gantz, seem ready to reach a deal, in the name of the national - read Jewish Israeli - interest. Many of the protesters waving Israeli flags in a show of patriotism and in defence of their freedoms do not seem to realise or admit that as long as their colonial Israel maintains its oppressive Jewish supremacy in Palestine, its entrenched system of apartheid will continue to feed into tyrannical fascism and fanaticism. They do not seem to realise or admit that the new generation of rogue religious extremists, like ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, are byproducts of Israel's occupation and illegal settlement enterprise, and that judging from their large and growing following among Israeli youth, they are destined to become very powerful and very dangerous, as the violent apartheid regime persists.

And while there is no moral equivalence between Israel's drive for domination and the Palestinian struggle for freedom, the past three decades of apartheid have had similar effects on both the occupier and occupied, strengthening the religious and extremist elements in both societies and threatening new cycles of violence that will in turn lead to more fanaticism. It is not yet clear how or when the present commotion will end, but what is clear is that today's schism within Israeli society will continue to deepen unless Israel tackles the biggest lie of all: that of being a Jewish democracy, a liberal occupier and a civilised tormentor of another people, the Palestinians. This lie became pervasive in the early 1990s, when the US-sponsored peace process gave Israel the privilege of becoming a prosperous settler-colonial state over 78 percent of historic Palestine - an industrious, liberal state with secular Tel Aviv at its heart, fully

integrated into the West and the Middle East - alongside an independent Palestinian state.

The alternative was to continue to expand its illegal Jewish settlements to become an apartheid state like South Africa, stretching over the entirety of historic Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, with two separate political systems, economies and infrastructure, dominated by a more fanatic and illiberal "Jewish state" with the religiously charged, occupied Jerusalem at its heart. Arrogant and greedy, Israel rejected the overly generous Palestinian offer of coexistence, believing it could have it both ways - rule over all of Palestine and enjoy peace, prosperity and international legitimacy. This was propagated from the outset by none other than Netanyahu himself, who took power in 1996 after conjuring incitement against the peace process, which had led to the 1995 assassination of his predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin.

Thanks to its American patron, Israel has, for a long while, had it both ways. Over the past 30 years, Washington has shored up Israel's economy, invested in its high-tech industry, funded its army, and pushed for the normalisation of its relations with much of the world, all the while ignoring the deepening apartheid and mounting violence. But the decades of unconditional American support that have allowed Israel to punch above its weight withchutzpah, and approach the realities of the region with utter disdain, have also enabled the rise of apocalyptic fascism and fanaticism that may well lead to its demise. So, let me be clear, as the deception unravels and the lie catches up with the liar, Israel must end the charade, break out of its Zionist trap, and stop pretending to be both colonial and liberal, Jewish and democratic, secular and fanatic, oppressive and peaceful, apartheid and humane. It is time for Israel to choose wisely before the fanatics make the choice for it.



Localization key to effective development policies

Julia Kaufman & Jane Kabubo-Mariara

AN international development circles, "localization" has become a buzzword, partly thanks to a push by the US to shift more aid funding to local actors. But growing awareness of the importance of local expertise is not yet adequately reflected in most development research, which still regularly excludes researchers from low- and middle-income countries. As matters stand, economic and development research in the Global South is led almost exclusively by academics who do not live there. A 2021 study found that just 16 percent of the articles published in top development journals between 1990 and 2019 were authored by researchers based in developing countries, and only 9 percent of presenters at major development conferences were affiliated with universities in developing countries.

Moreover, a recent report by the Center for Global Development shows that local researchers tend to be left out of rigorous impact evaluations of development programs in health, education and other sectors. While the number of research experts in low- and middle-income coun-

ty. The Partnership for Economic Policy, known as PEP and led by one of us (Kabubo-Mariara), is an example of a Southern-led global organization that supports and promotes the work of local researchers in order to amplify the policy impact of high-quality evidence. PEP uses a "research coproduction" model in nearly all its projects, fostering collaborations among researchers and key government and non-government stakeholders to shape research objectives and generate useful evidence.

Consequently, more than half of PEP's projects since 2013 have influenced policy processes and decisions in target countries. For example, recommendations by local PEP researchers concerning the protection of rural women's livelihoods against climate shocks have been integrated into Lesotho's national agricultural policy. And, in Pakistan, PEP-supported research on the economic effects of the policy response to COVID-19 has informed the federal budget. In academic settings, more than 40 percent of papers from PEP-supported projects have been published in international peer-reviewed journals and half

needs by collaborating over time. But despite the growing interest in and capacity for long-term, trust-based partnerships, a large share of development-research funding continues to support one-off projects and short-term consultancies. As a result, many local research institutions face chronic funding challenges and other professional barriers. To be sure, local expertise is by no means a silver bullet for combating poverty. And, like all empirical research, policy-relevant evaluations may carry risks related to conflicts of interest and require ethical safeguards. But both evidence and experience show that researchers with firsthand knowledge of the countries studied can help identify more relevant questions, understand political constraints and guide policymakers on how to spend limited public funds more effectively. Last year, a group of PEP researchers launched a call to action to increase the participation of researchers from the Global South in economic development research, citing a series of studies on underrepresentation in the field.

Funders in government, philanthropic foundations, universities and other grant-making institutions

Researchers with deep knowledge of their countries and communities offer critical insights into local priorities and opportunities to inform policy decision-making. And contextual knowledge is not entirely dependent on geography: many in the diaspora can also provide valuable empirical insights for policy. The Partnership for Economic Policy, known as PEP and led by one of us (Kabubo-Mariara), is an example of a Southern-led global organization that supports and promotes the work of local researchers in order to amplify the policy impact of high-quality evidence. PEP uses a "research coproduction" model in nearly all its projects, fostering collaborations among researchers and key government and nongovernment stakeholders to shape research objectives and generate useful evidence. Consequently, more than half of PEP's projects since 2013 have influenced policy processes and decisions in target countries. For example, recommendations by local PEP researchers concerning the protection of rural women's livelihoods against climate shocks have been integrated into Lesotho's national agricultural policy.

Bush did what Putin's doing - so why is he getting away?

It was disgracefully dubbed "Operation Iraqi Freedom" by the invading United States military forces, but for millions of Iraqis around the world, it was anything but. Last week marked the 20th anniversary of the start of what then-United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan described more appropriately as an "illegal" war on Iraq by the US and its allies. What we did learn from the war is the abhorrent hypocrisy of labels in conflicts when viewed through a Western lens. This war has, as an Iraqi, plagued my thoughts daily since March 2003. It has left hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead, with millions of others displaced and their lives ruined.

Images of Baghdad's night sky lit up by flames, as bombs were indiscriminately dropped more regularly than a ticking clock on the City of Peace, are forever etched in our memories. For weeks, nights turned to day, as Iraqis would pray to make it to the morning alive. The years that followed could hardly be forgotten, either. From an oppressive occupation to sectarian governance, the Iraq war has continued to ruin the lives of millions. My own family is now scattered around the world, from Canada to Australia, as a result of the brutal invasion.

Sadly, over the last 20 years, we have failed to see any accountability for the plethora of lies and false arguments by both former US President George W Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's governments that led to an era-defining conflict. In contrast, it took current US President Joe Biden mere weeks to decry his Russian counterpart as a "war criminal" after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Of course,

Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine is brutal and illegal. But what about Biden's own warmongering? Let me remind you: Biden championed a war in Iraq years before Bush even took office. Within a mere few days of US military action in Iraq, more than 15,000 Iraqis lost their lives in violent conflict as a result of Washington's "shock and awe" tactic to overwhelm the country with its military might. To put this into context, and although one innocent life lost is one too many, the total death toll in Ukraine of non-combatants since the war began a year ago is an estimated 8,000 civilians.

Yet while Russia has been hit by sanctions by multiple Western nations and their allies, and the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant against Putin, we saw none of this with the US, United Kingdom, Bush and Blair.

There's little difference even between the language used by Bush and Putin before their respective wars. Ahead of the Iraq invasion, Bush used terms like "freedom", "liberation" and "war on terror". Putin similarly claimed he was liberating Ukraine and curbing "terrorism" in the region. Such are the parallels that in a moment of bizarre irony, Bush - while attempting to denounce Putin's invasion last year - accidentally scolded his own actions, criticising in a speech "the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq". The reality is that both leaders used false narratives to build public support for wars that have redefined their respective regions. Much like Bush's claims of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Putin suggested Ukraine has ambi-

itions to use chemical weapons.

It was Bush, however, who did use incendiary weapons in Iraq in the form of white phosphorus in Fallujah, with children to this day suffering birth defects as a consequence of the lasting effects of the chemical. Yet far from facing accountability, Bush has been allowed to redefine his own narrative as an immigrant-loving artist. If he is not seeing out his days of retirement at his ranch in Texas, he can be found dancing with Ellen DeGeneres on prime-time television. Former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, both architects of the Iraq war, passed away without facing justice. Bush must be held to account before it is too late. Conveniently, Bush withdrew the US from the International Criminal Court in the year before the Iraq invasion, making it near to impossible to hold US leaders or military officials to account for alleged war crimes. When the ICC's top prosecutor wanted to investigate alleged war crimes by US soldiers in Afghanistan in 2020, Washington imposed sanctions on her - much like Putin's Russia has opened a case against the current ICC prosecutor.

Against this backdrop, the US making allegations of war crimes against Putin seems hypocritical. At least 800,000 Iraqis were killed as a consequence of Bush's alleged divinely inspired invasion of Iraq. Those who dared oppose the eight-year US occupation in Iraq were labelled as insurgents. Many were infamously tortured and sexually abused by US troops at the now notorious Abu Ghraib prison. Similar resistance movements in Ukraine,

however, are branded as heroic for standing up to Russian occupation. Ukrainians have been celebrated for making homemade Molotov cocktails as defence weapons, but when similar acts of resistance happened in Iraq or Palestine, the label "terrorist" was used. This racist double standard has been evident throughout the past year. The touching acts of global solidarity with Ukraine - from Premier League football matches raising Ukrainian flags to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy giving a speech at the Golden Globes this year - were never on display for the victims of the brutal Iraq war.

If the absence of support and empathy was not bad enough, the war on Ukraine unsheathed a disregard for the lives of people in the Global South suffering from deadly conflicts often plotted in Western capitals. "This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades," said Charlie D'Agata, a senior CBS News correspondent, reporting from Kyiv, Ukraine. "You know, this is a relatively civilised, relatively European - I have to choose those words carefully, too - city where you wouldn't expect that or hope that it's going to happen." The reason Iraq has witnessed decades worth of war is directly linked to Bush's 2003 decision to invade a country that had already been ravaged by years of brutal sanctions. The death of innocent Iraqis matters just as much as the deaths of innocent Ukrainians. Just as Ukrainians deserve life and solidarity, so too do Iraqis. Just as we should want Putin to be tried for his crimes, we should be demanding that Bush be charged for his. We cannot wait another 20 years.

In May, a 40-year-old woman - we'll call her "Ana" - was arrested in downtown San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. She presided over a shabby bar and eatery in an area known as the Ex Biblioteca - or Ex-Library - a reference to the institution that had occupied the grounds prior to the devastating earthquake of October 1986. Her family has not heard from her since.

Ana was detained for alleged gang ties, two months into the state of emergency that kicked off on March 27, 2022 in response to a spike in homicides occasioned by a collapse in negotiations between gangs and Nayib Bukele, president of El Salvador and self-proclaimed "coolest dictator in the world". Over the past year, about 66,000 people have been imprisoned in accordance with the "emergency" - most of them condemned to indefinite detention and relieved of even the most basic rights. Many have nothing whatsoever to do with gangs aside from residing in a gang-saturated country. As luck would have it, the Ex Biblioteca is now the ex-Ex Biblioteca, if you will, as much of the space has been cleared to make way for Bukele's vision of a revamped downtown that is more aesthetically pleasing to the international bitcoin crowd he is fervently courting - and other important representatives of "development", "investment" and similar euphemisms for capitalism's war on poor people.

When I spoke recently in San Salvador with a former employee of Ana's, he dismissed the possibility that she had any gang affiliations but speculated that her arrest had indeed served as a useful warning to other folks in the downtown area to comply with the sweeping "voluntary evictions" that were about to take place. To be sure, mass incarceration is one way to temporarily disappear

A nation under hypnosis

Belén Fernández

domestic problems, particularly if you also imprison lawyers who defend people accused of gang ties. A case in point is attorney Nubia Morales, who was arrested this month for representing "suspected gang members". And while there is no denying that El Salvador has long been terrorised by gangs, the current obliteration of rights is also definitively terrifying.

It bears reiterating that the gangs themselves are nothing more than a product of United States policy, Salvadoran state negligence and the good old capitalist war on the poor - all of which serve to underscore that Bukele's much-celebrated "new reality" is not really anything new at all. Over the past several decades, gangs have provided a convenient excuse for all manner of US-backed Salvadoran state repression, including extrajudicial killings by law enforcement personnel. Now, they continue to constitute a handy scapegoat for all societal ills - as well as the justification for a potentially eternal "state of emergency" and suspension of fundamental freedoms. Just the other day in downtown San Salvador, I was accosted by a policeman and threatened with five years in prison for having taken a photograph of an apparently inebriated woman who had just been smacked by a private security guard. After deleting the image from my phone and receiving a pompous lecture, I was eventually allowed to go, another manifestation of gringo privilege to which the average Salvadoran obviously cannot aspire.

A young man from the municipal of Apopa, previously one of the most gang-ridden zones in the San

Salvador metropolitan area, recently commented to me that, while it was nice to be able to enter neighbourhoods where he would have once been killed, the "other side of the coin" of the Bukelean emergency was that he could now "be thrown in jail forever for no reason". Meanwhile, Bukele's international acolytes are having near-orgasms over the option to buy ice cream on the beach using cryptocurrency. Call it the other side of the bitcoin. As of mid-March, the human rights organisation Cristosal had documented 126 in-custody deaths during the state of emergency although the presumed existence of clandestine graves within detention centres would boost that number even higher.

Abuse and torture of detainees is rampant, and Bukele himself delights in conspicuously mocking the very concept of human rights on Twitter, his preferred platform for governance. One pride and joy of the world's "coolest dictator" is El Salvador's new Centre for the Confinement of Terrorism (CECOT), located about 75km (45 miles) southeast of San Salvador, where Bukele has sworn that suspected gang members will disappear for "decades". With a maximum capacity of 40,000 people, CECOT is said to be the largest such facility in the Americas. The jail was built in a record seven months, unhindered by any sort of financial transparency - such is the nature of business in the "new reality". The week before the one-year anniversary of the state of emergency, I drove out to CECOT with a Salvadoran acquaintance of mine who, as we approached the looming white monstrosity and corresponding military checkpoint, entered into a

visible state of panic and swung the car around. Back in San Salvador later on, my acquaintance, a former Bukele devotee, confessed to having suddenly experienced a reckoning with the reality that nothing and no one could stop the Salvadoran authorities from locking him up for life if they wished to do so.

And yet the brand of politics hawked by Bukele, a former advertising executive, enjoys dangerously high approval ratings as many Salvadorans have enthusiastically embraced what amounts to a war on themselves. This seemingly blind rapture, an almost spiritual ecstasy, can perhaps be explained by El Salvador's contemporary history of unceasing violence and Bukele's marketing of himself as an instant saviour. The day before I drove out to CECOT, I was downtown drinking beer with two Salvadoran friends who were lamenting the "voluntary eviction" of Ana's spot in the Ex Biblioteca. At one point during our conversation, a young man sitting next to us felt the need to interject his own opinion, which was that we were wrong, Bukele was right, and "modernity and tourism" were all that mattered. Judging from his appearance, this young man hailed from El Salvador's lower socioeconomic echelons, meaning that, if someone were to spontaneously accuse him of gang ties, no amount of "modernity and tourism" was going to save him. Just as no amount of "modernity and tourism" will ultimately save El Salvador from crushing poverty.

Indeed, what is lost in the present national hypnosis is that poverty kills too. On Monday, as Bukele's crack-down celebrates its first anniversary - and a "new reality" that is neither new nor real continues to destroy a whole lot of lives - there is no end to the state of emergency in sight. And that is the real emergency.

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Weekly inflation decrease by 0.36 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.36 percent for the combined consumption group during the week ended on March 30, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

The SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 249.75 points as compared to 250.66 points during the past week, according to PBS data. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 45.36 percent.

The weekly SPI with the

base year 2015-16 =100 is covering 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs17,732 witnessed a 0.42 percent decrease and went down to 256.53 points from last week's 257.62 points.

Meanwhile, the SPI for the consumption group from Rs 17,732-22-888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175; and above Rs 44,175 witnessed a decrease of 0.41 percent, 0.37 percent, 0.37 percent, and 0.34 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 23 (45.10%) items increased, 11 (21.57%) items decreased and 17 (33.33%) items remained

stable.

The items which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week (WoW) included onions (15.10%), chicken (11.96%), tomatoes (10.26%), cooking oil 5 litre (1.24%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (1.07%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (0.77%), pulse gram (0.42%), pulse moong (0.22%) and mustard oil (0.17%), non-food items, LPG (1.35%) and firewood (0.35%).

The items that recorded an increase in their average prices on a week-on-week (wow) basis included bananas (7.54%), eggs (7.22%), mutton (2.39%), sugar (2.12%), wheat flour (1.91%), tea lipton (1.79%), georgette & shirt-

ing (1.32%) each, milk fresh (1.12%) and beef (1.02%).

On a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the commodities which recorded a decrease in their average prices included tomatoes (10.88%) and chillies powdered (9.56%).

The commodities that witnessed an increase in prices on a YOY included cigarettes (165.88%), onions (127.07%), wheat flour (123.22%), gas charges for Q1 (108.38%), diesel (102.84%), tea lipton (98.08%), eggs (96.67%), bananas (94.89%), rice basmati broken (83.65%), petrol (81.17%), rice irri-6/9 (79.17%), pulse moong (67.85%) and potatoes (56.44%)

PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 152.48 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) had witnessed a bullish trend on Friday, gaining 152.48 points, with a positive change of 0.38 percent, closing at 40,000.83 against 39,848.35 points on the previous day.

A total of 112,200,436 shares were traded during the day as compared to Rs 88,701,289 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 3.933 billion against Rs

3.988 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 314 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 168 of them recorded gains and 115 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 31 companies remained unchanged. The three top-trading companies were Pak Int. Bulk with 12,120,000 shares at Rs 4.22 per share, Pak Elektron with 6,523,000 shares at Rs 11.30 per share, and Hascol Petrol

with 4,865,500 shares at Rs 5.93 per share.

Bata (Pak) witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 94.26 per share price, closing at Rs2033.68, whereas the runner-up was Nestle Pakistan with a Rs 40.10 rise in its per share price to Rs 5017.50.

Pak Services witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 35.90 per share closing at Rs 840.10, followed by Philip Morris Pak. with a Rs 35.57 decline to close at Rs 426.43.

FPCCI urges SBP for a policy rate cut of 250 bps

KARACHI (NNI): The Policy Advisory Board - Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce (FPCCI) has urged the State Bank of Pakistan to cut the policy rate by 250 basis points in the forthcoming monetary policy committee to target core inflation rather than general inflation.

The core inflation in February 2023 stood at 17.1 percent whereas general inflation was 31.5 percent in the same period. Given the bleak economic outlook with the decline in the real sector and deterioration in business confidence, it is imperative for the State Bank of Pakistan to not control supply-induced general inflation by raising policy rates.

Pakistan's current policy rate of 20.00% is well above its regional peers, including China, India, and Bangladesh, for which the policy rates are 2.75%, 6.50%, and 6.00% respectively. Inflation in Pakistan, however, appears to be deep-rooted, and it mainly stems from substantial exchange rate depreciation, unprecedented hike in international commodity prices, multiple rounds of hikes in energy tariffs, and other prescribed measures under the IMF program. Despite the massive hike in the policy rates by 1,025 bps from 9.75% to 20% during February 2022 and February 2023, inflation remained stubbornly high and further surged from 12.20% to 31.5% over the same period.

The State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) approach to contain inflation by increasing the policy rate turned out futile and has

adversely impacted the economy, deteriorated the fiscal equation of the country, and has severely hit the already struggling business community. According to the Ministry of Finance's Monthly Economic Update & Outlook February 2023, markup payments grew by 77 percent during the first half of FY 2023 driven by higher servicing on debt amid a higher level of interest rates. The impact of the hike in interest rate could be seen in a reduction in bank advances to the private sector that took a dive to 73 percent during the first eight months of the fiscal year 2022-23, according to the data released by the central bank. Overall SBP and commercial banks' credit portfolio reflects that the government sector accounts for 65.91 percent of total credit, whereas the private sector share is a meager 34.09 percent as of February 2023.

Almost all sectors bear the brunt of lower production in the backdrop of soaring inflation, pushing the cost of doing business. The large-scale manufacturing fell by 7.9 percent year on year in January 2023 due to a shortage of raw materials, expensive credit, and political unrest. FPCCI strongly recommends that the SBP to target core inflation instead of general inflation as it excludes the volatile components of the inflation, i.e. energy and food prices. In addition, the prudential regulations measures should be used to curb demand pull in particular sectors as the monetary policy measures have differential impacts on the spectrum of industries and income classes.

Stock markets climb as traders weigh interest rates outlook

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Stock markets mostly moved higher on Thursday as banking sector worries eased and traders weighed central banks' interest rate plans in the wake of recent turmoil. Investors have taken to heart reassurances by authorities around the world that fallout from the collapse of US regional banks and the takeover of Credit Suisse has been contained.

"Worries about the banking industry continue to ease, offering support to the broader market," said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com.

Cooling inflation in Europe also boosted hopes for a pause in interest rate hikes.

"Fresh from their triumph yesterday, stocks have barreled into a second day of gains, with the catalyst being the much weaker Spanish inflation reading this morning," said Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at online trading platform IG. Wall Street's main indices climbed, European stock markets closed higher and Asian markets ended the day mostly in the green as well.

The banking flare-up has fanned speculation that the US Federal Reserve will have to end

its inflation-fighting rate-hike campaign sooner than expected in order to avoid further destabilizing the finance industry.

Some investors now predict the central bank will cut borrowing costs by year-end. Some forecasts put the rate at just above four percent by 2024, compared with more than five prior to the recent upheaval.

That has focused eyes on the Fed's next policy meeting, with observers predicting it could mark the last increase, even though inflation is still high. "The Fed remains in a very difficult position," said Wolfe Research's Chris Senyek.

"With banks stabilizing, inflation still way above target, the labor market still historically strong, and the Fed desperately needing to rebuild credibility, our sense is that the (policy board) will hike by 25 basis points on May 3," he added. US and eurozone inflation data due Friday should provide a clearer idea of whether monetary policymakers will have more flexibility in terms of pausing rate hikes.

Data on Thursday showed inflation slowing to 7.4 percent in March in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, down from 8.7 percent in the two previous months.

Inflation eased to 3.3 percent in Spain.

Some analysts believe the latest woes among banks, which have been blamed on sharp increases in rates, will force lenders to tighten access to credit which will in turn reduce the need for the Fed to hike further.

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

The softer outlook for future US interest rates weighed on the dollar, which was down against most of its major peers.

The weaker greenback also helped dollar-denominated oil prices reverse earlier losses.

Shares in British energy infrastructure group Petrofac soared 70 percent after it and Hitachi Energy secured a multi-billion-euro deal to expand offshore wind capacity in the Dutch-German North Sea. The Hong Kong index rose as Alibaba extended gains after surging 12 percent Wednesday on news the Chinese tech giant intends to split into six units.

- Key figures around

2100 GMT -

New York - Dow: UP 0.4 percent at 32,859.03 (close)

New York - S&P 500: UP 0.6 percent at 4,050.83 (close)

New York - Nasdaq: UP 0.7 percent at 12,013.47(close)

London - FTSE 100: UP 0.7 percent at 7,620.43 (close)

Frankfurt - DAX: UP 1.3 percent at 15,522.40 (close)

Paris - CAC 40: UP 1.1 percent at 7,263.37 (close)

EURO STOXX 50: UP 1.3 percent at 4,285.42 (close)

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 0.4 percent at 27,782.93 (close)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: UP 0.6 percent at 20,309.13 (close)

Shanghai - Composite: UP 0.7 percent at 3,261.25 (close)

Euro/dollar: UP at \$1.0910 from \$1.0845 on Wednesday

Pound/dollar: UP at \$1.2385 from \$1.2316

Euro/pound: UP at 88.03 pence from 88.01 pence

Dollar/yen: DOWN at 132.67 yen from 132.85 yen

Brent North Sea crude: UP 1.3 percent at \$79.27 per barrel

West Texas Intermediate: UP 1.9 percent at \$74.37 per barrel

Huawei unveils OpenLab 3.0 Asia-Pacific

SINGAPORE (Xinhua/APP): OpenLab 3.0 Asia-Pacific, Huawei's latest regional center for joint innovation and solution R&D, has been officially inaugurated here on Friday.

Aiming to accelerate the digital transformation, the 20-million-U.S. dollar project will upgrade the OpenLab in Singapore and radiate its capabilities across the Asia-Pacific (APAC) and beyond.

"OpenLab 3.0 is a global technology platform for local partners, customers, and institutions of higher learning in the APAC. It explores joint solutions based on the demands of various industries and continuously contributes to building the digital APAC," Nicholas Ma, president of Huawei APAC Enterprise Business Group, said.

"OpenLab 3.0, a platform for innovation, experience, and know-how sharing, exemplifies our talent-centric commitment, and is set to emerge as a pivotal hub for talent cultivation across the region," said Zhang Zhengjun, vice president of Huawei APAC Public Affairs and Communications.

The launching ceremony of OpenLab 3.0 Asia-Pacific, witnessed by Goh Pei Sheng, vice president of the Singapore Economic Development Board's Digital Industry Singapore, saw the attendance of over 60 participants from the technology and public sector, industry associations, and universities.

Huawei has established OpenLabs worldwide which serve as open innovation platforms where the Chinese company joins forces with local partners to develop industry solutions for the region.



ISLAMABAD: Butchers busy in washing after slaughter goats at Ghouri Town VIP in Federal Capital.

Agriculture credit disbursement grows by 28.5% in 08 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Agriculture credit disbursement witnessed a 28.5 percent growth during the first eight months of current fiscal year as compared to the disbursement of the corresponding period of last year as the government provided an amount of Rs1,073.5 billion to the farming community for uplift of the country's agriculture sector, considered backbone of the national economy.

During the period from July-February, 2022-23, the agriculture credit disbursement recorded at Rs1,073.5 billion, which was Rs 835.3 billion during same period of the last year, according

the Monthly Economic Update and Outlook for March-2023 released by the Ministry of Finance.

For the Rabi crops' season 2022-23, the harvest of wheat crop has been started in Sindh, while it was scheduled to be harvested in Punjab by the end of March, whereas the Kissan package is expected to bode up the crop productivity in the aftermath of flood damages. However, the issued related to climate changes would play a critical role in achieving the target.

More importantly, the government has increased the wheat support price from Rs 2,200 to Rs3,900

per 40 kg to incentivize the local farmers.

The fiscal deficit during first seven months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) has been contained to 2.3 percent of the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] against 2.8 percent of the last year's GDP.

The primary balance has posted a surplus of Rs 945 billion during July-January against the deficit of Rs 210 billion of the last year.

Total expenditures grew by 10 percent, largely driven by expenditures on markup payments which surged by 73 percent due to higher servicing on domestic and foreign debts, according the report.

The net provisional tax collection increased by 8.2 percent to Rs4,493.3 billion during the period from July-February against Rs3,802.1 billion in the comparable period of last year.

The fiscal consolidation efforts have been reflected in attaining surplus in primary balance and containing fiscal deficit despite exponential increase in borrowing cost.

The current account deficit shrank to \$74 million in February 2023 that stood at \$230 million in the previous month. The Current Account posted a deficit of \$3.9 billion for July-January which was \$12.1 billion in last year.

Rupee sheds 14 paisas against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan rupee weakened by 14 paisas against the Dollar in the interbank trading on Friday and closed at Rs 283.79 against the previous day's closing of Rs 283.65.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 283.7 and Rs 286.5 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 1.59 which closed at Rs 309.38 against the last day's closing of Rs 307.79, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen closed at Rs 2.13 with a 01 paisa decrease; whereas a surge of Rs 1.46 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 351.66 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs 350.20.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal witnessed an increase of 04 paisas to close at Rs 77.27 and Rs 75.60 respectively.

Monetary Policy announcement F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Monetary Policy Committee of SBP will meet on Tuesday, April 04, 2023 at SBP Karachi to decide about the Monetary Policy. Later on, SBP will issue the Monetary Policy Statement through a press release on the same day.

Gold prices increase by Rs 700 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 700 and was sold at Rs 208,700 on Friday against its sale at Rs 208,000 the previous day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 601 to Rs 178,927 from Rs 178,326, whereas the price of 10 grams 22 karat gold went up to Rs 164,016 from Rs 163,466.

The price of per tola silver and that of ten-gram silver remained unchanged to close at Rs 2270 and Rs 1946.15 respectively. The price of gold in the international market increased by US\$ 10 to \$1981 against its sale at \$1971, the association reported.

OGRA slashes LPG prices by Rs 48 per kg

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) slashed the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by Rs 49 to Rs 229 per kilogram for the month of April 2023.

According to a notification issued by OGRA on Friday, the above prices will be effective from April 1. Following this, the price of 11.8 kg domestic LPG cylinder has decreased by

Rs 576 for the whole month of April.

In the monthly review, OGRA announced to cut Rs 278 to Rs 229 per kg price and the new domestic cylinder of 11.8 kg price has also reduced from Rs 3,278 to Rs 2,702.

Maximum LPG consumer price has been decreased by Rs 48,775 per MT from Rs 277,774 to Rs 228,999 per MT.

Similarly, the maximum producer price with 18% GST decreased by Rs 576 from Rs 2,790 to Rs 2,214.

The notification said LPG prices will be regulated with a maximum price at all levels of the supply chain. However, it added, producers, marketing companies and distributors may sell below the maximum price determined from time to time.

UK-Asia trade deal to boost UK economy by 0.08%

LONDON (BBC): The UK has signed a deal to join a trade pact with 11 Asia and Pacific nations, three years after it officially left the European Union.

Joining the group will boost UK exports by cutting tariffs on goods such as cheese, cars, chocolate, machinery, gin and whisky, the government said.

However, the government's own estimates show being in the bloc will only add 0.08% to the size of the UK's economy. The trade area covers a market of around 500 million people.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership - or CPTPP - was established in 2018, and includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Membership of the CPTPP loosens restrictions on trade between members and reduce tariffs - a form of border tax - on goods. Together, the 11 members account for about 13% of the world's income

and after 21 months of negotiations, the UK has become the first European country to join. The government said the agreement was the UK's "biggest trade deal since Brexit".

However, the gains for the UK from joining are expected to be modest. The UK already has free trade deals with all of the members except Brunei and Malaysia, some of which were rolled over from its previous membership of the EU. And even with some gains in trading the government only estimates it will add 0.08% to the size of the economy in 10 years. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which provides forecasts for the government, has previously said Brexit would reduce the UK's potential economic growth by about 4% in the long term. But Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the deal demonstrated the "real economic benefits of our post-Brexit freedoms".

"As part of CPTPP, the UK is now in a prime position in the global economy to seize opportunities for new jobs, growth and inno-

vation," he said. "British businesses will now enjoy unparalleled access to markets from Europe to the south Pacific." Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch said the agreement was like "buying a start-up". "This is not to replace EU trade, this is in addition. We are still in a free trade agreement with the EU," she told Radio 4's Today programme.

"You wouldn't buy a small company like that and expect it to be delivering on the day - we are thinking about the potential," she said, adding that in seven years "40% of the world's middle class is going to come from that region". Ms Badenoch denied there would be any hit to UK agriculture, saying the deal would "create new markets" for farmers. Labour's shadow international trade secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds said the UK joining the CPTPP was "encouraging", but added that questions remain on "consumer safety, food safety, data protection and environmental protections".



RAWALPINDI: CEO Murree Brewery Group of companies Mr. Isphanyar Bhandara hosted a sumptuous Iftar dinner at Rawalpindi Garrison Club.



In brief

Poel can go distance at Tour of Flanders

BRUGES (AFP/APP): Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel says he is peaking ahead of the 19 cobbled climbs of the Tour of Flanders in the Flemish Ardennes on Sunday. The epic 273km-long course and those punishing cobbled ascents can be counted on to whittle down a competitive field to its core talent on Belgium's biggest sporting day out of the calendar. History suggests a two or three-man sprint following a late escape is the most likely scenario. Defending champion Van der Poel, who also won in 2020, triumphed at Milan-San Remo two weeks ago and warned the pinnacle of Flemish cycling was his next target. "I'm riding into form," Van der Poel insisted after coming second to his eternal rival Wout van Aert at the E3 cobbled classic a week ago. "I can live with second today. But hopefully next week I can win. I want to turn things round next week." Van Aert lost teammate Dylan van Baarle to injury this week but still appears to have the strongest back-up. He missed the race with Covid last season and is seeking a first win here. "The best tactics will be aggressive ones," said Van Aert, hoping to give Belgium its 70th win in the 107th edition of a race first staged in 1913.

Vaughan cleared

LONDON (BBC): Former England cricket captain Michael Vaughan has been cleared "on the balance of probabilities" of using racist language towards ex-Yorkshire team-mate Azeem Rafiq. Vaughan was accused of saying "there's too many of you lot, we need to have a word about that" to Rafiq and three other Asian players representing Yorkshire in 2009. The Cricket Discipline Commission (CDC) panel found the England and Wales Cricket Board's case against Vaughan, 48, was not proved. The panel said it was "not satisfied on the balance of probabilities" that the words were said by Vaughan "at the time and in the specific circumstances alleged". It said there were "significant inconsistencies" in the evidence provided by Rafiq and fellow key witness Adil Rashid regarding the exact wording of Vaughan's alleged comment. It added its findings "do not in any way undermine" Rafiq's wider evidence - in which he said English cricket is "institutionally racist".

Alonso tops rain-affected

SYDNEY (BBC): Fernando Alonso set the early pace in second practice at the Australian Grand Prix before rain affected the majority of the session. The Aston Martin driver was 0.445 seconds quicker than Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. Red Bull's Max Verstappen was third fastest, 0.615secs off the pace. Verstappen topped the first session, run in dry conditions, ahead of Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton. Hamilton was only 13th in the second, with team-mate George Russell fourth. Hamilton's dry-weather running was curtailed by a decision to pit for set-up changes in the front suspension. Verstappen also appeared to be unhappy with his car balance in the dry, the world champion running wide over the grass at the first chicane before setting his fastest time. But the Dutchman said his problem was more the lack of grip from the track surface in the dry than the car.

IOC faces backlash over readmission of Russian athletes

PARIS (AFP/APP): Ukrainian athletes' human rights have "not been addressed" by IOC president Thomas Bach and a UN expert in weighing Russia and Belarus's readmission into global sports events, a leading authority on human rights says. Patricia Wiater said "unfortunately" neither the International Olympic Committee (IOC) nor UN special rapporteur in cultural rights Alexandra Xanthaki had addressed protecting the rights of Ukraine's athletes. Wiater was behind the German Olympic Sports Confederation's legal opinion justifying the ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes from international competition. She spoke to reporters - alongside Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian athletes -- following the IOC's recommendation on Tuesday to allow athletes from Russia and Moscow ally Belarus to compete as individual neutrals in upcoming international competitions. They have been largely banned since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year. "The question is, are

the proposed conditions of readmission enough to guarantee the human rights of Ukrainian athletes are being respected," Wiater said during the press conference via zoom. "Are they proportionate and are they adequate to prevent (that) sporting events are abused for war propaganda," added the professor for Public International Law and Human Rights. "Unfortunately, it was not addressed in the statement by the IOC nor by the special rapporteur but it is very important when we look at the question of readmission." Ukrainian tennis player Lesia Tsurenko -- who pulled out of a match against Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka earlier this month due to a panic attack -- believes she and her compatriots feel they have been forgotten about. Her remarks echo those of Poland's world number one Iga Swiatek, who has criticised the WTA for not doing enough to support Ukrainian players. "Why is no one thinking about the discrimination of Ukrainians," said

Tsurenko. "We only hear of discrimination of Russians. What about the Ukrainians?" Although the IOC has yet to decide whether Russians and Belarusians can compete at the 2024 Paris Olympics, their re-entry to international competition will allow them to qualify for the quadrennial sporting showpiece. The fencing federation this month pre-empted the IOC recommendation by reopening its events to athletes from the two countries. The decision prompted a hard-hitting letter by more than 300 past and present fencers accusing Bach -- himself an Olympic gold medal winning fencer -- and interim fencing federation president Emmanuel Katsiadakis of prioritising Russians over Ukrainians. "Here, we are talking about life and not just about competing," German fencer Lea Kruger told the same press conference, dismissing the conditions given by the IOC for the Russians' return as "not enough".

Taskin: 'We don't like to lose, but we also won't give up our intensity'



CHATTOTGRAM (Agencies): Taskin Ahmed said that Bangladesh will continue to bat in the same way in T20Is after their seven-wicket defeat against Ireland in the third T20I in Chattogram. The visitors chased down the 125-run target in 14 overs to pick up the consolation win, their first win on tour. The Bangladesh batters pressed down hard like they did in the previous two T20Is, only to be reduced to 41 for 5 in the seventh over after deciding to bat first. Taskin, who was declared player of the series after finishing as the top wicket-taker from both sides, said that their approach was the same as that in the first two matches

of the series when Bangladesh posted 200-plus totals on both occasions. They had wicketless powerplays at a run rate of over 12 an over. The rest of the batters took advantage of the rapid starts to post the big scores. "We lost early wickets but our intent was like the previous two matches," Taskin said. "There were runs in those games but today we got out. I think we were capable of batting better but that didn't happen today. We just had a bad day. Maybe we had a batting collapse today but we used the same intent to score 200 in the last two games. We have to keep this in mind. We must have intent to do

well in T20Is in the future. We have to go ahead with an aggressive mentality, batters and bowlers alike. We have to accept that there will be days like today. It won't make us fearful, rather help us for the future." Taskin said that the aggressive intent in the future will help them against bigger teams, as big scores will be paramount on good batting pitches. "We will be playing on good wickets against big teams like England and Australia. We have to score big, so this intent will help us. There will be collapse[s] from time to time, but I don't think we will change our intensity. Being fearless will help us do better in the future." "Everyone has an individual mindset. They wanted to play positively. They wanted to go after the ball that was in their zone from the first ball. Those who got out with miss-hits, those would have gone for six if they'd middle[d] it. That's okay. We don't like to lose, but we also won't give up our intensity. We want to play aggressively."

'Best way to stop the run rate is by taking wickets': Young

HAMILTON (Cricinfo): Three wickets in the first ten overs is great, but five in the first 20 is usually a match-defining passage of play. New Zealand dismissed three of Sri Lanka's top four inside the powerplay in the third ODI in Hamilton, and then got two of their middle-order batters before the 18th over was completed too, leaving the opposition at 70 for 5 - a predicament from which the visitors would never seriously recover. Will Young, New Zealand's best batter on the evening with a contribution of an unbeaten 86 in a successful chase of 158, felt that was the case too. "In one-day cricket, there's an old adage that if you take three wickets in the first ten, you're doing pretty well, and they took four or five in the first spell or two," Young said of the New Zealand seamers. "They were incredible. The way they hit their lengths, [and] got the ball to talk in the air and off the wicket was really impressive." New Zealand's quicks moved the ball beautifully in their opening spells, with each of the first three wickets coming off edges behind the stumps. Then, Daryl Mitchell got two middle-order wickets by getting the ball to bounce

more than the batters had expected, and finished with one more wicket. But Matt Henry was the standout quick, taking 3 for 14 from his ten overs, even as Henry Shipley got three wickets too, to go with the five he had got in the first ODI in Auckland. "For Shippo to do that in one of his first series is testament to the form he's in," Young said. "For Matt Henry, it seems like an extension of his red-ball form at the moment. He's hitting the same areas, and it's awesome to see." Although Sri Lanka had won the toss and chosen to bat first, New Zealand captain Tom Latham had said at the toss that he would have bowled first anyway. New Zealand had had a solid slip cordon in the early overs, and then used the short ball effectively, as their tall bowlers consistently extracted more bounce from the surface than Sri Lanka's batters could contend with. "The best way to stop the run rate in one-day cricket is by taking wickets," Young said. "I think Tom Latham did a great job in summarising the conditions early, [by] getting fielders in the right positions, and trusting that the ball will go to those attacking fielders - those slips, those gullies.

They used the short ball as well. The bowlers and Tommy were singing from the same sheet." However, New Zealand had had to see out a tough new-ball spell of their own, with Young, batting at No. 3, having to come in to bat in the second over, and then seeing his team sink to 21 for 3, which soon became 59 for 4. But he then forged an undefeated 100-run stand for the fifth wicket with Henry Nicholls, and New Zealand sauntered to the target in the 33rd over. "It was a bit more nerve-racking a bit later, when we were three or four down," Young said. "But one of the great things about this team is that we bat deep, so I had full confidence in the boys, that we'd get the job done. And it happened to be Henry that I established a bit of a partnership with. "It can be quite a tricky time to bat, in that twilight period. We saw that if you hit the strings - and hit a good length - it's going to be challenging at times. We found exactly that when the Sri Lankans got the ball in the right area: there was a bit of swing early, the ball certainly nipped around and there was a little bit of bounce too. Conditions were tough at times, but we managed to absorb that to get the job done."

Miami Open 2023

Elena reaches final, Carlos and Daniil reach semis

MIAMI GARDENS (BBC): Carlos Alcaraz and Elena Rybakina remained on course for the rare 'Sunshine Double' by progressing at the Miami Open. Tenth seed Rybakina reached the women's final by beating world number three Jessica Pegula 7-6 (7-3) 6-4. World number one Alcaraz brushed aside American ninth seed Taylor Fritz 6-4 6-2 to make the men's semi-finals. They are bidding to become the eighth man and fifth woman to follow victory at Indian Wells with the Miami title. Kazakhstan's Wimbledon champion Rybakina, who beat Aryna Sabalenka in the Indian Wells final last week, has now won 13 consecutive matches. She will play Czech Petra Kvitova or Romania's Sorana Cirstea in Saturday's final. Defending men's champion Alcaraz, who must win the title to stay top of the rankings, will play Italian Jannik Sinner in the last four on Friday - the two played a five-hour epic quarter-final at last year's US Open. It will be a sixth meeting between the pair - the Spaniard leads the head-to-head 3-2 - in what is seen as one of the best burgeoning rivalries in the men's game. "I [am] happy to play against him again because I look forward to these



kind of matches," Sinner said. "I feel like he makes me a better player." In the other side of the men's draw is former world number one Daniil Medvedev, who continued his fine form with a straight-set win over American qualifier Christopher Eubanks in the quarter-finals. The fourth seed won 6-3 7-5 in a commanding performance and will play fellow Russian Karen Khachanov. Khachanov won 6-3 6-2 against Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo. "We grew up together," Khachanov said. "Every time Daniil plays against

Rublev], or I play against Andrey or Daniil, it's never easy because we know each other pretty well and we are good friends outside of the court." Medvedev, the 2021 US Open champion, has won 22 of his past 23 matches and beating Eubanks enabled him to reach the semi-finals at a fifth straight ATP event. After winning consecutive titles in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, Medvedev was beaten in the Indian Wells final by Alcaraz. In the women's draw, Kvitova beat Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-4 3-6 6-3 in their rain-delayed quarter-final to reach the Miami semi-finals for the first time.

Barcelona 'in contact' with PSG forward about Nou Camp return

BARCELONA (BBC): Barcelona are in contact with Lionel Messi about returning to the club, says vice-president Rafael Yuste. The 35-year-old Argentina forward is Barcelona's all-time top scorer with 672 goals in 778 games and left the Nou Camp for financial reasons in 2021. His two-year contract

with Paris St-Germain expires this summer and his preference is thought to be staying with the French club. "Leo and his family know the affection I have for them," Yuste said. Messi agreed a new deal with Barcelona on reduced wages two years ago, but it was dependent on the club selling players following new financial rules.

That did not happen in time and ended his storied spell at the club which yielded four Champions Leagues and 10 La Liga titles - plus six Ballons d'Or. "I participated in the negotiations which unfortunately did not lead to a certain result," said Yuste. "I've always had this thorn in my side that Leo couldn't continue at our club. "Messi knows how much we appreciate him. I would love for him to come back. We're in contact, of course, with them." Messi, who won the World Cup with Argentina in December, has scored 29 goals in 66 games for PSG. He recently claimed his 100th international goal and 800th career strike.

Wimbledon 2023 lifts ban on Russian & Belarusian players for championship

MOSCOW (BBC): Russian and Belarusian players will be able to compete at Wimbledon this summer after the All England Club lifted the ban it imposed last year. The players will be able to feature this year "subject to competing as neutral athletes" and complying with certain conditions. They were banned in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the support provided by Belarus. Wimbledon starts this year on 3 July at the All England Club (AELTC). "We continue to condemn totally Russia's illegal invasion and our wholehearted support remains with the people of Ukraine," said AELTC chairman Ian Hewitt. "This was an incredibly difficult decision, not taken lightly or without a great deal of consideration for those who will be impacted." The decision also covers other British events held in the run up to Wimbledon, most notably the tourna-

ments at Queen's and Eastbourne. Conditions players must comply with include: Agreeing not to support the Russian and/or Belarusian states or their regimes and leaders Not receiving funding from Russian and/or Belarusian states, including sponsorship from companies operated or controlled by them Outside of Wimbledon and other British events, players have been able to compete on the game's professional tours as neutrals - including in the other Grand Slams - whereas Wimbledon and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) were fined for the bans imposed last year. The AELTC said its decision for the 2023 championship was made after discussion with the UK government, the LTA and international stakeholders. The AELTC and LTA said they stand by last year's position but that without changing their stance this year, tennis' two main profession-

al tours, the men's ATP and women's WTA would have cancelled the LTA's membership. As a result, Queen's, Eastbourne and other British grass-court events would not have been staged, damaging British tennis organisations financially. Russian trio Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev and Daria Kasatkina - who are all in the top 10 of the men's and women's rankings - are among the high-profile names able to play this summer. Belarusian women's world number two Aryna Sabalenka, who won the Australian Open earlier this year, will also now likely feature. Players and their support staff will have to sign neutrality declarations in order to compete. Punishments for breaking the declarations will range from fines to expulsion from the tournament. Many sports banned Russian and Belarusian teams and athletes in response to the invasion but the ATP and WTA decided players could compete under a neutral flag. Last month, Ukraine's highest-profile player Elina Svitolina told BBC Sport that Russian and Belarusian athletes must remain excluded from Wimbledon while "innocent Ukrainians are still being killed". Wimbledon's decision last year was guided by the UK government and supported by 69% of the British public, according to a You Gov poll. As well as being fined, the WTA and ATP said they would cancel the LTA's membership if it exercised further "discrimination based on nationality". That led to the LTA fearing the tournaments traditionally staged in the lead-up to Wimbledon may be lost forever.

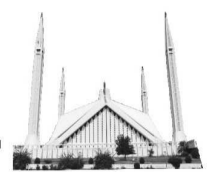


Anthony Joshua v Jermaine Franklin Briton weighs in at career-heavy 18st 3lb for Saturday's fight

LONDON (BBC): Anthony Joshua has weighed in at a career-heavy 18st 3lb (115.7kg) for Saturday's contest against Jermaine Franklin at London's O2 Arena. Joshua, 33, is 11lb heavier than his last fight - a points loss to champion Oleksandr Usyk in August. "I've got my gameplan, got my mind right and I'm ready to go for war," said the bulked-up Briton. American Franklin, 29, weighed 16st 7lb (106.1kg) - 23lb lighter than when he lost to Dillian Whyte in November. A heavier Joshua suggests he could be targeting a knockout win, using his added weight and strength. When he is lighter, that often indicates he is prepared for a bout to go the distance. His previous heaviest weight was 18st 2lb (115.6kg) when he stopped Carlos Takam in the 10th round in

2017. "I know I've got the possibility of doing it," Joshua said of a knockout. "But there's a process to get there. I just follow the process." The Watford-fighter has shown signs of fatigue in later rounds of previous championship fights - and there has been much debate surrounding his weight in recent years. After losing to Andy Ruiz Jr in June 2016, Joshua came in at 16st 13lb (103.5kg) for the rematch and outboxed the Mexican-American over 12 rounds. Joshua, who based his camp for this fight in Texas, has spoken of the gruelling methods under new trainer Derrick James. "There's always an over-analysis with his weight, but clearly he's come in with bad intentions for this fight," said promoter Eddie Hearn. "In some fights, where you need speed and

agility, he comes in lighter. But tomorrow night I think you're going to get an explosive knockout." Franklin - for all his attributes, resilience and durability - is not considered a technically-astute boxer. With 14 knockouts in 21 wins, nor is he necessarily considered a heavy hitter. The Michigan boxer has shed the pounds and, at Wednesday's news conference, he credited his improved physique to a healthier lifestyle. "We've approached this fight with a whole new attitude, a whole new demeanour, a whole new strategy," said Franklin. "He probably bulked up a little bit but we're ready for whatever. We've got a chin of steel." Such is the pull of Joshua, there was no venue close to the O2 Arena big enough to deal with the number of people eager to catch a glimpse of the two-time world champion.



In brief

IRSA releases 64,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 64,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 51,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1426.26 feet and was 28.26 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 18,900 cusecs while outflow was 13,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1099.00 feet, which was 49.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded at 17,100 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded at 21,600, 42,700, 36,300 and 7,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 16,000 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera and 4,200 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

NHMP to ensure safe travels

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) was taking special measures to ensure safe travels during the Holy month of Ramadan. In a statement issued here, IG Sultan Ali Khawaja said guidelines have been issued for the people to drive with care during Sehar and Iftar hours. "Never exceed the speed limit and the people who are fasting must get enough sleep before traveling in Ramadan," he said. He said patrolling was being made more efficient for safe and comfortable travel in the motorways. "Initiatives are been taken to hold special briefings on toll plazas in this regard. Always follow traffic laws and use seat belts while traveling," Khawaja said. He said the Motorway Police was trying to make travel safe for public by using its full capabilities. "SSP and DIG are monitoring special patrolling in their respective areas. Safety of passengers is the first priority," he said.

NHA magisterial powers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The general manager and other officers concerned of the National Highway Authority (NHA) were conferred with magisterial powers by the Punjab government on Friday. Federal Minister for Communication Maulana Asad Mehmood met with caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi while Secretary Communications Captain (R) Khurram Agha, Chief Secretary Punjab, Chairman P&D, Additional Chief Secretary Home, Member Finance Muhammad Tayyab and other officials were also present in the meeting, said a press release. In the meeting, it was decided to award magisterial powers to NHA GM and other relevant officers. After being given magisterial powers, the NHA officers concerned would now control the prices of food items on motorways and highways. They would also exercise magisterial authority for encroachments on national highways and violations of the official price list. The minister said providing convenient and affordable passenger facilities on motorways and national highways was the top priority. "We will take all possible measures to prevent accidents on motorways and national highways," he assured. In the meeting, it was also agreed to make fitness certificates mandatory for vehicles coming from Punjab to prevent accidents on national highways.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of clouds hovering over the Faisal Masjid as large number of faithful coming out after offering Namaz-e-Jumma (Friday Prayer) during Holy fasting month of Ramzan.

‘Govt to generate 10,000 MW solar energy besides solarizing all public buildings’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman on Friday informed the Senate that the incumbent government has given a complete plan to harness Renewable Energy (RE) and generate 10,000 megawatt solar energy besides switching all public buildings on environmental-friendly solar energy.

Replying to various questions during the Question Hour, the minister said that it would not only reduce import bill but also control greenhouse emissions in the country. She said that recommendations would be finalized in consultation with the provincial governments for a long-term strategy to meet the challenges of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions.

To a question, she said that electrical vehicles (EVs) were very expensive and ordinary person could not import it. Indian Tata company was locally manufacturing EV and unfortunately in Pakistan, we have no such local manufacturing facility of EV and batteries, she added. She said in Pakistan

EV policy for two and three-wheelers has been framed.

The minister said that around 3.3 million tons plastic waste was generated in Pakistan but the plastic recycling facility was available in few European countries. To another question, she said the Prime Minister launched "Protected Areas Initiative" to improve flora and fauna of 15 protected areas extending over an area of 7500 square kilometer. A PC-I was prepared after detailed consultation with provinces/territories to improve flora and fauna of 23 protected areas extending over 23606.373 square kilometres, she said.

She said an amount of Rs. 3895.000 million have been allocated through Federal PSDP to execute the project in the province/territories. The project aimed at protecting the existing flora and fauna, improve governance, create protected areas fund and promote eco-tourism in the 23 protected areas, she said. She said implementation of project activities would start after final approval by Central

Development Working Party (CDWP). Since 2018, 44 Protected areas have been notified throughout Pakistan extending over 23592.633 square kilometres, she said.

To a separate question, Sherry Rehman said Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was created to provide policy-makers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options.

She said the establishment of Heat Wave Task force-Under the PM directives a task force has been established, engaging all stakeholders both at Federal and Provincial levels. The major role is to take immediate actions to address emergency relief services as well as proposing the long term actions to take adaptation interventions for heat waves, she added. The minister said with 7,253 known glaciers, there was more glacial ice in Pakistan than anywhere on Earth outside the polar regions, according to various studies.

ANF recovers over 7.5 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in four operations managed to recover over 7.5 kg drugs and arrested six accused including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that ANF managed to recover 73 heroin-filled capsules from the possession of a Jeddah-bound passenger, resident of Sargodha netted at Islamabad International Airport.

In another operation, 4.2 kg charras was recovered from the possession of two women, residents of Peshawar arrested from Chungi No 26, Islamabad area.

In third operation near Islamabad Motorway Toll Plaza, 2.4 kg charras and 1.2 kg opium were recovered from the possession of two accused, residents of Peshawar.

ANF in another operation recovered 800 grams heroin from the possession of a Saudia-bound passenger resident of Swabi, held at Karachi International Airport. Heroin was tactfully concealed in books.

He said that separate cases had been registered against the accused while further investigations were under process.

Two bike lifters arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The police have arrested two bike lifters besides recovering seven stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession.

According to a police spokesman, a team under the supervision of SHO, Race Course Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Arslan and Usman and recovered seven stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession.

A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway.

Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Muhammad Waqas Khan said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind the bars.

He said that the operations against the law-breakers would be accelerated further.

President directs payment of death insurance claim to widow

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has directed an insurance company to pay the death insurance claim to the widow of a deceased policyholder who was denied payment on the ground that her husband did not wilfully disclose his true health condition to the company at the time of obtaining the policy.

The president gave this decision while accepting a representation filed by Shehnaz Akhtar (the complainant) against the order of the Federal Insurance Ombudsman (FIO) whereby the case had been closed.

The case was disposed of on the ground that the widow had already been refunded the premiums amounting to

Rs 150,000 deducted from her late husband's account and since the matter had been settled on compassionate grounds, thus, the company was not liable to pay the death insurance claim. Feeling aggrieved by the decision of FIO, the complainant filed a representation with the President, which he accepted. In his decision, the president observed that the company repudiated the claim based on the death certificate alleging that it reflected that the deceased had been suffering from

Diabetes Mellitus and Chronic Liver Disease since a year before death but no such period had been specified in the certificate. He further noted that the insurance company was relying on an admission chart issued by a hospital in Lahore which pertained to the year 2017 whereas the policy had been issued in the year 2015, thus, it did not pertain to the insurance period.

He also referred to a decision of the Lahore High Court in the year 2009, wherein it had been held that the majority of people having ailments such as hypertension and diabetes lived either for decades or longer than people not having such diseases by remaining more careful in their lifetime, and the concealment of such diseases could not be termed as done fraudulently. The president held that the insurance company was not justified in repudiating the insurance claim on such flimsy grounds. He said that maladministration on the part of the insurance company had been established, therefore, the orders of the FIO were being set aside. He further directed the company to pay the insurance claim to the complainant within 30 days of the receipt of the President's order.

ICT private schools to mark golden jubilee celebration of Pakistan constitution

ISLAMABAD (APP): Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) has directed the all Chief Executive Officers / Principals of Private Educational Institutions (PEIs) working in Islamabad Capital Territory to organize declaration competition to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Constitution of Pakistan.

In a notification, Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training has directed the PEIRA that the National Assembly of Pakistan is

organizing the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In this regard, series of events shall be organized to mark this historic occasion and to celebrate the significance of the constitution in shaping the nation and guaranteeing the rights of its citizens. As part of these celebrations, the management of Private Educational Institutions (PEIs) are requested to organize maximum activities in educational institutions maximum from April 1-15, 2023. The activities

including orientation session in morning assembly regarding subject matter, bilingual declamation competition on the relevant themes including "My Constitution Guarantee of my freedoms", essay writing competition, poster competition and art competition.

The nominated speakers and report may also be shared with PEIRA not later than 15th April, 2023. Selected top speakers both in Urdu and English languages will be nominated to deliver speech in the Parliament House.

Around 25 paediatric eye surgeries execute at Al-Shifa Trust

RAWALPINDI (APP): The prevalence of Glaucoma in children is increasing rapidly in Pakistan, which requires proper intervention. Prof. Dr Sumaira Altaf, Head of the Paediatric department at Al-Shifa Trust, said here on Friday. She said that Glaucoma in children was a vision-threatening condition and was highly prevalent in our population, likely due to the high incidence of consanguinity or family marriages in Pakistan.

"Timely medication and surgical treatment can help control this disease with a good visual outcome and save many children from lifelong visual disability or blindness," she added.

She said that Glaucoma in children had become a growing cause of concern worldwide, and millions were suffering from it in Pakistan. Dr Sumaira Altaf said that Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital provided free of cost medical and surgical treatment to 80 per cent of patients who experienced and skilled Pediatric Ophthalmologists treat.

Around 22 to 25 paediatric eye surgeries were performed daily, including various types of surgeries for Glaucoma, she informed. The successful treatment of

these patients has resulted in many referrals to the trust's hospital nationwide. She added that many paediatric glaucoma cases had secondary causes either due to trauma, previous eye surgery, associated eye anomalies or injudicious use of steroids.

Dr Sumaira highlighted that the vision of many unfortunate children had been compromised because of the careless use of over-the-counter steroid eye drops. Moreover, salesmen frequently prescribed harmful medicines at pharmacies relatives, quacks, and sometimes by general practitioners, who were ignorant that these medicines lead to complications and irreversible blindness.

"Pharmaceutical companies should also mention the side effects of these medicines on their packaging as knowledge regarding paediatric Glaucoma is scarce, she said, adding that examination at birth by an ophthalmologist was recommended for every child to rule out any eye abnormalities. Dr Sumaira advised that an annual eye examination by an ophthalmologist was recommended to detect early signs of Glaucoma or other ocular problems and intervene before it was too late.

PR focusing quality not quantity to improve train services: Kiran

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Railways, Kiran Imran Dar on Friday while responding to MNA's queries on the poor performance of the Railways Department said Pakistan Railways was focusing on quality, not quantity to improve train services and public convenience.

She was responding to the queries of MNAs Salahuddin, Tahira Aurangzeb, and Nuzhat Pathan during the question hour of the 51st session of the National Assembly.

The MNAs raised queries pertaining to poor procurement material provided to the Railways, mechanisms to penalize substandard food suppliers in trains and inefficient mess services on various rail stations.

Dar said the government was working to support the department and make it self-sufficient with its focus on enhancing carriage and locomotives. She added that it was also the fact that the department bore massive infrastructure damages during the 2022 floods and restoration was underway. The Parliamentary Secretary informed the House that the Department recently launched its Green Line that got a good response from the public as it has updated services.

MNAs seek probe into corruption among successful Hajj pilgrims

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Members of the National Assembly on Friday sought probe into alleged corrupt practices in including applicants' names among successful Hajj pilgrims after taking bribes from the masses not qualifying Hajj balloting. MNAs Dr Mahreen Razzaq Bhutto and Sheikh Fayyaz-Ud-Din during the question hour session made queries pertaining to the criteria of posting staff on Hajj duties and alleged corruption made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in including names of Hujjaj in the list of successful pilgrims of the ballot respectively.

Dr Bhutto of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)

queried the Minister for Religious Affairs to apprise the house that the staff who already made three Hajj pilgrims was sent again or not to avoid discrimination of other employees to render official duties during Hajj operations in Saudi Arabia. She also asked him to clear policy details in this regard.

MNA Sheikh Fayyaz-Ud-Din of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) alleged that the Ministry officials took Rs 30,000 from Hujjaj to add their names in the successful ballot list, adding, "Will this continue this year as well or the Ministry will take any action?" Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Mufi Abdul Shakoor said the

federal cabinet used to sanction approval to the Hajj and after that, the Minister used to assign duties to its staff.

He added that there was no limitation in that policy after the principle decision that one official who performed three Hajj should not be sent again. However, he said the experienced staff was sent after a discussion with senior officials, he added. The minister underlined that the Ministry had proper committees to ensure monitoring in Makkah and Madinah whereas a medical mission headed by a senior doctor, a core committee and Hajji committees were present there to ensure proper management of the staff.

CDA to auction commercial plots in Islamabad to boost revenue

ISLAMABAD (APP): The capital Development Authority (CDA) is all set to auction commercial plots in various developed sectors of the federal capital, beginning on May 3, aiming to generate more revenue for the city and attract investors to participate in the auction.

Talking to APP, an official in the authority urged interested investors to participate in the auction, which will take place at the Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad. The development is expected to have a significant impact on the commercial estate market in the capital city.

He said the auction in various sectors of the Islamabad capital territory would continue till May 5, adding that the authority has already publicized the auction schedule of various plots in different newspapers. The official said that the real estate experts have announced it as a must-avail investment opportunity for investors nationwide and overseas. The participants investing in the public sale can possess commercial plots with 'legal protection.'

The details about the commercial plots located in the developed sectors of the federal capital included various centres, agro farms, petrol pumps, E-11 northern strip, Class-III shopping centre, Park Enclave commercial and Blue Area E-11/F-11,

Canopy side, he added.

The participant, the official said that whoever submits full payment within 30 days of the bid acceptance letter would be offered a 10 percent rebate on the remaining amount. He said the list of protocols announced by the authority in the auction voucher for prospective investors included a facilitation team presence is mandatory for the assistance of investors, 25 percent amount of the bid amount would be considered the first instalment, 1st instalment should be submitted within thirty days of bid acceptance, CDA to collect the advance tax on a pro-rata basis, site and marketing offices charges would not be included, building plan will be approved after the submission of 1st instalment centres. The official said the CDA auction voucher allowed accommodated investors with a one-window directorate to make their payments. The investors can also pay through selected Askari, UBL, HBL, MCB, and Bank of Punjab branches from March 25 onwards.

The official said the CDA advertisement also included details about the flexible completion period for commercial plots included 3 years: 1,000 yards, 4 years: 1,000 to 3,000 yards and 5 years above 3,000 yards.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Health Services Abdul Qadir Patel cutting ribbon to inaugurate Regional blood center Islamabad with a High level delegation of UAE in federal Capital.

Iran hands over 20 Afghan

KABUL (Agencies): Taliban's Foreign Ministry officials in Nimruz province said that 20 Afghan inmates, including students, scholars and ordinary citizens were released from Iran's Zahedan province. The Directorate of Information and Culture in western Nimruz province in an announcement said that after being released, the inmates were handed over to the Taliban officials in Zaranj the provincial capital of Nimruz province.

The Frontier Post

Ramazan 10, 1444 — Saturday, April 01, 2023

Attack on Kabul Security Compound

KABUL (Agencies): Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) militant group claimed to have attacked Kabul Security Command using a hand grenade, killing two security forces and injuring a third one. Reportedly, the attack took place around 6:00 mp, but official sources have not yet confirmed the incident and the casualties left from Thursday night's attack. The incident took place a day after Ahmad Massoud, the leader of the Afghanistan NRF claimed to have carried out an operation.

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

UAE sends urgent medical and food supplies to Afghanistan



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates on Friday announced the provision of urgent medical and food supplies to those affected people by the recent earthquake in Afghanistan.

"Today, the UAE sent a plane carrying 38 tons of urgent medical and food supplies to Afghanistan to meet the needs of thousands of Afghan families affected by earthquakes that

recently struck northeastern Afghanistan."

The statement said that providing these supplies would enhance humanitarian support for vulnerable groups, including women, children and the elderly. "Providing these supplies is part of the UAE's enduring efforts to provide urgent relief to countries affected by natural disasters and enhance humanitarian support for vulnerable groups such as women,

children, and the elderly." The UAE's humanitarian efforts for Afghanistan from 2021-2022 included launching a relief air bridge that sent 28 aircraft carrying 623 tons of medical and food supplies, benefiting approximately 1.1 million people, including 850,000 women and children, the statement read.

UAE relief also helped mitigate the impact of the earthquake that struck Khost in southeastern Afghanistan last June. The UAE built a 1,000-square-meter field hospital with 75 beds and receives 200 patients daily. Moreover, the statement added that the UAE sent medical supplies, equipment, and teams specialized in treating injuries caused by natural disasters.

Last week, Afghanistan hit by a powerful earthquake of 6.5 magnitudes, which resulted in killing more than ten people and injuring several others. The earthquake has caused financial and economic damage, including over 665 houses destroyed across Afghanistan, including Badakhshan, Takhar, Panjshir, and Kunar. Afghanistan is a disaster-prone country, including earthquakes, landslides, flooding, and avalanches.

Private Firm awarded contract for Cement Project in Kandahar



KABUL (Agencies): The contract for the Shur Andam cement project was awarded to a private company. Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the project, the acting head of the Mines and Petroleum Department of Kandahar, Abdul Hanan Hamid, said that \$100 million is invested in the project and it will produce 1 million tons of

cement per year.

"The production in the first phase will be at a scale to meet the needs of the people," Hamid said. "It will increase based on the demand of the market."

Officials of the company said the practical work on producing cement will be kicked off within one year.

"The production will be low initially but eventually, around 5,000 people

will be employed here," Abdul Rahim, head of the company. Meanwhile, the deputy governor of Kandahar, Hayatullah Mubarak, called on Afghan investors to invest in businesses in Afghanistan.

"Investors and all of those who can help our nation, we call on them to come and serve here," he said. Kandahar residents

praised the inauguration of the project and urged national investors to invest in such projects.

"This is a good step. This will provide job opportunities for the youth," said Sulaiman Shah Lalai, a resident of Kandahar.

Kandahar has one of the biggest resources of minerals in the country used for the production of cement.

Abbas Stanikzai calls for reopening of Afghan Girls' School, University

KABUL (Agencies): The deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, called for the reopening of Afghan women and girls' schools and universities on Friday. Stankizai tweeted that he has supported women and girls' education in Afghanistan and stressed reopening the doors of schools and universities.

"98 per cent of scholars are in favour of women and girls' education; the deputy foreign minister for political affairs, Sher Mohammad Stankizai is one of those people who is always in favour of women and girls' education and insist on opening the doors of schools and universities to girls every speech," he said in a tweet. His remarks came after a week that the Ministry of Education reopened schools except for girls beyond the sixth grade on 21 March 2023. The new academic has started in Afghanistan, but girls and women beyond sixth grade have yet to be allowed to continue their education for the third consecutive year.

National and international organizations, including the United Nations, have slammed the Taliban's suppressive policies regarding girls' education and work.



Earlier, Richard Bennett, the UN special envoy for Afghanistan and a group of experts expressed their concerns, saying that "the ongoing unlawful denial for girls' right to education in Afghanistan is impacting an entire generation and the country's future" in a statement.

The statement also stressed that the Taliban administration "has no justifi-

cation for denying the right to education, on any ground, including religion or tradition." The UN urged the Taliban authorities to reverse their policy and reopen girls' schools and universities for all in the country. However, the Taliban administration has not allowed women and girls to attend schools and universities despite massive criticism and condemnation by the international community.

Union supports cancelling of permits for lone currency Exchangers

KABUL (Agencies): The Union of Currency Exchangers of Shahzada Market in Kabul backed a decision by the Central Bank to cancel individual-run money exchange businesses and allow bigger-format entities to provide services in the market.

A spokesman of the union, Abdul Rahman Zirak, said the decision will provide the ground for better business and more oversight over currency exchange businesses.

"If the company's permit is transparent, the Central Bank grants it a user account, and all of its activities are supervised like a private bank," Zirak said.

Meanwhile, a number of currency exchangers asked the Islamic Emirate to provide them with more resources.

"The Islamic Emirate should cooperate with us and facilitate our activities," said Munir a money exchanger. Analysts said

that providing permits to companies that offer currency exchange services will increase transparency in financial transactions and will help the implementation of monetary policy. "Money changers who operate without a permit in the capital and provinces, their source of money should be checked in terms of money laundering and terrorist funding," said Siyar Qureshi, an economic affairs analyst.

"The implementation of

the policy will result in the loss of multiple jobs at once, and it is also predicted to reduce people's income," said Darya Khan Bhair, an analyst.

According to figures from the Union of Currency Exchangers, over 800 currency exchange businesses have received permits while at least 4,000 permits for currency exchange businesses run by individuals have been cancelled due to the Central Bank of Afghanistan's order.

Women-run Radio Station banned in Afghanistan's Badakhshan

KABUL (Agencies): Taliban have shut down Radio Sada-e-Banowan in northeastern Badakhshan province over an alleged violation of the ruling regime's broadcasting policy, according to the officials of the local radio station.

According to the Taliban's Director of Information and Culture in Badakhshan province, Moezuddin Ahmadi, the women-run radio station was forced to cease its operation due to broadcasting music, during the holy month of Ramadan, according to local sources. It is also reported that the Taliban's Director of Information and Culture and the official of the Department of vice and virtue of the province on Thursday shut down the radio station and locked its doors.

Najla Shirzad, director of the radio station, however, denied broadcasting music and violating the Taliban's policy.

Ms. Shirzad relates the group's decision of shut-



ting down the radio in response to the programs about girls' education that her radio had aired recently. Despite many challenges, the women-run radio station continued its operations with female employees at their homes over the past year.

Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, the

group has imposed serious restrictions on media and journalism.

As per the Taliban announcement, journalists and media outlets are not allowed to speak against the ruling regime or criticize the Taliban members.

The United Nations and the International

community have repeatedly called on Afghanistan's de facto authorities to respect the freedom of speech, media freedom, as well rights of all the people of Afghanistan. However, the Islamic Emirate authorities pursue their policies and priorities regarding such matters.

Afghan refugees told to leave London say they lost jobs and school places

KABUL (Agencies): Afghan refugee families who were told by the Home Office to uproot their lives in London and relocate 200 miles away say their children's education and health are being severely damaged.

In a challenge to claims made this week by the veterans minister, Johnny Mercer, they say that children as young as five years old and three GCSE pupils have not been found school places after being relocated in February from Kensington to a bridging hotel in Wetherby, on the outskirts of Leeds. Some of the refugees, who include former elite soldiers, interpreters and political advisers who worked alongside the UK authorities in Kabul, say doctors' appointments, operations and jobs have been lost because of the move.

They face being forced to leave their latest hotel after the government announced this week that up to 8,000 Afghans in hotels or serviced accommodation could be given three months' notice from April to move out. The refugees' testimony appears to contradict the words of Mercer, who told fellow MPs this week that the education and health needs of Afghan families were being met.

"Operation Warm Welcome has ensured all those relocated to the UK through safe and legal routes have

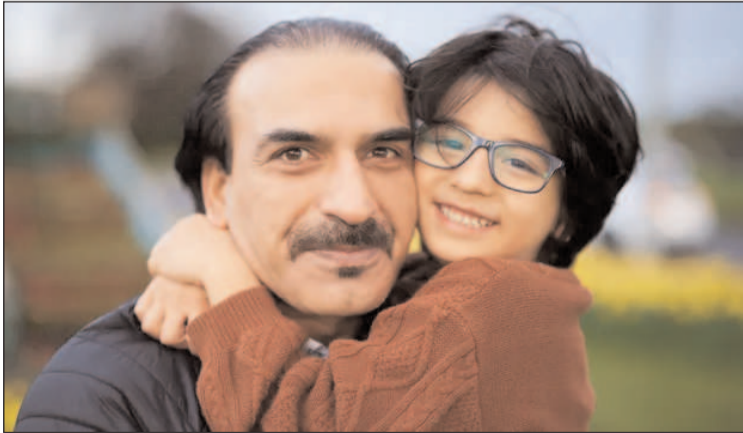
been able to access the vital health, education and employment support they need to integrate into our society," Mercer told the Commons.

Speaking to the Guardian in the grounds of the modern three-star hotel in Wetherby, Hamidullah Khan, a former parliamentary adviser in Kabul who was evacuated to the UK with his wife and three sons, said his five-year-old son Ibrahim had no school place in Yorkshire.

"Before we left London for Wetherby, we kept asking the Home Office about schools for our children," he said. "We have now moved and look, we were right, there were few school plans in place, Ibrahim and others must be given a chance to become part of this society."

About 40 Afghan families living in a bridging hotel near the Victoria and Albert Museum were ordered to move to Wetherby in February, leading to protests outside Downing Street and legal action by the residents. Eight Afghan families are living in the hotel in Wetherby, on a A-road a five-minute walk outside a thriving town centre.

Other families who were staying in Kensington have been moved to alternative hotels in Yorkshire, while some are living on friends' floors in London so their children can com-



plete their education.

Since being taken over by the Home Office, most of the Wetherby hotel's signs have been covered up amid security concerns over anti-migrant demonstrations. The grounds and the building are monitored by at least two security guards.

Inside the hotel, there are signs printed on pages of A4 paper laying out strict meal times for the residents and offering housing advice in Pashto and English. Paintings and drawings from dozens of refugee children adorn the walls. Nearly all of the facilities including bars and conference rooms have been closed.

Khan, like others living in the Wetherby hotel, is travelling to London for part of every week so he can hold down a job as a cab driver.

He was among several hotel residents who raised health concerns, saying they had been told to register with a GP in Leeds city centre, which can be reached after a bus journey of an hour and 15 minutes.

Three GCSE pupils staying in the Wetherby hotel have been told they will not be able to complete their studies in Yorkshire.

Yalda Nadiri, 18, who was studying GCSEs in maths, English, chemistry, physics and biology in

London in the hope of one day becoming a doctor, said she was deceived by Home Office officials who reassured her that she would have a school place. "In Afghanistan, the Taliban do not want girls to get their education. But here it is the same for me. They [the Home Office] ordered my family to leave London, promised us schools, and once we moved said 'we do not have any space for you,'" she said. "They lied to us about our education."

Nadiri qualified to come to the UK because her father was a security operative for the National Crime Agency in Kabul for 15 years. She has learned to speak near-perfect English since her arrival 20 months ago. She said she had been thriving in a Hammersmith school but now faced waiting until September before beginning the academic year again. "I have lost my schoolfriends from London. All the days here seem the same. I feel so sad," she said.

Her father, who has been waiting for an NHS medical procedure in London for 18 months, said he had been told that he would have to go to the back of the queue. "I am in pain, but I have no choice," he said.

Many Afghan refugees have struggled to find private rented flats

because they have low income and no credit history, and are unable to build credit history because they have no permanent address.

Khan said the Home Office should stop paying millions of pounds in hotel fees and instead act as a guarantor so the families could afford to rent places of their own.

"The Home Office is wasting so much money. The government pays out for this huge hotel, and yet most of it stands empty. There are security guards outside day and night. That cash could be better used helping us to find homes.

We do not want to live here, eating the same food day after day. We want to be independent," he said. The Home Office declined to say how much it was paying to use the Wetherby hotel, and it did not respond directly to claims that officials had lied to Afghan refugees.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "This week we have announced substantial extra support to help Afghans into settled accommodation, putting an end to the insecurity that comes with living in hotels. The responsibility for providing school places rests with the receiving local authority, which has a legal obligation to allocate for a child in their catchment area."



PESHAWAR: KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali administering oath to Justice Rooh-ul-Amin Khan as Chief Justice Peshawar High Court.

Alvi okays withdrawal of petitions

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday approved the withdrawal of the curative review reference and Civil Miscellaneous Application (CMA) against the judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

The president gave the approval on the advice of the prime minister in accordance with Article 48 of the Constitution. Dr Alvi also signed his power of attorney in favour of Advocate Supreme Court Anees Ahmed Shehzad.

No compromise on sanctity of constitution and judiciary: Imran

LAHORE (INP): Former prime minister and Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan said that there will be no compromise on the sanctity of constitution and judiciary.

Talking to senior journalist, the PTI chairman said that Pakistan army is my army and Pakistan is ours. Former prime minister and Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan said that the armed forces are the strength of Pakistan. He maintained that free and fair elections are the solution to the country's problems. He added that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) would go to any end for democracy. There will be no compromise on the freedom of the judiciary and constitution.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman revealed that PTI workers are being abducted from their homes. There is no information on the whereabouts of party workers. Former prime minister and Chairman of PTI Imran Khan said that his new life after the murder attempt is in Pakistan. The Secretary-General PFUI Rana Azeem also said that journalists will fight for the supremacy of the law and constitution and judiciary.

Promotion of merged policemen PHC forwards case to PSB for redressal

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) has forwarded promotions policemen to rank of Superintendent of Police (SPs) merged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police to Provincial Selection Board (PSB) along with 10 questions and ordered to immediately dispose-off the matter, on Friday.

PHC's divisional comprised of Justice Musht Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad hearing writ petition of Salim Aman Ullah, Sher Wazir along with others while Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Secretary Home, Secretary Establishment, Inspector General of Police (IGP),

PSB and others were made respondents.

The counsel Bilal Ahmad Kakakzai Advocate informed that petitioners were transferred from other provinces while merged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police and promoted several times. The petitioners are now serving as DSPs and didn't promoting to SP rank while grounding Supreme Court Judgement while the SC's decision didn't applicable on the applicants, the counsel argued.

The petitioners are due for promotion to SPs rank and their working papers were placed before PSB but it was rejected by the board, Bilal Advocate argued. PHC has forwarded the cases with 10 questions

to PSB including that Is the petitioners appointed on due post after transfer other provinces? Are petitioners eligible for promotion and are they working as regular basis at parent departments?

Are the petitioners belong to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and their merger concluded as per law? Is their transfer and merger made in their cadre? Is SCP judgement applicable for petitioners or not? The divisional of PHC comprised of Justice Musht Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad forwarded the case PSB for promotion with abovementioned questions for braining storming whiled ordered to settle the issue immediately.

Governor administers oath to new PHC CJ

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Friday administered oath to Justice Rooh ul Amin on assuming the office of Chief Justice, Peshawar High Court (PHC) here at the Governor's House.

At the function, Secretary Law KP, Masood Ahmad read out the notification of appointment of Justice Rooh ul Amin as Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, issued by President of Pakistan, Arif Alvi. On the occasion, the Governor felicitated Justice Rooh ul Amin on assuming charge of the new responsibility. The function was attended by judges of the PHC, lawyers, Chief Secretary KP, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, IGP KP, Akhtar Hayat Khan and caretaker KP ministers.

President appoints Justice Musarrat Hilali as first female CJ of PHC:

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi has appointed Justice Musarrat Hilali as Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) with effect from April 1 and till appointment of a regular Chief Justice by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan.

A notification available with APP disclosed that in exercise of the power conferred under Article 196 of the constitution of Pakistan 1973, the president has appointed Justice Musarrat Hilali, being the most senior judge of the PHC as Chief Justice. It is mentioned here that Justice Musarrat Hilali would become the first female Chief Justice of PHC and the second female of the country who would serve as CJ of a high court after Justice Tahir Safdar, the CJ of Balochistan High Court.

Full Court Reference held in honor of Justice Rooh-ul-Amin: A full court reference held to pay

tribute to Justice Rooh-ul-Amin on his retirement on 31st March as Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, on Friday.

Justice Rooh-ul-Amin graduated as LL.B student at Khyber Law College, University of Peshawar while enlisted in 1986 as Advocate NWFP Bar Council, Pakistan. In 1989 enlisted as Advocate High Court, Peshawar NWFP Bar Council, Pakistan. However, in 2001 enlisted as Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan, Islamabad Pakistan Bar Council.

Justice Rooh-ul-Amin served as Deputy Attorney General for Pakistan, Deputy Advocate General, NWFP, Special Government Pleader, NWFP, Service Tribunal, Dealing in cases of Civil Servants, Advocate of Federal Shariat Court, Islamabad and assist the court as Federal Counsel in various cases of different nature.

Atta says nation will no longer accept 'one-man show'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Ataullah Tarar, while emphasizing the need for a full court bench to hear the PTI's petition against the deferment of elections in KP and Punjab, said that the nation would no longer accept the "one-man show".

Speaking to the media outside the Supreme Court building on Friday, he added that they aim to restore the dignity of the apex court and the formation of a full court has become necessary; failing to do so will only prolong the matter.

Atta Tarar raised concerns about the reputation of the institution if the benches continue to be broken and constituted like this. He believed that the "Chief Justice should have formed a full court bench" and claimed that the entire nation was saddened by what's happening in the top court. At the same time, he noted that lawyers had reservations about today's bench, and the objection was raised after the formation of the bench.

The PM aide also criticized the negation of judges' orders through circulars before the hearing. He argued that if such decisions continued to be made, it would negatively impact the institution's reputation. He urged Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial and political leaders to resolve all problems through consultation while emphasizing that the nation was already suffering from problems, so it was essential to "sit together and solve the problems."

Cop martyred, terrorist killed in CTD raid

F.P. Report

MARDAN: A policeman was martyred during a raid conducted by Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in Jahangirabad Khatko Kaly area of Tehsil Takhtbhai of Mardan, on Friday.

According to details, the CTD officials conducted a raid in Jamai Masjid and in exchange of fire with the Imam Masjid the CTD personnel was martyred and the Imam was killed in the incident. Police sources claimed that Imam Masjid identified as Maulana Fawad Khan, resident of Bakhshali was wanted to the CTD police in different cases. The Maulana was Imam in Jamia Masjid of village Jahangirabad Khatko Takht Bhai Mardan. The sources said that CTD police team reached in Masjid on Friday. Meanwhile the Imam was in his room on the third floor of the mosque building.

The police talked to Maulana Fawad to cooperate and that go with us to the police station, in response he agreed. Police said that all the policemen came down and assigned the duty of a policeman to come down with the maulana.

China rolls over \$2b loan to Pakistan: Dar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday said China had rolled over a \$2 billion loan that matured last week, providing relief during the country's acute balance of payment crisis.

Locking in a rollover had been critical for the country of 220 million, where reserves have dipped to just four weeks' worth of imports and talks over an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout tranche of \$1.1 billion have hit a stalemate. "I am happy to confirm that this had been rolled over on March 23," Dar told parliament, referring to the maturity date. He said all concerned documentation had been completed.

Neither the government in Beijing nor the Chinese central bank responded to requests for comment on the rollover. Dar's comments were the first official

announcement of the rollover after the loan matured. Dar did not give the new maturity date or other terms of the arrangement. A top finance ministry official told Reuters on Wednesday that a formal confirmation of the refinancing would be made after the process was completed.

One of the IMF's conditions for the release of the next tranche is the assurance of external financing to fund balance of payments. Longtime ally Beijing has provided the only help Islamabad has got so far, with a refinancing of \$1.8 billion credited last month to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

In its monthly Economic Update and Outlook, the Finance Division of the government noted that Pakistan was currently confronted with a shortage in external liquidity. Islamabad has been negoti-

ating with the IMF since late January for the release of \$1.1 billion from a \$6.5 billion bailout package agreed upon in 2019. To unlock the funding, the government has cut back on subsidies, removed an artificial cap on the exchange rate, added taxes and raised fuel prices. "Through demand management policies, the government is trying to limit the current account deficit, which will not transfer further pressure on dwindling reserves," read the report. It added that inflation, which is already running above 30%, a nearly 50-year high, is expected to stay elevated.

The report cited market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gaps of essential items, exchange rate depreciation, and the recent upward adjustment in prices of fuel as reasons behind higher inflation expectations.

Imran solely responsible for all crises: Sanaullah

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Rana Sanaullah on Friday said it was imperative to oust him from politics. There was a need to probe how he (Imran Khan) was "launched" in politics and the judiciary should also play its role in that regard, he added.

He said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader wanted chaos in the country. The two provincial assemblies were not dissolved constitutionally as the respective chief ministers were not willing to do so. It was rather an "arrogant and stubborn" person who made them dissolve the assemblies for his "nefarious agenda", he added. Rana Sanaullah said the decision of a two-member bench headed by Justice Qazi Faez Isa regarding the

political and administrative crisis and now judicial issues and that is why it becomes all the more important to oust him from politics. There was a need to probe how he (Imran Khan) was "launched" in politics and the judiciary should also play its role in that regard, he added.

The minister suggested that a full court bench should be formed to decide the provincial assemblies' election case. The matter must be resolved "in a win-win situation for all". Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Interior and Legal Affairs Atta Tarar, talking to the media, called for a full court to hear the elections-related case. "We want any division in the top court," he said, adding only a full court bench could end the constitutional crisis with mutual consultations.

Solar energy besides solarizing public buildings

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman on Friday informed the Senate that the incumbent government has given a complete plan to harness Renewable Energy (RE) and generate 10,000 megawatt solar energy besides switching all public buildings on environmental-friendly solar energy.

Replying to various questions during the Question Hour, the minister said that it would not only reduce import bill but also control greenhouse emissions in the country. She said that recommendations would be finalized in consultation with the provincial governments for a long-term strategy to meet

the challenges of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions.

To a question, she said that electrical vehicles (EVs) were very expensive and ordinary person could not import it. Indian Tata company was locally manufacturing EV and unfortunately in Pakistan, we have no such local manufacturing facility of EV and batteries, she added. She said in Pakistan EV policy for two and three-wheelers has been framed. The minister said that around 3.3 million tons plastic waste was generated in Pakistan but the plastic recycling facility was available in few European countries.

To another question, she said the Prime Minister

launched "Protected Areas Initiative" to improve flora and fauna of 15 protected areas extending over an area of 7500 square kilometer. A PC-I was prepared after detailed consultation with provinces/territories to improve flora and fauna of 23 protected areas extending over 23600.373 square kilometres, she said.

She said an amount of Rs. 3895.000 million have been allocated through Federal PSDP to execute the project in the province/territories. The project aimed at protecting the existing flora and fauna, improve governance, create protected areas fund and promote eco-tourism in the 23 protected areas, she said.

SC turns down govt's request to form full court

(Continued from Page 1)

He added that the issue before the court was the date of October 8. "The court did not sit to create problems. Tell the court a solid reason or start a dialogue," said the CJP. He added that one party chairman was giving assurances, saying that the government will have to forget the past. "The assembly's time was ending in August and if there are talks between the government the opposition then they will take a break for some days," said the CJP. He added that if the dialogue was not held then they would play their constitutional role.

"After seeing the court decision, you will say that it is an independent decision. Each side's points will be mentioned in the decision," said the CJP. He then asked the AGP about the court's directives of reducing expenses. The CJP also added that he was asked to reconstitute the bench, adding that if he wanted he could have changed all the judges. "If you want to do that, that would be an invasion of our privacy," said the CJP.

The AGP then interjected and stated that the CJP had stated that the judges did not recuse themselves from the hearing. "I did not say anything about judges' recusal," clarified the CJP. "We judges will discuss the matter of stopping the hearing," said the CJP. He then added that the internal discussions of judges should not be done in public. He then directed the AGP to argue on decreasing the political temperature, adding that they will resolve these issues soon.

Meanwhile, AGP Awan then requested the formation of a full court bench to hear the case. Once the AGP made the request, the CJP gave him the go-ahead to argue about it. "Full court issue was on my mind; however, before forming the full court, it is

necessary to look at some factors," said the CJP. He added that one factor was that routine cases are not affected as the number of cases was rising daily. The CJP also explained that at times judges were not in the same city as they were visiting the registries of the apex court in other cities.

"While forming the nine-member bench, I thought that all the judges from senior to new should be represented," said CJP Bandial. He then talked about members of the initial nine-member bench formed to hear the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa election case. He also added that the full court case dealt with Justice Qazi Faez Isa's reference from 2019-2021 and it had to face repercussions for it. The CJP said that he found Justice Athar Minallah to be in line with the Constitution and Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, and Justice Munib Akhtar were constitutional experts. Justice Ahsan is also an expert on the Constitution, he added.

"You may ask why Justice Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi was included in the nine-member bench," said CJP. At this, the AGP said, "if the CJP wishes to talk about it then he may do so". "Added Justice Mazahar Naqvi [to bench] to send a silent message to someone," said the CJP. CJP Bandial then went on to say that a political case was ongoing which was why the judges were being targeted. He added that judges were being targeted based on hearsay.

"Supreme Court was united and is still so on some matters," said CJP Bandial and added, "No one sees how the judiciary is affected". "I am being asked to punish one more judge. First

go and evaluate those facts," said CJP Bandial. The CJP also added that judges were being targeted based on audio leaks. "If you talk about the law, I will listen as a judge. If you talk about my judges, then you will have to face me," said CJP Bandial. The CJP also added that judges were being targeted based on audio leaks. "If you talk about the law, I will listen as a judge. If you talk about my judges, then you will have to face me," said CJP Bandial.

Meanwhile, AGP told the court that he would finish his arguments soon. But on this ECP's lawyer, Irfan Qadir intervened and said that his client's point of view was not heard. However, the CJP asked Qadir to let the AGP complete his arguments. "I only want to speak for three minutes. I have to sit for hours if you can get emotional then I can too," said Qadir. "We will listen to you. You spoke about three minutes," the chief justice told Qadir.

"Not three minutes, I will be even briefer," Qadir said. The CJP then asked the attorney general to talk about the case saying he got emotional because of the random conversation," he said. The CJP said the country was facing a security problem and half of the polling stations were either highly sensitive or sensitive. "It isn't enough to just say there is terrorism in the country," he said and also remarked, "Terrorism has been around since the 90s". "The court was told that the forces are busy at the border. This has to be looked into as well," the chief justice said. The attorney general said that he had seen the court's circular and read Justice Mandokhail's note as well. He added that the second point was about the

ratio of the March 1 judgment and the third point was based on the decision of March 1.

"The basis of the current application is the court order of March 1," he said and added that two members of the nine-member bench voluntarily recused themselves. "Who told you that two judges recused themselves from the bench? Read the court's February 27 order, where is it written?" CJP asked the attorney general. He then went on to tell the attorney general to speak about security and funds. AGP Awan said he would give his arguments after the CJP was done listening to political parties. "I'll inform the court about the country's economic situation," he said. During the hearing, Justice Munib Akhtar questioned the attorney general whether elections could be postponed till October 8.

Meanwhile, the CJP said that the bench would also give an audience to Farooq Naek, Akram Shaikh, and Kamran Murtaza. "We want to listen to Pakistan's state first," The AGP said that the matter was no longer about Rs20 billion, but of the entire economy. He added that the country was facing a deficit of Rs1,500 billion. "The central bank interest rate can go up to 22% by June 30. An increase in interest rate also hikes up debt," he said. "Does the new rate of interest also apply to past loans?" the chief justice asked.

"How much money does the government have at the moment? How much money is there in the federal consolidated funds? How much will the deficit increase if Rs20 billion is spent?" Justice Akhtar asked. Justice Akhtar asked the AGP how much

would be the increase from the Rs20 billion in the Rs1,500 billion deficit. He added that election expenses were probably less than 1% of the deficit. The AGP responded saying that revenue of Rs170 billion was expected [as a result of taxation measures introduced] in the supplementary budget if fully collected.

"Who controls the federal consolidated funds," Justice Akhtar asked. "The funds are under the finance ministry's control," the AGP responded. The CJP asked the AGP would the budget deficit end by October. The AGP said Pakistan was likely to receive funds after the revival of the bailout agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). AGP Awan said that he hadn't thought of polls being held in the current fiscal year. "Will the court accept the request to form full court request on this occasion?" he asked.

"It seems you are getting emotional. We will provide time, if you need," Justice Akhtar told the AGP. "The court should consider the request for full court in the meantime," the AGP said. The court, the CJP said, held a full hearing for three days. "The precious time that has passed will be lost by adding more judges. It will take time for new judges to hear and understand the case from the scratch."

Justice Bandial said that the ECP's counsel had shared the statistics and the court needed confirmation from the government. "The Supreme Court rules are clear that a bench of more than two members will hear cases falling under 184(3). The parties before the court are those who run the government," the CJP said.

The top court has summoned the defence secretary and finance secretary for the upcoming hearing. AGP Awan said that he had been instructed to discuss three issues. "The parties should be given the opportunity to deliberate till Monday," he requested.

Justice Akhtar asked the AGP to read the court judgment of the 2021 suo motu notice and added that it was the right of every party to request a full court bench. "It is a very serious allegation if the government gives the impression that favourite benches are being formed," he said. Justice Akhtar said that the Supreme Court had declared the chief justice as the bench master of the roster. AGP Awan said that the government did not intend to mention favourite judges. "The temperature outside the court is very high."

He added that no one would be able to object to the decision written by all the judges. Justice Akhtar said that the judges were sitting in a court and not a beauty contest. Irfan Qadir, the ECP's lawyer, said that the electoral authority also wanted to talk about the law. Justice Akhtar, while addressing Qadir, said: "You probably want to talk for three minutes and leave for Lahore." Justice Bandial said that as per the Constitution, elections should be held within 90 days if the assembly had been dissolved. "If elections can't be held in 90 days then how many more days will be required?" he asked adding that the court needed to consider this point.

The CJP said that no regulation or law allowed the constitution of a full court. "An application can only be submitted to constitute a full court," AGP Awan said. The chief justice asked the AGP that the nation wanted to know when would the polls be held and sought a guarantee from all parties to remain peaceful until the elections.