

3 terrorist killed in Turbat
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Three terrorists were killed in an Intelligence-Based Operation (IBO) conducted by the security forces on Hoshab Turbat road. According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the terrorist was involved in placing the IEDs. The army's media wing said weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorists.

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Gill approaches LHC

LAHORE (INP): PTI leader Shabbaz Gill approached the Lahore High Court (LHC) against the Federal Investigation Authority (FIA). As per details, the DG FIA and IG Punjab Police have been made respondents in the plea filed by Shabbaz Gill. Shabbaz Gill's counsel told the court that the PTI leader's name was included in the exit control list (ECL) on October 17, 2022.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing a session of the National Assembly.

NA to be given in-camera briefing today: Shehbaz

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that the members of the National Assembly would be given an in-camera briefing on the matters of the National Security.

The prime minister, responding to a point raised by a parliamentarian from Waziristan, said during the in-camera briefing, the parliamentarians would also be able to put questions on the relevant subject. He assured the MNA that all of his reservations would be listened and responded positively to satisfy his concerns. "This will be a healthy interaction," the prime minister remarked. He assured the House that there will no such discussion to spoil the situation rather it would be an attempt to rectify the matters.

Imran's lies, lust for power imperiled Pakistan's foreign policy interests: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also said that through his lies and the lust for power, Imran Khan had imperiled the vital foreign policy interests of Pakistan.

The prime minister, in a tweet, said that from accusing the United States of toppling his government to now wooing the US to mend fences, Imran Niazi's hypocrisy knew no bounds. "From accusing the United States of toppling his government to now wooing the US to mend fences, Imran Niazi's hypocrisy knows no bounds. In the process, his lies & lust for power have imperiled Pakistan's vital foreign policy interests," he wrote on Twitter.

Pakistan looks forward to IRC's support over climate resilience, disaster management: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan was looking forward to the continued support of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in further promoting capacity building for climate resilience and disaster management.

The prime minister, in a meeting with President and CEO of IRC David Miliband, who called on him, also underscored the importance of the Committee's valuable support for reconstruction and repair of the damaged schools and hospitals in the flood-affected areas. Lauding the valuable and long-standing partnership of IRC with Pakistan, he noted with appreciation IRC's timely assistance in the after-

math of last year's devastating floods.

He apprised the visiting dignitary about the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the flood-affected areas. David Miliband appreciated the Government of Pakistan for the commitment and dedication by taking timely steps to minimize the effects of last year's devastating floods. He also reaffirmed IRC's desire to further deepen collaboration with Pakistan in disaster and climate change management.

Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Special Assistants to PM Dr. Jehanzeb Khan, Syed Tariq Fatemi, Chairman National Disaster Management Authority Lt. Gen. Inam Haider Malik and senior officials of the relevant ministries also attended the meeting.

PM reiterates Pakistan's commitment to strengthen ties with Iran: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday reiterated Pakistan's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Iran in all areas of mutual interest, particularly trade, energy cooperation, security and regional stability.

During telephonic conversation with President of Iran Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, the PM expressed satisfaction on the recent operationalization of Polan-Gabd Electricity Transmission Line and appreciated the Iranian government's cooperation in that regard.

The Prime Minister also emphasized the need for enhancing people-to-people contacts, including cultural and educational exchanges, to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lauded the Iranian leadership's efforts in promoting peace and stability in the region and congratulated President Ebrahim Raisi on the historic development of resumption of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Prime Minister called for an immediate end to Israel's human rights violations in the occupied territory and stressed the need for a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-state solution, in accordance with the relevant United Nations Resolutions and international law. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to maintain close contact on all matters of mutual interest.

PM, Zardari, Bilawal discuss current issues

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday held a meeting with former president Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

The prime minister received the two leaders. During the meeting, the leaders discussed in detail the prevailing political situation in the country. They held consultation on the recent decision of the Supreme Court on the elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Meetings of WBG, IMF: Pak team in Washington

ISLAMABAD (PPD): A high-level Pakistan delegation, comprising Secretary Economic Affairs Division Dr Kazim Niazi, Secretary Finance Division Hamed Yaqub Sheikh and Governor State Bank of Pakistan Jameel Ahmed, is currently in Washington DC to participate in the 2023-Spring Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) started from April 10-16, 2023.

The Spring Meetings are held annually to bring together central bankers, heads of IFIs, ministers of finance and development, private sector executives, representatives from civil society organizations, and academics to discuss issues of global concern, including the world economic outlook, poverty eradication, economic development, and aid effectiveness, says an official statement issued here on Thursday.

During Spring Meetings, Pakistan delegation is to hold, inter-alia, a number of bilateral meetings with the senior management of WBG and IMF and to interact with finance and economic ministers from around the world to discuss development initiatives and other issues that have an impact on Pakistan's economy.

The Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, and Minister for Economic Affairs, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, also join and lead the delegation in important bilateral meetings virtually. So far, Pakistan delegation has held/participated in 17 bilateral meetings during the first three days particularly with senior management of IMF and WBG, Rating Agencies, IFC, JICA, US Treasury and Economic teams etc.

The Secretary EAD, Dr Kazim Niazi, also represented Pakistan in the high level WBG event titled "Operationalizing the World Bank Group's Country Climate and Development Report" which illustrate a vision for building long-term and systemic resilience against climate and natural disasters while promoting green and inclusive socio-economic development.

The Frontier Post

Not to accept constitution of SC's 8-member bench

Coalition government for full-court bench to hear pleas against 'SC Practice and Procedure Bill 2023'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The coalition government on Thursday called upon Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial to constitute a full-court bench to hear pleas against the 'Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023'.

Speaking in a news conference, Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Adviser to Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira, Kamran Murtaza of the JUI, ANP leader Mian Iftikhar Hussain, MQM-Pakistan (MQM-P), Syed Aminul Haque, Senator Tahir Bizenjo of BNP emphasized that a collective wisdom approach is essential for the decision-making process.

Speaking on the occasion, Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar urged the chief justice to dissolve the larger bench as the coalition parties, bar councils from across the country and legal fraternity had repeatedly asked the latter to form a full court bench to hear the case. The law minister termed the current situation alarming and said that a "selective bench has been formed". He said the two senior judges of the apex court had not been included in the bench. "There is lack of representation from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan among the judges on the bench," he added.

The minister was of the view that a conflict of interest existed as the case involved the question of the chief justice using his own powers in taking suo motu notices and constituting benches. He claimed that all the rules of the apex court prohibited the chief

justice from leading the bench. All provincial bar councils had unanimously expressed their disagreement with the current bench, he added.

The minister said that all the coalition partners agreed that it was not the right time to take up pleas against the bill as it had not yet been legislated. Speaking on this occasion, PPP leader and Advisor to Prime Minister on Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Qamar Zaman Kaira that nobody could prevent the parliament from using its authority and the incumbent government would not compromise or accept it.

"Do you want to prevent the Parliament from using its authority? We will not accept it," Kaira asserted. He said that the rifts among institutions were leading the country towards a bad situation. "We only want the benches to be constituted in a balanced and proper manner," he added. Senator Kamran Murtaza of JUI-F said that the inclusion of junior judges in the bench was also not appropriate which would harm the sanctity and prestige of the Supreme Court.

He said there should be some criteria for the fixation of the cases. Mian Iftikhar Hussain of ANP said a well-organized campaign was underway against the Parliament. He said the objective of Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Bill, 2023 was to ensure balance in the power of the judges. He said Parliament was supreme, and its supremacy would have to be accepted. He urged the Chief Justice to review the formation of the bench for the sake of the country, Parliament and judiciary.

In his remarks Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Syed Amin-ul-Haq vowed that no one would be allowed to cause the supremacy of the Parliament compromised. It was the only forum having absolute Constitutional authority and powers to run the state affairs by making necessary legislation. The minister said the 1973 Constitution was supreme and chained all the federating units with each other.

"Our struggle is for the supremacy of the Parliament, freedom of judiciary, impartially and strengthening of democracy," he added. Senator Tahir Bizenjo of National Party said the formation of a "selected bench" may prove to be dangerous for the country. He asked the CJP to ensure the representation of small federating units on the bench.

Balochistan National Party (Mengal) leader and Minister of State for Power Hashim Notezai said Pakistan was already facing an economic crisis and could not afford more crises. He also urged the CJP to form a full court with the representation of all the federating units to decide the matter. Leader Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party Shafiq Tareen said the formation of "controversial bench" was creating the impression of confrontation among the institutions. Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) leader and Minister for Defence Production Israr Tareen said the purpose of politics was to ensure the supremacy of the democratic system and his party would continue its efforts for upholding the constitution.

SC blocks implementation of judicial reforms bill

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In a major development, an eight-member larger bench of the Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday ordered that even if the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill 2023 received the assent of the president, the bill would not be acted upon in any manner till further order.

The top court's eight-member larger bench — headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial and comprising Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Sayeed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Ayesha A Malik, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Shahid Waheed — issued its eight-page ruling on three petitions challenging the SC bill. "The moment that the Bill receives the assent of the President or (as the case may be) it is deemed that such assent has been given, then from that very moment onwards and till further orders, the Act that comes into being shall not have, take or be given any effect nor be acted upon in any manner," read the interim order.

The larger bench of the top court heard the petitions challenging the SC bill 2023 amidst a boycott of court proceedings by the country's top lawyers body and criticism of the coalition government. At the outset of the hearing, the petitioner's lawyer Imtiaz Siddiqui started his arguments by saying that this case is very important in the prevailing situation.

The counsel said that differences widened between the parties in the wake of the Qasim Suri case and the political crisis increased after the National Assembly was restored. "The federal government and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) are not willing to hold elections which is why the court had to take suo motu notice," said Siddiqui, while highlighting the circumstances in which the apex court intervened in the matter.

The lawyer said that the problems created following the court's directives to implement the Constitution after which the judges and judiciary were criticised. "The government's ministers and members of parliament are responsible for this," said the lawyer, adding that the proposed legislation interfered with the independence of the judiciary. He said that the president's objections to the bill were not examined. Siddiqui said that the bill will become law after the approval of a joint session of the parliament in 10 days.

He said that the Supreme Court makes its own rules under Article 191. A three-member committee will decide on the formation of benches and taking up suo motu notice under the bill, the lawyer said, while explaining the important points of the bill. "It is illegal for the cabinet to endorse a bill. Presenting and approving a bill in the cabinet are administrative matters," he noted.

He further said that the bill is not pending but is a proposed act, adding that it would become law in 10 days

whether or not the president approves it. Lawyer Siddiqui said that the Supreme Court can nullify the bill passed by the parliament. "The Supreme Court does not exist without the chief justice and by limiting his powers, the judiciary's independence and other judges will be affected," remarked the lawyer.

He further said that the CJP and the judges' powers cannot be curtailed. Siddiqui added that the apex court can review the steps taken by the state's institutions. "The court can review the bill once it is passed and even before it is approved by the president," he insisted. Siddiqui observed that the parliament is bound to obey the orders given by the Supreme Court.

"The Supreme Court's rules under Article 191 cannot be amended by the parliament," he said. In his response to the lawyer, CJP Bandial said: "According to you, the freedom of judiciary is a basic right which enjoys complete security by the Constitution." He added that similarly, "you [Siddiqui] think that the judiciary also has constitutional security just like the parliament and executive."

Siddiqui replied that the president is a symbol of unity of the state of Pakistan and his position as the head of state is not just ceremonial. "The president directed to review the bill once again, however, the bill cannot be amended after the approval of the assembly," he said, adding that the process of legislation is considered done once it is passed. Advocate Siddiqui requested the court to stop the bill from becoming law and the Ministry of Law should be restrained from notifying the proposed act as a law until the verdict is announced.

Siddiqui said that there is a right to appeal under the proposed bill. "How can an appeal be filed if a 10-member bench hears a case? Can junior judges hear the appeal against the verdict announced by senior judges?" he questioned. At this, CJP Bandial replied that all the judges in the court are equal. Advocate Siddiqui said that the stages before the approval of the bill should also be taken into consideration in this case.

"What do you want from the court regarding this current case?" questioned Justice Akhtar. To this, the lawyer said that the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023 should be declared unconstitutional. CJP Bandial remarked that this is an important case as the matter regarding the judiciary's independence was raised. "We have the utmost respect for the parliament, however, the court wants to examine the legislation," he stated.

The chief justice said that the court will try to schedule the next hearing as soon as possible when fellow judges are available. Later, the SC issued notices to the parties in the petitions filed against the bill clipping CJP's powers including Pakistan Bar Council and Supreme Court Bar Association. The apex court also issued notice to the attorney general for legal assistance, adjourning the hearing till next week.

NA passes resolution against SC bench on bill

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Assembly (NA) has passed a resolution against the constitution of the Supreme Court's (SC) eight-member larger bench on the judicial reforms bill.

The resolution was presented by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Agha Rafiqullah. It stated that the House rejected the constitution of the SC eight-member larger bench without two senior judges against the judicial reforms law.

The resolution demanded the dissolution of the SC's larger bench. It added that the parliament is solely authorised for legislation. The House expressed concerns over the Supreme Court's interference in parliamentary affairs. It further stated that the top court is making unjust verdicts and the House condemns the acceptance of the petition against the bill.

ATC extends Imran's interim bail

LAHORE (INP): An anti-terrorism court Judge Ijaz Ahmed Buttari heard the case and accepted the PTI chairman Imran Khan's plea to appear before the court via video link. The PTI chief Imran Khan's counsel Barrister Salman Haider told the court that there are threats to Imran Khan's life and the documents of those threats are submitted to the court.

The court asked why unlike other former prime ministers the PTI chief Imran Khan has such serious life threats. If the bail plea is disposed of on the video link then how will the authorities arrest Imran Khan, the judge asked. As this, Barrister Salman Haider assured the court that PTI chief Imran Khan will present himself to the court if that happens.

Bill for election funds rejected by NA, bodies

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): After the Ministry of Finance — citing scarce funds and strict International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions — excused itself from providing funds for general elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the National Assembly and Senate's standing committees on finance on Thursday rejected the money bill seeking assistance in the matter.

During the meeting, NA's standing committee chairman Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh — who also presided over it — suggested that Finance Minister Ishaq Dar come and answer questions regarding the current state of the country's economy. At this, Minister of State for Finance Aisha Ghausa Pasha said that they have informed the body about the situation. She further said that Pakistan has been bound by the IMF to keep the fiscal deficit on target.

"We are facing a shortage of funds and a huge deficit and do not have additional funds available apart from the allocated budget," she said. She added that the provision of funds outside of the budget would be a violation of IMF conditions.

Meanwhile, during the

Senate's standing committee session, the state minister said that Pakistan had a limited amount of funds as the country was struggling to avert a possible default. The government tabled the bill regarding election expenditures in both houses of the parliament as it informed the legislature about the repercussions of holding the election in Punjab earlier.

Dar tabled the bill pertaining to funds for general elections in Punjab and KP hours before the deadline given by the Supreme Court for the disbursement of Rs21 billion to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) ended. The bill titled "Charged Sums for General Elections of Provincial Assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bill 2023" was presented in both houses of the parliament minutes after the federal cabinet approved a summary prepared by the Ministry of Finance regarding the expenditure on elections.

The Supreme Court, in its April 4 verdict, had directed the federal government to release and provide ECP with funds worth Rs21 billion in any case by April 10 for polls. While presenting the bill in the National Assembly, the finance min-

ister said that it is now the responsibility of the parliament to decide whether funds to ECP should be released or not. Expressing his views in the lower house, Dar said the snap polls ordered by the apex court were not in the national interest due to the country's security and economic situation.

"Elections in all assemblies should be held on the same date," the finance minister said, adding that the government laid this bill before the parliament in light of the Supreme Court's orders to release Rs21 billion to the ECP. The finance czar recalled that the lower house had also passed a resolution that the apex court order into the suo motu notice regarding holding elections in Punjab is a decision of 4-3 and the judgment of 3-0 is a minority verdict and that "should not be implemented".

He further added that the federal cabinet, in its recent meeting, pondered over the apex court's orders and in view of the NA's resolution, has sought the will of the parliament to take a final decision regarding the allocation of funds for general elections for the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP.

Street criminal arrested

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Rangers Sindh and Police in a joint intelligence-based operation in New Karachi area arrested an alleged street criminal involved in snatching over 200 mobile phones and cash Rs 5 million in different robberies.

According to a news release on Thursday, the arrested identified as Amjad Zaman during initial interrogation confessed his involvement in over 150 robberies in which he snatched more than 200 mobile phones and cash over Rs. 5 million from citizens in different robberies.

He along with his other accomplices was also involved in a robbery in which they robbed Rs. 0.6 million from a milk shop located in Qasba Colony. While escaping from the scene after committing the said robbery they also opened firing in which two passer-by teenage girls got injured. Raids were being carried out to apprehend his other accomplices. Arrested was handed over to police for further legal proceedings.

Power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Thursday issued a power suspension programme for Friday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 07:00 AM to 11:00 AM, Islamabad Circle, Angori, NCP, Mangial, Shadara, Shahpur, Khaya Ban Iqbal, Pir Sohawa, QA University, Punjab House, Bari Imam, Mandla, Athal, NIH Feeders, Chakwal Circle, Dera Muslim feeder and surrounding areas.

Shehla Raza meets IGP Sindh

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Minister for Women Development Syeda Shehla Raza Thursday met Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh Ghulam Nabi Memon at the Central Police Office Karachi and had a detailed discussion on pending issues and other matters with the Sindh Police under the Women Development Department.

The provincial minister said the Women Complaint Cell, Darul Aman, 23 Safe Houses under the department were actively working to protect the rights of women and cooperation of police was important to solve the various problems and issues faced by the women, said a news release on Thursday.

Also present on the occasion, Additional IGP - Karachi Javed Alam Odho said formal instructions had been issued to the in-charges of all the complaint centers working under the police to ensure permanent links with the Women Development Department in order to protect the rights of women. It can also ensure the prevention of crimes. The IGP Sindh assured the provincial minister that the police will provide all possible cooperation in solving the problems and difficulties faced by women and girls and protecting their rights as well as preventing crimes against them.

Pakistan ranked among top countries in world for philanthropy: Governor

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that Pakistan ranked among the list of top countries in the world for generous philanthropy and bounteous donations to alleviate the sufferings of poor strata of society and towards calamity victims for their early rehabilitation.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of “ Rabia Welfare Hospital” here on Thursday, he commended the services of Model Steel for building a state of the art hospital for providing free of cost specialized medical treatment to the poor under one umbrella. He said private philanthropy was a growing source of funding for middle and low income countries – supporting public health, education, agriculture, gender equality or clean energy. He hoped the charity hospital would cater the medical needs to the people of the area. He called upon the tycoons and industrialists to come forward and establish public welfare projects especially in the field of health and education which he added, would pay dividends in future in the shape of better country in the comity of nations.

He said, “The secret to living is giving”. When you serve something greater than yourself, whether it was for your family, your local community or you, discovered a deeper purpose and created more meaning in your life.He said there was a strong cul-

ture of philanthropy in Pakistan – high net worth individuals who had chosen to donate financial resources to communities and causes that needed support. He said tenets of Islam also mainly focused that the key to fulfillment lies in giving. He said famous philanthropists make their impact in the world by giving back a portion of their monetary wealth. Even if you don't have large pools of capital to deploy into nonprofits or other recipients, you can still give – your time, your energy, or whatever resources you have that you'd like to share, he said. In this way, everyone can become a philanthropist,he added.

Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman,Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House and MD Model Steel Meher Kashif Younis said it was 4-storeyed 50 bedded hospital constructed at total cost of Rs 500 million with latest medical gadgets and equipment especially first ever open MRI in the city. He said poor patients would continue get complete free treatment and medicines while others well-off could also avail at highly subsidized rates.

Asif Mahmood Jah, Federal Tax Ombudsman,Sohail Zia Butt former MNA,Omar Sohail Butt, Shahid Nazir, Chairman Filter House,Mujahid Butt,Mian Jabbar Khalid,Amir Mian, Farhan Shahid and Ahmad Waqar were among the prominent guests on the occasion.

CM inspects free flour distribution process

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi made a surprise visit to Sabzazar Model Bazaar on Thursday and inspected the distribution process of free flour.

The citizens made complaints with regard to the closure of a few centers in the city on which the CM ordered the administration to immediately open up the closed free flour centers.

The CM stated that the closed flour centers should be opened up for the facilitation of citizens forthwith because due to the closure public rush on other centers had increased.

Mohsin Naqvi remarked that he went on a visit to inspect free flour centers in the city and few centers were found to be closed down on which he issued directions to the administration with regard to promptly opening up the closed centers.

The Caretaker CM talked with a few men and women present in the Sabzazar Model Bazaar and inquired from them about the provision of free flour. Few citizens made complaints about non-verification of their CNICs on which the CM ordered to promptly redress their complaints forthwith.

He himself got the registration of CNICs of few men and women present in the model bazaar. The CM appealed the citizens to make a queue and directed the verification staff members to complete the flour distribution process in the least span of time. Mohsin Naqvi directed that the

elderly citizens should be ensured provision of free flour without any delay.

CM hails security arrangements: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi expressed his satisfaction over the security arrangements made on the Martyrdom Day of Hazrat Ali (RA) across Punjab including the provincial capital.

Mohsin Naqvi was himself overseeing security arrangements till late at night and lauded the police and the administration for making foolproof security arrangements as well as law & order on the day.

The caretaker CM acknowledged that the police, administration and law enforcement agencies jointly maintained a peaceful environment of law and order. Mohsin Naqvi stated that the performance of the Cabinet Committee for Law & Order and the whole team is praiseworthy. He said that the way departments and institutions discharged their professional duties like teamwork is highly appreciable.

CM expresses displeasure over kite flying: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi has sought a report from CCPO Lahore about the injury of a youth due to kite twine. The CM expressed displeasure over kite-flying incidents and ordered departmental action against those responsible for the negligence that led to the incident. He directed strict implementation of the law prohibiting kite-flying across Punjab and asserted that an effective crackdown should be done against those violating the law.

KU, Türkiye Yunus Emre Institute inks MoU to establish Turkish language culture center

KARACHI (APP): The University of Karachi and Türkiye's Yunus Emre Institute inked the memorandum of understanding to establish a Turkish language and cultural center for the faculty and students on the campus on Thursday.

Consul General of Türkiye in Karachi Cemal Sangu and the head of the Urdu Department at Istanbul University Professor Dr Halil Tokar visited the KU and met the KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi at the VC Secretariat. The dean of science Professor Dr Samina Bano, the dean of arts and social sciences Professor Dr Shaista Tabassum, the dean of pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences Professor Dr Faiyaz H. M. Vaid, the dean of Islamic Studies Professor Dr Zahid Ali Zahidi, the dean of law Justice (retired) Hasan Feroz, in-charge Students' Guidance Counseling and

Placement Bureau Dr Ghazal Khawaja Hummayun, Foreign Students' Advisor Dr Shumaila Shafkat Ali, Students' Advisor Dr Syed Asim Ali, Director Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization Professor Dr Bilquees Gul, President Unikarians International Professor Ejaz Ahmed Faruqi and others were also present on this occasion. According to the MoU, the KU and Ankara-based Yunus Emre Institute, which was established to promote Türkiye, its culture and language, and aimed to develop relations with other countries, would encourage the development of academic, scientific and cultural cooperation through its proposed language and culture center. Türkiye CG Cemal Sangu and Professor Dr Halil Tokar briefed the KU administration that the said project would also bring people of both countries closer to each other.

Heat wave likely

LAHORE (APP): The current heat wave is likely to be subsided as the Met office has predicted a wet spell from Saturday to Wednesday which may drop maximum temperature 5-8 degree Celsius.According to a spokesman for the Pakistan Meteorological Department, a westerly wave is likely to enter upper parts of the country on April 15 and would spread in western and central parts subsequently.



LAHORE: Volunteers distributing food among people to break their fast in Badshahi Masjid.

CM Sindh chairs meeting on tax collection

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presiding over a joint meeting of tax collecting agencies of the province, Sindh Revenue Board, Excise & Taxation, and Board of Revenue, observed that the revenue recoveries of the Board of Revenue had fallen short because of recent floods, here on Thursday

The CM Sindh directed the Excise & Taxation department to launch a campaign against tax-defaulting vehicles and stopped them from transferring vehicles on the open letters.

The meeting was held at CM House and was attended by CM Advisor on Agriculture Manzoor Wassan, Revenue Minister Makhdoom Mahboob, Excise & Taxation Minister Mukesh Chawla, Chief Secretary Sohail Rajput, SMBR Baqaullah Unar, Secretary Finance Sajid Jamal Abro, Secretary to CM Raheem Shaikh, Secretary Excise Atif Rehman, and others.

The CM Sindh was briefed that the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) was given a target of Rs 180 billion

against which it had recovered Rs 128.2066 billion during the eight months of the financial year 2022-23 showing revenue growth of 22 percent. Meanwhile, Sindh Minister Excise & Taxation Mukesh Chawal told the chief minister that his dept was given a target of Rs 127,200 million against which Rs 63,331 million have been recovered during the last eight months. He vowed to achieve the target by the end of the financial year. Chawla said that the Excise & Taxation dept recovered provincial Excise, Motor Vehicle tax, Cotton Fees, Infrastructure Cess, Entertainment Tax, and different fees. “We used to collect Property Tax and Professional Tax which have been devolved to local bodies even then the property tax recovery has been recorded at Rs8 million and Professional Tax Rs 464 million,” he said and added against a target of Rs 12,000 million Provincial Excise Rs 4,250 million has been recovered.

The excise minister said that his department has recovered Rs 6,996 million against a target of Rs 14,000

million in Motor Vehicle Tax. Similarly, against a 100,800 million infrastructure Cess target, Rs 51,601 million has been recovered.

He added that Rs 8 million entertainment tax and Rs 1 million different types of fees have also been collected so far.

Sindh Minister Revenue Makhdoom Mahboob briefing the chief minister said that the Board of Revenue (BoR) was given a target of Rs 36 billion against which it had recovered around Rs 10 billion (Rs9961 million). He added that due to heavy rains and floods, the recovery recoveries had been affected.

Makhdoom Mahboob said that the provincial government granted various exemptions to the flood-affected growers. He added that due to the financial crisis in the country, the real estate business had shown a downward trend, therefore the ratio of transfer and registration cases of properties had come down considerably. The chief minister directed the Board of Revenue to take necessary measures to enhance its revenue collections.

‘Firefighters sacrificed their lives in factory fire incident are our heroes’

KARACHI (APP): Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman has said that four firefighters who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty due to the collapse of the factory building at New Karachi Industrial Area, are our heroes, and it was a big tragedy for the families of the firefighters.

In this hour of sorrow, we are with the families of the martyrs and all possible measures are being taken for the speedy recovery of the 13 firefighters who were injured in the incident. The program to be held on May 04 on the occasion of World Firefighters Day has been attributed

to these martyrs to pay homage to the services of these martyrs.

He said this while talking to media persons on the occasion of the funeral prayers of firefighters Khalid Shahzad, Mohsin Sharif and Afzal in Shah Faisal Colony here. The body of fourth firefighter Sohail was sent to Hyderabad for funeral and burial.

Municipal Commissioner Syed Shujaat Hussain, Chief Fire Officer Ishiaq Ahmed, Karachi Fire Station Officers, Departmental Heads of KMC, Fire Fighters and political and social personalities attended the funeral prayer. Later they were buried

in Azeempura Cemetery.

On this occasion, the employees of the fire brigade department were saddened by the death of their colleagues and remembered the martyred fire fighters. The fire incident was taken place in the cardboard factory of North Karachi Industrial area. As soon as the information was received, the vehicles of the KMC Fire Brigade reached the affected place along with the staff and took timely action to evacuate all the people from the factory safely.

Ten fire tenders and bowers participated in extinguishing the fire.

‘Taking care of mental health equally important’

LAHORE (APP): Institute of Public Health (IPH) Board of Management Chairman and former governor Punjab General (retd) Khalid Maqbool has said it is important to take care of mental health, along with physical health, as negative thoughts and negative attitudes affect human health, especially mental health.

He expressed these views while addressing a seminar, organised on the occasion of World Health Day on the topic of 'universal health coverage, healthy eating for all and mental health for all' at the IPH, here on Thursday.

He said a balanced diet and a moderate lifestyle make human health sus-

tainable.

Khalid Maqbool said that to reduce the load of patients in hospitals and in order to control the high costs of treatment, it was necessary to focus on disease prevention and the slogan of "prevention is better than cure" should be spread more and more in society.

He said awareness was important, so that people could protect themselves from getting sick by taking precautionary measures, adding that in this series, public health experts and physicians should provide awareness about the principles of hygiene in the public so that a healthy society could be developed.He said that only by controlling diseases could

the dream of 'Health for All' be realised.

According to the vision of Punjab Health Department, the DG Health briefed in detail about the provision of quality medical facilities to the public and prevention of diseases.



LAHORE: A student passenger traveling on a traditional horse-drawn carriage (tanga swari) passes through Delhi Gate.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Fawad Hussain with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Shah Nawaz Khan citizen number 1570224936843 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Ihsania Bibi (Daughter)
2. Sabila (Daughter)
3. Husna Bibi (Daughter)
4. Reshma Bibi (Daughter)
5. Bibi Halima (Spouse)
6. Fawad Hussain (Son)
7. Ihsan Uddin (Son)
8. Muhammad Idress (Son)
9. Atif Hussain (Son)
10. Suliman Shah (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA DIR UPPER-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Mubashar Ullah Jan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Ms. Saroor Afza citizen number 1610139421808 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Mubashar Ullah Jan (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MARDAN-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Ms. Nadia Khan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Ms. Khurshed Begum citizen number 4240187457978 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Foza Bibi (Daughter)
2. Shazia Khan (Daughter)
3. Nadia Khan (Daughter)
4. Asif Khan (Son)
5. Sajid Khan (Son)
6. Sultan Mahmood (Son)
7. Waris Khan (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MANSEHRA-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Mustafa Alam Mahsud with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Sher Alam Mahsud citizen number 1730131080147 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Natasha Alam Mahsud (Daughter)
2. Lubana Mahsud (Mother)
3. Shandana Mahsud (Spouse)
4. Mustafa Alam Mahsud (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA RING ROAD-DSFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Zakir Hussain Siddiqui with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Ms. Razia Begum citizen number 1730111887784 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Shagufta Naveen (Daughter)
2. Zakir Hussain Siddiqui (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
PID(II) 6313/22
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA MEGA CENTER PESHAWAR-SFU



RTS orders CCPO to register FIR, summon SHO

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Public Services Commission (RTPSC/RTS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has ordered Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar to register First Information Report (FIR) on Siraj's complaint, on Thursday.

Chief Commissioner RTS Muhammad Salim Khan and Commissioner Judge Muhammad Asim Imam heard six public complaints. The applicant Siraj has filed complaint at RTS stated that his driver has sold his truck in scrap while the police didn't register his FIR.

A complainant Majeed Ullah resident of Dir

reported that police didn't registered his FIR despite doctor report for his beating by rival while DPO Lower Dir has already denied relief to book case. RTS has summoned DPO Dir and SHO Talaash, however, Additional SHO Fahim Ahmad appeared before commission while argued that the complaint is pending since the time period of the then SHO Rahim Khan while the commission summoned him to appear on next hearing.

RTS has forwarded complaint to Assistant Director (AD) Local Governments Bajaur for issuances of birth, death and marriage certificates on complaint of Gul Rehman as immediate

forum for redressal of public grievances.

RTS has withdrew complaint of Pervaiz Khan due to the pendency of the case before civil court while the applicant has filed complaint seeking registration of FIR at Haripur district. The commission disposed off complaint of Muhammad Umar due his absentia.

Moreover, RTS directed applicant Gul Khan to approach Family Court because he has filed complaint that his son-in-law has abducted his daughter. RTS is committed for good governance, delivery of services and awareness among public regarding provision of services within stipulated timeframe.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan chairing 4th Meeting of Provincial Caretaker Cabinet.

Cops receive empty cartridges for polio duty

PESHAWAR (INP): A video has surfaced on internet on Thursday in which a police official, posted to escort polio workers in anti-polio drive in Peshawar, has revealed that they were given empty cartridges in magazines.

After the video of the official complaining about empty cartridges went viral on social media, CCPO Muhammad Ijaz Khan ordered an inquiry to find out the facts.

According to a Peshawar police spokesman, an inquiry committee comprising DSP Sher Afzal Khan and DSP Akhtar Naseer Khan has been formed which will look into the matter.

After the investigation, the involved officials will face strict departmental action. The counting orders have been issued before handing over of government arms, ammunition, he added.

On the other hand, police claimed that all of the officials, who have travelled from various districts to perform their polio duty, are receiving weapons, and that officials will receive full and accurate official weapons and ammunition and other protective equipment.

PHC summons VC, stakeholders

PESHAWAR (APP): A two members bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) has summoned the Vice-Chancellor, Peshawar University, Teachers Association and presidents of all university employees' unions on April 20 in the closure of the Peshawar university case.

The hearing was conducted by Justice Ejaz Anwar and Justice Shakeel Ahmed wherein the Advocate General, counsel for the petitioners, and Legal Advisor of UoP presented their arguments.

UoP legal advisor argued that due to the prolonged strike of tea hers the precious time of students was being wasted adding that students were facing severe problems since last two months.

The court issued summon notices to all stakeholders and adjourned hearing till April 20.

UoP approves 15% adhoc relief allowance

PESHAWAR (APP): The Vice Chancellor of University of Peshawar (UoP) has approved payment of 15% adhoc relief allowance 2022 to the varsity employees with the monthly salary of April 2023.

The payment of adhoc relief allowance was among one of the demands being made by the employees of the university who were on a strike from last one month and educational activities were suspended at the university.

Tayyab to lead Eid prayer

PESHAWAR (APP): The provincial Chief Khateeb Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Maulana Muhammad Tayyab Qureshi will lead Eid-ul-Fitr prayer at Eid Gah Mosque, Charsadda Road, Peshawar.

He will deliver his speech on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr at 7:00 am, lead Eid prayer at 7:30 a.m. and deliver Khutba immediately after the Eid prayers. It was stated in a circular issued by Administrator Aqauq government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa issued on Thursday here.

KPIT Board argues engagement of legal firm within jurisdiction

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Technology (KPIT) Board issued clarification against reports published by national newspapers stated that Board being competent forum decided to engage the services of a private law firm.

The only employee in relation to law is the Legal Advisor of the Board, who is a regular employee of the Board and was/is in actual active litigation with the Board. There was/is no dedicated law section in KPITB.

The Board required competent law firm to deal with its litigation, regulation's amendment, vetting of

amendments to regulations, regular legal advice (almost on daily basis on questions of law), agreements/contracts vetting, represent the Board in meetings (physical or virtual) in respect of legal affairs.

Decision was taken by the Board to float an advertisement and hire a law firm for the afore-said in line with the KPRA Regulations. Advertisement was floated, bids were received, one Law Firm was successful as the lowest bidder with excellent technical expertise. They were engaged after formal signing of the agreement.

The law firm has successfully dealt in with the

cases of the Board since being engaged in February 2022. They have been rendering advice on daily basis in light of the regulations and the Act. The impression that the news story has given is deplorable and is not consistent with facts and circumstances. Everything was done and still is being done strictly in accordance with the law.

There is no element of illegality or even a remote irregularity in either the engaging of the law firm or the intent behind the same. The aforementioned being the case, the news stories that are published may be retracted and clarification issued in this regard.

Some of our policies not wise enough to ensure transparency

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The ongoing trounce and snatching scenery before our eyes is not a far-fetched film Movie, but an actual state of men and women's dishonoring and pillage over the three bags of 10kg flour granted free as a Ramadan Package. Instead of a livelihood and relief package, it unfortunately, proved to be a death trap for the popu-

lace due to it's poor and improper mechanism of delivery.

Unlike, Benazir or Ahsan Kafalat this program is non-biometric and obviously very prone to be embezzled. Therefore, everyone is trying his/her best to avail it as soon as possible. Another factor is it's timeline which is lasting for a month (Ramadan) only but along with that the actual bone of contention is

the fear already mentioned that most of the people complains against the ill-practice of Mill Stores and respective Center's flour Mafia who has been releasing and looting per-diem thousands of bags through the Voters List.

On the other hand, despite of thoroughly reporting the issue to each of the adjacent District Administration, no counter measures seems yet to be taken.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Provincial Minister Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel addressing a press briefing after Cabinet meeting.

Sports and Youth Affair digitized facilities, services

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Department of Sports and Youth Affairs Irfan Ali Khan also participated in the session while Secretary Mushtaq Ahmad directed DYOs to compose an event calendar to address challenges and grievance of youth across 35 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This was claimed by Additional Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs Hameed Ullah Khattak while addressing review session with District Youth Officers

(DYO) from all over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Director Youth Affairs Irfan Ali Khan also participated in the session while Secretary Mushtaq Ahmad directed DYOs to compose an event calendar to address challenges and grievance of youth across 35 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Additional Secretary urged DYOs to present event calendar in next review session for establishment of comprehensive

strategy for uplift of youth across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He added that training and education regarding policy making should be provided to DYOs to ensure good governance.

Additional Secretary claimed that Department of Sports and Youth Affairs with strategic negotiation with Google App and other stakeholders to ensure accessibility of youth to online market/industry.

CEO EZDMC inspects infrastructural uplift work

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development & Management Company (KP-ZDMC), Javed Iqbal Khattak along with other officials of the company visited Mohmand Economic Zone (MEZ) and inspected he ongoing infrastructure development projects initiated under package 1 and 2 in the zone respectively.

Talking to this scribe, a spokesman of the company said here on Thursday that during the visit the CEO instructed the zone management and projects teams to ensure quality works on under construction roads and drainage/sewerage systems.

He also instructed the contractors to accelerate the pace of work to meet their respective deadlines.

During his visit CEO also met a delegation of MEZ industrial community who congratulated him the extension of his services for another term. Industrialists of the zone expressed solidarity and said under the leadership of the incumbent CEO the company progressed swiftly and has left no stone unturned in the facilitation of investors.

The CEO assured the industrial community of MEZ his full support from him and his team in the achievement of the common goal of rapid

Industrialization in KP. He assured the industrialists that KP-EZDMC will continue the facilitation of industrialists and investors.

DG Metropolitan govt, others take charge

PESHAWAR (APP): Director General Metropolitan Government, Waqar Ali Shah, Director East, Rehman Khattak and Director West, Dr Riaz Awan on Thursday took charge of their new responsibilities during a simple ceremony here at the metropolitan office. On the occasion, the Director General was presented bouquets and was congratulated by the officers and staff of the Metropolitan Office. Chairman Mazdoor Ittehad, Qaisar Bacha was also present on the occasion. DG Waqas Ali Shah said they were standing by the Mayor for the development of Peshawar and will spare no effort in provision of needed facilities to the people at their doorstep.



PESHAWAR: Chief Commissioner RTS Muhammad Salim Khan and Commissioner Judge Muhammad Asim Imam listening complaints of people.

DSWOs directed to expedite activities

PESHAWAR (APP): Special Assistant to Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Zakat and Ushr, Social Welfare, Special Education and Women Empowerment Salma Begum Thursday issued directives to District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) to expedite welfare activities and perform their duties with full responsibilities.

She issued these directives while chairing a monthly progress review meeting of the DSWOs of the province held at the committee room of Directorate of Social Welfare. The meeting was attended by all the DSWOs.

The DSWO one by one gave a detailed presentation regarding their social activities and progress of their concerned district. During the presentation, Ramadan iftar dastarkhwan program, rehabilitation centers, welfare homes, shelter homes, special education complex, working women hostel, vocational training centers, institute for visually impaired children and other social welfare activities on district level were briefly discussed.

Police bust gang of deadly robbers

PESHAWAR (APP): Capital City Police busted a gang of deadly robbers operating in posh Hayatabad Township and recovered precious cell phones, cash and arms from their possession, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

On a tip, Station House Officer (SHO) of Tatara Police Station, Taimur Saleem Khan conducted a raid and arrested two deadly armed robbers identified as Shahab son of Noor Baz and Amin son of Sahib Khan, residents of the tribal district Khyber.

Police have recovered 9 precious mobile phone sits snatched at gunpoint from the people, cash and arms used in various crimes. The arrested accused were involved in looting people at gun points.

SCCI demands to restore scanning process

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: President of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muhammad Ishaq, expressed serious concern over the suspension of the scanning process of Afghan transit trade and export cargo vehicles at the Torkham border.

The SCCI chief demanded the relevant authorities and senior officials to take notice and issue directives for restoration of the scanning process so that traders and Pak-Afghan transit trade and exports can be saved from loss.

Sarhad Chamber President Muhammad Ishaq said that around 2,500 Pak-Afghan Transit and Pakistan Export trucks, including perishable goods have stuck up at the Torkham borders due to the suspension of the scanning process, which has adversely affected the trade and export process.

Ishaq said that according to reliable sources, the scanning process of Pak-Afghan

Transit Trade and export cargo vehicles was stopped due to the ongoing construction work on a terminal.

The chamber president urged besides construction of the terminal, initiatives should be taken to ensure smooth Pak-Afghan transit and export because the further decline in bilateral trade and exports is not in the best interest of Pakistan's economy and business community.

Ishaq demanded that the scanning process be restored before Eid so that the business community can be saved from financial losses due to halting and demurrage charges.

The SCCI chief appealed to the Inspector General FC Frontier Constabulary and other concerned authorities to take immediate notice of the stopping of thousands of cargo vehicles and issued orders to start the scanning process as soon as possible so that mutual trade and exports can be increased that would put the country's economy on the path of stability and development.

WHO provides aid to Health Dept

PESHAWAR (APP): The World Health Organization (WHO) has donated medical equipment worth millions or rupees to the health department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa upon the request of the KP health advisor Dr Abid Jamil.

The equipment included essential medicines, medical equipment, necessary items for the labor room and furniture for health centers in flood-affected Upper and Lower Kohistan areas.

Advisor to the caretaker chief minister on Health Dr. Abid Jamil thanked the WHO and its representative for its cooperation. WHO's representative for Pakistan, Dr. Palitha Mahipala, visited Kohistan and handed over approximately 30 million rupees of medical equipment, furniture, and other essential items to the health department. He also visited the district and KP Sub offices and handed over

necessary medicines and other items to the relevant district health officers. The equipment included essential medicines, medical equipment, necessary items for the labor room, and furniture.

Dr. Aabid Jamil said in a statement that he had requested WHO for the provision of necessary equipment for hospitals in Upper and Lower Kohistan a month ago. Dr. Palitha Mahipala promptly responded and provided the equipment within a month, for which he expressed gratitude. He further stated that WHO is also working on the functioning and restoration of 40 health centers in flood-affected areas.

WHO's representative for Pakistan stated that the equipment was provided for the flood-affected areas, and it would help the health department in provision of better healthcare services to the people in need.



PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to CM Hidayatullah Afridi talking with a patient during his visit to Jail Hospital.



In brief

Five shot dead in Kharian

KHARIAN (INP): Five persons died and three sustained critical injuries in a firing incident between two groups over some monetary issue in Terwanwala, Kharian, police said on Thursday. The members of Mehar group came to the dera of Haji Fazal to collect money. As the matter escalated, both sides fired shots at each other. Resultantly, 53-year-old Muhammad Nawaz of Fazal Group died in the firing while 40-year-old Nasir Mehar, 30-year-old Saddam Butt and 40-year-old Sajjad Mithu of Mehar Group were also among the deceased. Haji Fazal, Ehsan and Faisal sustained injuries in the incident.

Rs4.7m snatched from trader

F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Unknown four dacoits looted owner of showroom at gunpoint and snatched Rs4.7 million at Jhandai bazaar, on Thursday. According sources, the owner Junaid Akbar along with his cousin Ishfaq withdrew Rs4.7 million from United Bank Limited Mardan Cant branch while returned their showroom in vehicle possessing No# NX-410 Islamabad 2011 Model. However, four unknown dacoits on motorcycles reached behind them to Showroom at Jhandai bazaar and looted Rs4.7 million on gunpoint. The dacoity in daylight has created fear and agitation among trader community in the premises. Moreover, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Takhtbhai Circle Bashir Ahmad Yousafzai reached to the dacoity spot along with concerned Station House Officer while deployed teams for arrest of alleged dacoits involved in the offense.

Measures against dengue

KHANEWAL (INP): The local district administration has decided to take strict measures to eradicate the suspected presence of dengue larvae after the recent rains. In this regard, 400 teams of the health department have been formed for dengue surveillance, said Deputy Commissioner Wasim Hamid in a meeting. The DC directed the authorities concerned to pay special attention to city service stations, tire shops and the central graveyard to achieve the objective. He asked surveillance teams to distribute pamphlets among citizens to make them aware of the hazards of mosquito-borne diseases. Teams of the health department must move into fields to detect the larva, he maintained. DC ordered the sealing of commercial properties with registered FIRs if larvae are found anywhere. He warned of taking strict action against negligent officials deputed for the dengue campaign. He appealed to the citizens to keep their surroundings dry and clean to ensure the elimination of the virus from parts of the district.

Anti-polio drive reviewed

F.P. Report

TANK: Deputy Commissioner Tank Muhammad Shoaib Khan chaired a meeting to review the arrangements for the polio campaign which began here on Thursday. The meeting was attended by District Health Officer Tank Dr. Sher Khan Afridi, polio officials, DPO Tank Muhammad Waqar Khan and other senior officials of the administration besides representatives of the relevant departments. Giving a briefing, the DHO said that 86,550 children would be administered anti-polio drops during the polio campaign which started on Thursday.

Terrorists who martyred traffic cop, killed by police

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Lower Dir police on Thursday claimed to have killed two militants affiliated with the banned Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (Bajaur) during an encounter with a police party at Khat Kalay area of Talash here late on Wednesday night. Briefing local journalists at his office, the district police officer Lower Dir Tariq Iqbal said that both the terrorists identified as Burhanud Din and Hafeezullah alias Umar, residents of Alladand Malakand, were involved in the murder of a traffic police officer, Bakht Zamin, who was martyred in his uniform at Talash bazaar on April 4. The SP Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Amjad Khan, DSP headquarters Fakhr e Alam Khan and other police officers were also in attendance.

The CTD police station Kabal Swat registered a murder case against unknown killer(s). The DPO said that an expert police team worked day and night through CCTV footages, human intelligence and other technical devices to trace the blind killing of Shaheed Bakht Zamin and finally reached the riders who had escaped from the crime scene. The DPO said that police were informed about the presence of two suspects at Khat Kalay in Talash last night. He said the accused hurled a hand grenade on a police van that did not explode.

The militants also fired on police but the raiding party remained unhurt. In retaliation both the terrorists were killed on the spot. The DPO said the bodies were brought to the THQ hospital Talash and later dispatched to Malakand district. Police also recovered two pistols, 6 cartridges, one hand grenade, two mobile sets and a motorcycle from the militants' possession. The DPO said that over 100 suspects and dozens of motorcycles had been taken into custody during the investigation but the majority of them were cleared. Responding to queries, the DPO clarified that the accused belonged to the TTP Bajaur group and they were wanted to police in several other cases. He said both the accused were also relatives and they had migrated to Malakand district from Sor Bat Barawal in Upper Dir. He said the main objective of the attack on a police constable at Talash bazaar was spreading harassment and panic among the peaceful citizens.

He appreciated the locals for fully cooperating with the police in the identification of the militants. The



DPO also thanked the local intelligence institutions for supporting police in tracing the group. About another question the DPO said the militants were looking for a soft target and Talash was the best option for them as no one could expect a terror act there.

Traffic plan: District police officer Tariq Iqbal issued a new traffic plan in the district to overcome the vehicles' rush on the roads. The district was divided into four sectors while DSP headquarters Fakhr e Alam Khan would be the overall in-charge. Inspector Khan Nazir Khan has been made the in-charge of Timergara and Maidan circle while assistant sub inspector Shah Muhammad Khan has been made the traffic in-charge in Adenzai and Jandol. A total of 42 traffic police officials have been deployed in Adenzai, 62 in Timergara, 28 in Jandol and 22 in Maidan circle.

Also the Lower Dir police issued its progress report of the current year, according to which three suspected terrorists, 66 proclaimed offenders and 10 judicial Pos were arrested. The police also recovered 19 kalashnikovs, 11 rifles, 50 shotguns, 130 pistols, 5135 cartridges, 226 chargers, 3 hand grenades, 31 rocket launchers, 13 safety fuses, 84.8 kg charas, 198 grams of heroin and 393 grams of ice.

Eid gifts distribution: The Shakeel Shaheed Development Organization (SSDO) Lower Dir distributed Eid gifts and cash money among the orphans during a simple function held in Sarai Talash.

The SSDO chief Pir Imtiaz Ahmed and other volunteers distributed clothes, cash money from Rs 3000 to

5500 among the deserving children on the occasion. Speaking on the occasion Pir Imtiaz Ahmed said that since 2010 different food packages had been distributed among orphans and needy people under the SSDO Bait ul Mal scheme. He appealed to the youth to stand up and help the poor people and the needy in the streets and form welfare organizations so that the burden on the government and big welfare institutions can be reduced. The SSDO chief expressed the expectation that philanthropists would provide financial support to welfare organizations so that they could serve humanity wholeheartedly.

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Commissioner assures coop to UADA for development

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Commissioner Malakand Division Shahid Ullah Khan committed to complete Kanju Township Phase-II by cooperating with Urban Area Development Authority (UADA) during his visit Kanju Swat.

Director and management UADA briefed Commissioner Malakand regarding the performance of the department and the facilities provided to the residents of the township. Commissioner Malakand determined to provide fully cooperation to make Kanju Township Phase Two operational soon and expressing satisfaction on the performance of UADA Swat.

According to the details, Commissioner Malakand Division Shahid ullah Khan visited Kanju Township yesterday. During the visit, Commissioner Malakand Division was given a brief-

ing in the office of Urban Area Development Authority regarding the functioning of the department and Kanju Township. Shahid Ullah Khan planted a sapling in Kanju Township.

During the visit, Commissioner Malakand was visited by Director UADA Swat Mehran Khan, Assistant Director Technical Adnan Sardar, Account Officer Muhammad Inran Khan, Assistant Director Planning Engineer Ahmed Khan, Housing Officer Waqar Ahmed Khan and Legal Superintendent Fazal Rabi briefed Commissioner Malakand Division and apprised him about the problems faced by the department. During the visit, Commissioner Malakand Division visited various sectors of Kanju Township, especially Phase Two.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Malakand Division Shahid ullah Khan

also inspected the ongoing work of the boundary wall around Kanju Township. Shahid ullah Khan appreciated the performance of the department and expressed his satisfaction on the performance of UADA SWAT. Finally, Director UADA Swat Mehran Khan presented the shield to Commissioner Malakand Division Shahid Ullah Khan.

On this occasion, Commissioner Malakand Division Shahid ullah Khan said that we will fully cooperate with UADA Swat to remove the hurdles in providing facilities to the residents of Kanju Township. He said that the department is ready to provide all kinds of cooperation to make phase two operational. He said that Kanju township is the only government housing society in Malakand division and will work closely to make it better with UADA Swat.

Bahlavi family kicks off cheap food project

F.P. Report

MULTAN: A well-known religious family of Shujaabad, Bahlavi, has started providing cheap food to the public in this period of inflation. It has started providing bread for 10 rupees and curry for 10 rupees. Political, social and religious circles, on Thursday.

On behalf of Maulana Abdul Rahman Bahlvi and Maulana Abdullah Bahlvi while talking to Peer Kifayatullah Chairman Shujaabad Press Club said that we have started the process of providing cheap roti salan to the people only to get the pleasure of Allah Almighty. Till now, more than 70 thousand people have benefited from this affordable scheme and this is continu-

Several hurt as police beat up PTI protesters

MUZAFFARABAD (PPI): A number of people injured when the police resorted to lathi-charge against PTI workers who were staging a protest outside Azad Jammu and Kashmir Supreme Court in Muzaffarabad on Thursday.

According to a report, the PTI activists were staging the protest against the court's decision to disqualify party's prime minister Sardar Tanveer Ilyas. The Supreme Court on Thursday also dismissed ex-PM's request to suspend the high court's disqualification verdict. The highly-charged PTI workers staged a noisy protest outside the Supreme Court which prompted the police to rush in which resulted in a clash between them. The police resorted to baton-charge to disperse the protest, injuring a number of PTI activists.

ing. Maulana Abdul Rahman Bahlvi and Maulana Abdullah Bahlvi added that free food is also being provided to the patients admitted to the civil hospital and their families.

Maulana Abdul Rahman Bahlvi and Maulana Abdullah Bahlvi said that if the philanthropists want to participate in this charity, we will welcome them.

On this occasion, Peer Kifayatullah Bahlvi, Chairman Shujaabad Press

Club, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani Bahlvi, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Makki Bahlvi, Maulana Saeed Ahmad Bahlvi, Maulana Rashid Ahmad Bahlvi, Qari Zubair Ahmad Bahlvi, Maulana Abdul Rahim Bahlvi, Maulana Abdullah Bahlvi. On behalf of the political, social and religious circles of Shujaabad. Tribute for providing 10 rupees bread and 10 rupees curry to the people.

Four killed in firing incident

GUJRAT (INP): Four people were killed and four received injured in an exchange of fire between two rival groups in Gujarat district of Punjab, police officials told on Thursday.

According to the Gujarat Police, a firing incident took place over a transaction dispute between two groups in Dinga, as a result of which four people, including three brothers, were killed and four got injured.

Police officials said the members of Meher group reached at Haji Fazal's residence to demand money, during the conversation, the situation reached at exchange of bitter words. Later on that converted into exchange of fire between two groups.

Officials said 53-year-old Mohammad Nawaz of Fazal group, 40-year-old Nasir Meher of Meher group, 30-year-old Saddam Butt, 40-year-old Sajjad Mithu Butt are among those killed, while Haji Fazal, Ehsan, Ashfaq and Faisal are among the injured. Police have shifted the dead bodies of deceased to hospital for medico-legal procedure. The injured people were also moved to hospital for medical treatment. The police have started investigation of the incident.

Five cops terminated

SEHWAN (INP): SSP Jamshoro Imran Qureshi has terminated five policemen including an ASI for their involvement in facilitation of drug dealing. Moreover, two years service was deducted as a punishment.

According to the police, SSP Jamshoro has taken action against the black-sheep within the department and terminated five policemen from the district for their involvement in facilitation of drug dealing. The terminated policemen were identified as ASI Manzoor Hussain and four constables named Muhammad Ali, Gulzar, Mumtaz and Fayaz, two years service of these officials was also deducted.

Excise bust two bids of narcotics smuggling in Mardan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Excise Police Station Mardan Region with assistance of Excise Intelligence Bureau (EIB) have conducted two different successful operations during the last 24 hours and the accused were also arrested after removing 51 (314 grams) Ice-filled capsules from the abdominal parts of an international smuggler.

In the second operation, 12 KG hashish was recovered and further investigation was started by registering the cases of these incidents in the light of which new revelations are also expected. Secretary Excise Department KP Ehsanullah and Director General Excise Zafarul Islam Khattak have issued special orders in this regard according to which successful operations are being carried out across the province against drug manufacturers, dealers and facilitators.

In the first operation of Excise Force, Provincial In-charge EIB Majid Khan received tip from his confidential sources that an international smuggler

namely Anwar Khan resident of Kuki Khel Ali Masjid, Jamrud District, Khyber, was carrying Ice-filled capsules inside his body via Islamabad Motorway and Later, try to smuggle it to the Gulf country Bahrain.

Knowing the information to be confirmed, after deciding the action plan with Excise and Taxation Officer Narcotics Control Zahid Iqbal Khan, under the supervision of Circle Officer Mardan Syed Naveed Jamal, SHO Police Station Excise Mardan Region Muhammad Riaz and Sub Inspector Mardan Squad Sher Shah Khan, ASI Irshad Khan alerted his raiding team for quick action.

The team reportedly nabbed the said smuggler near Motorway squire, from whose body 51 ice-filled capsules (314 grams) were recovered during operation at the Mardan Medical Complex. The accused was arrested on the spot while a case was also registered under the supervision of SHO PS Mardan Muhammad Riaz for further investigation and arrest of the dealers and other facilitators behind him.

ther investigation and arrest of the dealers and other facilitators behind him.

In the second successful operation, under the supervision of Excise Intelligence In-charge Majid Khan, Sub Inspector Nasir Amir along with his raiding team stopped the motor car number LEI 1161 while operating on Rashakai Interchange towards Islamabad and Mardan Nowshera GT Road. During the search, 12 thousand grams (12 KG) of hashish was recovered from his secret parts. Its case was registered under the supervision of SHO PS Mardan Muhammad Riaz for further investigation and arrest of the dealers and other facilitators behind him.

Meanwhile, Secretary Excise Department Ehsanullah, Director General Excise Zafarul Islam Khattak and Director Narcotics Control Engineer Dr. Eid Badshah have announced the award of certificates of appreciation to the concerned Excise Jawans while appreciating the recent successful operations of Excise Force.

Rs5317m allocated for 49 agri development schemes

Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: Agriculture Department has allocated 5317 million rupees for 49 development schemes of South Punjab, Secretary Agriculture. Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Saqib Ali Ateel has said that the development program of the Department of Agriculture is actually the development program of the farmer.

The sooner development projects are completed, the sooner the farmer will develop. While addressing the meeting held in the Committee Room of the Agriculture Secretariat to review the progress of the ongoing development schemes under the Department of Agriculture, he added that the timely completion of the annual development projects is my

first priority.

No compromise on quality of work and deadlines. Strict legal action will be taken against the officers who do not complete the agricultural projects by June 30. During the briefing on this occasion, Secretary Agriculture South Punjab was told that the Department of Agriculture South Punjab has a total of 49 development schemes, of which 35 are ongoing and 14 new schemes are included, for which 5317 million rupees have been allocated, of which 45.5% of the funds have been spent.

The new agriculture development schemes in South Punjab include water management, agricultural extension, research institute for fruits, research, agricultural engineering, cotton research, registration of nurseries.

On this occasion, Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Saqib Ali Ateel said that all the officers should prove their performance practically in relation to these projects. Closely monitor the development work and ensure 100% correct utilization of funds. He directed all officers to submit performance reports regarding development schemes regularly and said that all schemes will be monitored. He said that development projects should be completed in a timely and transparent manner.

Any kind of negligence in work will not be tolerated. Additional Secretary Task Force South Punjab Imtiaz Ahmed Warach, Deputy Secretaries Muhammad Iqbal, Dr. Haider Karar and other officers of various wings of the Department of Agriculture participated in the meeting.

RPO directs crackdown against outlaw activities

Fazle Haq

MARDAN: Regional Police Officer Muhammad Ali Khan Under the chairmanship of a high-level meeting was held at RPO Office Mardan on Thursday in which law and order, crime prevention in Mardan region. In which DPOs Mardan, Swabi, Nowshera, Charsadda, Mohmand and SPs Investigation of Mardan Region participated.

In the meeting, the law and order situation in the region, effective patrolling in the current situation, security measures for the last ten days of Ramadan and Eid days, action against unregistered motorcycles, registration of tenants,

appointments and punishments based on performance were discussed. There was a detailed discussion, apart from this, discussions were also held about the latest situations and events.

Regional Police Officer Mardan Muhammad Ali Khan addressed the police officers on this occasion to use their professional skills to complete the investigation of these trace cases on modern lines. Let it be done.

Destroy drug and arms trade, possession mafia, car lifting and gamblers by carrying out truly indiscriminate operations against them. In the context of the current situation, human intelligence including snap checking, special block-

ades, search operations should be activated.

During the briefing, the regional police officer was told that during the first three months of this year, the district police of Mardan region exposed 45 gangs involved in theft, robbery and extortion and arrested 123 people associated with them. 13 vehicles, 48 motorcycles and valuable mobile phones and other items worth 38 lakhs will be recovered. Apart from this, 554 accused involved in other cases of theft were arrested from whose possession stolen goods and cash worth 03.24 million were seized by the police, 24 stolen vehicles and 45 motorcycles were also recovered.

Operation against illegal cellular tower launched

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Tehsil Municipal Authority (TMA) has issued notices to at least five cellular towers against its unlawful installation in main Bazaar and cantonment area of subdivision Landi Kotal last day.

According to TMA office in first phase notices served to five antennas of Jazz, Zong, Telenor and Ufone telecom companies and soon after the Eid-ul-fitar, a massive operation would be launched against rest of the towers unlawfully installed in rural areas of the tehsil Landi Kotal.

Sharing details Tehsil Officer Infrastructure (TOI), Landi Kotal said that it was binding on owner or organization to seek Non Objection Certificate (NoC) from TMA while erecting a building or struc-

ture. The purpose of the act was to legalize the building structures and for getting NoC a certain amount of fee would be deposited with TMA that would be utilized in sanitation and other services provided by the department, she added.

The officer said that those who were found violating would be dealt with accordingly. As per Tehsil Officer Regulation (TOR), Landi Kotal, before issuing NoC to the towers, the applicant must assured (1) it is not established on public place, (2) to be set up 100-200 meters away from schools, hospital etc. (3) Provide safety bond in case of falling, (4) permission of land owners and (5) no objection statement of residents of the locality. It is worth mentioning here that the first commercial cellular network, 1G generation was launched in Japan by

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone in 1979 initially in the metropolitan area of Tokyo.

Operation against drug sealers

F.P. Report

DI KHAN: Paharpur police during a successful operation against drug dealers arrested one accused and recovered more than 02 kg of hashish from his possession. On the direction of DPO Dera Abdul Rauf Babar Qaisrani, police station Paharpur under the leadership of SDPO Paharpur Circle Kashif Sattar along with SHO Attaullah Khan, while taking action against the drug dealers, arrested Attaullah son of Saleh Khan resident of Umar Adda Tank and recovered 2170 grams of hashish from his possession.



Migrant deaths in Mediterranean reach highest level in six years

LONDON (Agencies): The number of migrant deaths in the Central Mediterranean in the first three months of 2023 reached their highest point in six years, according to a new report from the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM). In the first quarter of the year, the IOM documented 441 deaths of migrants attempting to cross what the agency calls "the world's most dangerous maritime crossing." It's the highest fatality count for a three-month period since the first quarter of 2017, when 742 deaths were recorded, according to IOM numbers.

Every year thousands of migrants, in sometimes rickety and overcrowded smuggler boats, attempt to reach Europe's southern shores from North Africa. Last weekend, 3,000 migrants reached Italy, bringing the total number of migrant arrivals to Europe through the Central Mediterranean so far this year to 31,192, the IOM said. The report seeks to serve as a wake-up call that food insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic and violent conflicts worldwide have dramatically increased the movement of both migrants and refugees around the world.

"The persisting humanitarian crisis in the Central Mediterranean is intolerable," said IOM Director General António Vitorino in a statement. "With more than 20,000 deaths recorded on this route since 2014, I fear that these deaths have been normalized." "States must respond," Vitorino said, adding that delays and gaps in search and rescue operations "are costing human lives." The IOM noted in its report that the number of recorded deaths was "likely an undercount of the true number of lives lost in the Central Mediterranean."

"Saving lives at sea is a legal obligation for states," the IOM chief said,



adding that action was needed to dismantle the criminal smuggling networks "responsible for profiting from the desperation of migrants and refugees by facilitating dangerous journeys." The delays in government-led rescues on this route were a factor in hundreds of deaths, the report noted. The report is part of the IOM's Missing Migrants Project, which documents the Central Mediterranean route taken by migrants from the North Africa and Turkish coasts, often departing Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria for Italy and Malta. Those nations serve as a transit point from all parts of the world, and have done so for many years. Last November, Italy announced that it would close its ports to migrant ships run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The report noted a February shipwreck off Italy's Calabrian coast in which at least 64 migrants died. It also mentioned a boat carrying about 400 migrants that went adrift this past weekend, between Italy and Malta, before it was reached by the Italian Coast Guard after two days in dis-

tress. In a video posted to social media, a spokesperson for Sea-Watch International, an NGO, criticized Malta for not assisting the ship, saying that Malta did not send a rescue ship "because they want to avoid" migrants "reaching their country." "So far this year, Malta did not rescue any person in distress," the spokesperson alleged.

Italy, for its part, declared a state of emergency over the migrant crisis, pressing the European Union for help. An attempted crackdown on smuggler ships has pushed migrants to take a longer and more dangerous Atlantic route to Europe from north-west Africa, resulting in what an Associated Press investigation dubbed "ghost boats" that have washed up with dead bodies, sometimes abandoned by their captains. "Every person searching for a better life deserves safety and dignity," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, a former refugee chief, said in February when the death toll spiked. "We need safe, legal routes for migrants and refugees."

Syria's rapprochement advances with Tunisia, Saudi Arabia

BEIRUT (AP): Syria will reopen its embassy in Tunisia, state media reported, as Syria's top diplomat visited Saudi Arabia seeking to restore ties that have been severed for more than a decade. Tunisia has become the latest Arab state to reestablish diplomatic ties with Syria, after cutting off relations in 2012. Tunisian President Kais Saïed announced earlier this month that he had directed the country's foreign ministry to appoint a new ambassador to Syria.

His move to appoint a new ambassador to Syria was reciprocated by the Syrian government, a joint statement from the two countries' foreign ministries said, according to Syrian state news agency SANA. The announcement was the latest in a regional trend of rapprochement with the war-torn country, which has picked up pace since the massive Feb. 6 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and the Chinese-brokered reestablishment of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Syria was widely shunned by Arab governments over Syrian President Bashar Assad's brutal crackdown on protesters and later civilians in an uprising turned civil war that began in 2011. The breakdown in relations culminated with Syria being ousted from the Arab League. Tunis shut down its embassy in Damascus in 2012.

Earlier this year, Assad visited Oman and the United Arab Emirates, two nations that had backed fighters trying to topple his government. The Syrian government is reportedly in talks with Saudi Arabia to reopen their embassies in Damascus and Riyadh. A delegation headed by Syria's foreign minister arrived in Saudi Arabia for talks about bilateral relations between the two countries, Syrian state media reported, the first such visit since 2012. Saudi state media reported that Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad was received by the kingdom's Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed Al-Khuraiji. The meeting focused on "efforts to reach a political solution to the Syrian crisis that preserves Syria's unity, security and stability, facilitates the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland and secures the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected areas in Syria."

Saudi Arabia is hosting the next Arab League summit in May, where most states hope to restore Syria's membership, the league's secretary-general, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, has

Xi says China must boost training for 'actual combat'

BEIJING (AFP): China's President Xi Jinping called on the country's armed forces to "strengthen military training oriented towards actual combat", state media reported, after Beijing conducted military drills intended to intimidate Taiwan. Xi's comments, made on a naval inspection trip, come amid heightened tension in the region after the show of force by Beijing, which sees self-ruled Taiwan as its territory.

China concluded three days of military drills launched in response to a visit last week by Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen to the United States, where she met a bipartisan group of lawmakers and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Xi told the People's Liberation Army's Southern Theatre Command Navy that the military must "resolutely defend China's territorial sovereignty and maritime interests, and strive to protect overall peripheral stability", state broadcaster CCTV reported. Beijing has also criticised a plan for US forces to use a growing number of bases in the Philippines, including one near Taiwan. The United States and the Philippines are holding their largest-ever joint military drills this week, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken committing to "standing with the Philippines against any intimidation or coercion, including in the South China Sea".

US to Mali: End restrictions on UN peacekeepers

UNITED NATIONS (AP): The United States warned Mali's military government that it would be "irresponsible" for the United Nations to continue deploying its more than 15,000 peacekeepers unless the western African nation ends restrictions including on operating reconnaissance drones and carries out political commitments toward peace and elections in March 2024.

The warning came as the UN Security Council considers three options proposed by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for the peacekeeping mission's future: increase its size, reduce its footprint, or withdraw troops and police and turn it into a political mission. Its current mandate expires on June 30. US Deputy Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis told the council that "it is unacceptable" that Malian authorities denied nearly 300 flight requests from January through March - about 80% of them for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance drones. The denials were seen as threatening the safety of peacekeepers and their ability to protect civilians.

The United States is also "greatly concerned" that the government expelled the peacekeeping mission's human rights chief and didn't issue sanctions for UN experts monitoring sanctions against Mali. Also cited was lack of progress on implementing a 2015 peace agreement Mali signed with a coalition of groups that included ethnic Arabs and Tuaregs who seek autonomy in the country's north, and a pro-government militia. While DeLaurentis said peacekeepers shouldn't be deployed "in conditions where they cannot succeed," the UN special envoy for Mali strongly supported maintaining the peacekeeping mission, citing its importance to stability in Mali and the larger Sahel region.

Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali's northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they have moved from the arid north to more populated central Mali since 2015. Insecurity has worsened with attacks on civilians and UN peacekeepers. The mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA, is the

most dangerous of the UN's 12 far-flung peacekeeping operations. In August 2020, Mali's president was overthrown in a coup that included Assimi Goita, then an army colonel. In June 2021, Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months and developed ties to Russia's military and the Wagner group, the private military contractor with links to the Kremlin.

Last year, Mali's former colonial ruler France pulled its troops out of Mali following tensions with the ruling junta and the arrival of Wagner mercenaries. In January, US Deputy Ambassador Richard Mills called Wagner "a criminal organization that is committing widespread atrocities and human rights abuses in Mali and elsewhere. France's UN Ambassador Nicolas de Riviere expressed concern that there has been no report on an attack in the central Mali town of Maura in late March 2022 "with, as we know, the involvement of the Wagner Group." Human Rights Watch said Mali's army and foreign troops suspected to be Russian rounded up and killed an estimated 300 men in the town.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the council Moscow is providing "comprehensive assistance" to the Malian army to increase its combat readiness which is producing "real results on the ground." Responding to "negative" Western reaction to its military cooperation, Nebenzia said it's "unfortunate that they cannot set aside their geopolitical rivalry." He blamed the current terrorist activity in Mali and the Sahel on "irresponsible military actions of Western countries in Libya."

Mali's UN Ambassador Issa Konfouressaid the government is committed to holding a referendum on the newly drafted constitution, which had been scheduled for March 19, and elections in March 2024. To Western criticism of its human rights record, he said security forces are continuing offensives against terrorists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group with "very encouraging results" and "in strict respect of human rights and international humanitarian law."

Canada faces questions over Chinese interference

TORONTO (Agencies): When Member of Parliament Kenny Chiu was contacted by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) ahead of Canada's federal election in 2021, he was puzzled. He had never expected to be part of a CSIS investigation, let alone one that required an in-person talk at the height of Canada's COVID-19 pandemic. "At that time, everything had moved online, so it was quite unexpected that they insisted on a face-to-face sit-down," Chiu told Al Jazeera.

But the topic of the meeting was highly sensitive: alleged Chinese interference in Canada's elections. And soon, it would be a dominant issue in Canada's politics, shaping Chiu's political fortunes - and eventually even the prime minister's. Intelligence reports leaked from the CSIS in recent months indicate that Canada's intelligence community has been concerned about Chinese election interference for decades. The documents suggest the Chinese government has not only been spreading disinformation but has also been operating a clandestine network to influence the past two federal elections, in 2019 and 2021.

The alleged network includes Chinese diplomats, Canadian politi-

cians, business owners and international students. They are accused of using their influence to support pro-Beijing candidates and scuttle voices critical of China. One of those figures is the former Chinese Consul General of Vancouver Tong Xiaoling. In a leak to the newspaper The Globe and Mail, Tong allegedly boasted that Chinese efforts resulted in the defeat of two candidates from Canada's Conservative Party in the province of British Columbia. Chiu was one of them. Chiu started to note a shift six months ahead of his reelection bid, in the early months of 2021.

First elected to represent the district of Steveston-Richmond East in 2019, Chiu had recently introduced a private member's bill called the Foreign Influence Registry Act. It would have required individuals working for foreign governments and political organisations to register their communications with Canadian officials if they sought, for example, to introduce policy proposals or influence public contracts. According to Chiu, the bill was intended to provide Canada with tools to combat foreign interference without singling out any country in particular.

"Yet, we saw a lot of

disinformation being circulated about the bill, saying things like, 'It is going to put Chinese-Canadians in jeopardy and that people with ties to China would risk being fined 400,000 Canadian dollars' [about \$300,000]," Chiu said. "Of course, none of that was true." Chiu himself came under fire. "There was also slander directed at me, saying that I am a sell-out and accusing me of racism in spite of my own Chinese heritage." But Chiu was not alone in noticing an increase in scrutiny after the introduction of his bill. The Canadian disinformation monitor DisInfoWatch closely reviewed the stories about Chiu and other Conservative Party candidates during the 2021 election. It found there were strong indications of a coordinated campaign aimed at influencing Chinese-Canadian voters.

Benjamin Fung, a cybersecurity professor at McGill University, also analysed the disinformation disseminated during the election. He too concluded that there were links to Asia. "It was widespread but a lot of the activity would be concentrated around a 9am to 5pm time slot - only not in Canada time, but in China time," Fung told Al Jazeera. "So it was most likely being coordinated from somewhere in East Asia."

Putin arrest warrant 'spanner in the works' for South Africa

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): South Africa said an international arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine war was a "spanner in the works" ahead of a BRICS summit in the country in August. Pretoria, which has close ties with Moscow, has been faced with a diplomatic dilemma since the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against Putin in March.

The Russian president is due to attend a summit of the BRICS - a bloc which groups together Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -- in South Africa in August. But the host nation is a member of the ICC and would be expected to make the arrest if Putin steps foot in the country. "All heads of state

would be expected to attend the summit. But now we have a spanner in the works in the form of this ICC warrant," Vincent Magwenya, President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesman, told a press briefing. "What that dictates is that there be further engagements, in terms of how that is going to be managed and those engagements are underway. Once they've been concluded, the necessary announcements will be made."

The ICC warrant against Putin stems from accusations that Russia unlawfully deported Ukrainian children. A continental powerhouse, South Africa has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine which has largely isolated Moscow on the international stage, saying it wants to stay neutral and prefers dialogue to

end the war. Earlier this year, it held a controversial joint military exercise with Russia and China, which critics cite as evidence of a tilt towards the Kremlin. South Africa's ties with Russia date back decades when the Kremlin backed the ruling African National Congress in its fight against apartheid. The ICC warrant has been the cause of political tumult in the country.

The leading opposition party, the Democratic Alliance has called for Putin to be arrested and for the ICC to force the government's hand. But leftist parties, including the South African Communist Party - a close ally of the ruling African National Congress -- have urged the government to welcome the Russian leader and pull out of the ICC instead.

France's plan to crack down on Indian Ocean migration

PARIS (BBC): Christian Ally Moussa did not tell anyone that he had decided to get in a small boat to make the 350km (220-mile) trip across a treacherous stretch of the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and the French island of Mayotte. He was desperate and he had made the risky crossing twice before. He needed to return to the place from where he was deported a few weeks earlier as he was supposed to appear at a hearing about his application for French citizenship.

After years of saving to pay his legal fees, the 42-year-old hoped he would finally be able to claim the European passport that was his birth right. He had the right to a passport as his father was a French citizen from Mayotte, a French overseas territory, 8,000km (5,000 miles) away from Paris. In almost every respect it is supposed to be treated like any part of mainland France. But because Mr Moussa was born and raised in Madagascar, an island to the south of Mayotte, he had struggled to gain recognition as a French citizen. He had been living and working in Mayotte on and off since 2004 without the correct paperwork, while, like many others, supporting his wife and children in Madagascar. But a French passport would allow him

to become a legal resident giving him greater opportunities.

Famous for its stunning coral reefs and lagoon, Mayotte is home to an estimated 300,000 people. It is the poorest part of France yet wealthy compared to the neighbouring islands of Madagascar and Comoros, off the south-east coast of Africa. With only weeks to go until his citizenship hearing, Mr Moussa was unexpectedly arrested by French immigration police and deported to Madagascar. "[The police] barged in and wanted to take Christian away," his relative, who we are not naming for security reasons, says.

"He asked me to go and get his shoes but by the time I came back with them, they had already taken him," Mr Moussa was tracked down to the only detention centre in the main city, Mamoudzou. "We spoke on the phone. He was crying a lot and said he didn't want to go back to Madagascar," the relative says. The family then contacted a lawyer who launched an emergency appeal to stop the deportation. Mr Moussa was set to appear in front of a judge at 11:00 the next day but by this time he was already on a flight to Madagascar, less than 48 hours after being detained.

But it was the court hear-

ing on his bid to become a French citizen that he did not want to miss. That was when he hatched the risky plan to return to Mayotte on a small fishing boat, known locally as a "kwassa kwassa". "I didn't know he wanted to make the trip back to Mayotte," the relative says. "He didn't say anything to me or his friends. He just asked for money as he said he was sick and needed medicine because they had no drinking water in the village." That was the last the relative ever heard from him.

"When the authorities called to tell me he had been found dead, I told them: 'No it's not him. It can't be him'. They then sent photos and I recognised his face." Mr Moussa died with at least 34 others - all discovered drowned off the coast of Madagascar on 12 March. What happened to Mr Moussa was not unusual. "The lagoon around the island is an open-air graveyard," says Daniel Gros, from the Human Rights League NGO in Mayotte. But, he adds, there is no official attempt to find out how many perish on the journey from either Madagascar or the Comoros. "When I [started working here] in 2012, the authorities used to say that about 10,000 people were estimated to have died there [since 2002]. And today, they give

the same figure."

Mayotte has been in the headlines for riots and unrest, with islanders experiencing rising poverty. They complain about an increase in immigration mainly from the Comoros, which has put pressure on public services. The French government says one in two people living on the island are "foreign" and has vowed to crack down on illegal immigration. It has stepped up its presence at sea as well as aerial surveillance and currently deport 24,000 people a year. As part of a plan to tackle the migration, the French government is planning a major demolition operation, known as Operation Wuambushu, to get rid of what it says are illegal dwellings or shanty towns. It has also boosted the police and paramilitary presence on the island to 1,300 officers. North of Mamoudzou, in a shanty town called Majikavo, officials are already marking some of the corrugated iron dwellings for destruction. The police believe most of the residents in this poor area are there illegally, but regardless of their status many are getting caught up in the operation.

"We live under constant threat," says Fatima, who has lived there for 15 years. "They said: 'Whether you accept it or not, this place will be destroyed.'"

Mexican migration chief to be charged in fire but keep job

MEXICO CITY (AP): Mexico's immigration head will face criminal charges in a fire that killed 40 migrants in a detention center last month, but President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said that he will not dismiss the official known for his hard line on northbound migration. Obrador's decision to keep Francisco Garduño as head of the Mexican Immigration Institute appeared to conflict with the federal Attorney General's Office announcement to charge Garduño in connection with the blaze.

That shows both some separation of powers in Mexico and the conundrum faced by the Mexican government. López Obrador and his administration are struggling with US pressure to slow the flow of migrants while the international community calls on them to treat migrants humanely and safely. López Obrador's comments came on the same day that relatives gathered in rural Guatemala to hold funerals for some of the victims of the deadly fire. Thousands of people gathered in the Guatemalan village of Chicacao for the

funeral of Francisco Gaspar Rojché Chiquival and his uncle Miguel Rojché Zapalu, two of the 19 Guatemalans who died of smoke inhalation or burns in the March 27 fire. "I am destroyed, I am wounded," said the younger man's father, Manuel Rojché. "This is a very hard blow."

The family had handed over title to their land to raise the \$15,000 that smugglers demanded to get Rojché Chiquival to the United States. They stand to lose the land. The only possession the 21-year-old left behind - his beloved motorcycle - traveled with his coffin in the procession to the local cemetery. The men died after a migrant set fire to foam mattresses in protest, and guards fled without opening the cell doors. "That president is a coward," Manuel Rojché said of López Obrador. "How can you treat people like that, not even an animal ... much less a human being." Garduño, a lawyer and criminologist, was called to take over the immigration job in June 2019 as Mexico was under pressure from the Trump administration to decrease the flow of migrants.

The Mexican immigration institute has been hit for years with repeated complaints of human-rights violations and unhealthy conditions in center for migrants, conditions including inadequate ventilation, clean water and food. There also have been numerous corruption complaints. Under Garduño, the institute took a harder line. Calls have come from within Mexico, and from some Central American nations, not to stop the case of last month's fire at the five low-level officials, guards and a Venezuelan migrant already facing homicide charges. Federal prosecutors said that Garduño was remiss in not preventing the disaster in Ciudad Juarez despite earlier indications of problems at his agency's detention centers. Prosecutors said that government audits had found "a pattern of irresponsibility and repeated omissions" in the immigration institute. However, charges being brought in Mexico, especially against public officials, do not always result in prison time. López Obrador said that even though the Attorney

General's Office was investigating Garduño, prosecutors had revealed few details and it was not exactly clear how they would charge him.

"We are going to wait and we are going to make decisions in the (right) moment," López Obrador said. The president defended Garduño, saying "his work is good in general; he has always had good performance," despite "the misfortune" that happened in Juarez. Garduño has been close to López Obrador since the latter was Mexico City mayor, and Garduño has overseen a strategy to contain migrants in southern Mexico with the help of the National Guard, which has been criticized as the start of a militarization of Mexico's immigration policy. It included placing retired or active military officers in leadership positions inside the immigration agency. Garduño's predecessor at the immigration institute, sociologist Tonatiuh Guillén, said the prosecutor's decision "is a good signal, given that the expectation at first was just an investigation of those who were directly responsible."

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Election saga and writ of the law

RECENTLY, the Supreme Court (SC) issued notices to the finance secretary, the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), and their deputies, along with the Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) over the government's failure to disburse Rs21 billion in funds for polls in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Apex court advised the concerned bureaucrats to bring along with them all relevant records of communication, while the Secretary of Finance and Governor State Bank would appraise the court regarding the details of the financial reserves held with the government and its institutions and the reason for the no provision of funds urgently needed for the conduct of the polls in two provinces. The apex court warned the incumbent government that the failure of the federal government to comply with the order of the court as aforesaid is prima facie disobedience. The consequences that can flow from such prima facie defiance of the court are well settled and known to the general public and the department concerned, while every person who embarks upon, encourages, or instigates disobedience or defiance of the court can be held liable, and accountable for his misconduct.

The issue of polls in two federating units has become a gigantic challenge for the administrators, a question of survival for the government as well as the opposition while it also poses a great risk to the ego of the apex court and inter alia a great setback to the sacred code of constitution of the country. The federal government has expressed its inability in providing Rs. 21 billion to the ECP which was highly essential to satisfy the expenses for the forthcoming elections in Punjab and KP. Apparently, no provision of funds had created doubts regarding the possibility of polls in the respective constituencies as per schedule in the present scenario, yet the Supreme Court of Pakistan is determined to rescue the country's constitution at all costs. The apex court was of the view that the question of the provision of funds for such a vital constitutional purpose is something that requires immediate attention and takes priority over proceeding against those who may have committed contempt of the court. The court has directed all concerned to appear before the chamber of the judges on Friday, which indicates that no formal hearing will be held regarding the no provision of funds and the court intends to steer the situation through direct intervention in the financial affairs of the government, that would leave no room for the government except blaming the court for its fiscal malfunctioning.

Unfortunately, the people and the state of Pakistan fell prey to the selfishness and high ego of its leaders that always prefer their personal or party interests over national unity, economic stability, and the well-being of the public. Currently, Pakistan is passing through the most crucial phase of its history while the persistent political instability remained at the heart of all other issues that made the country a failed state. There had been rumors and lobbying by the leaders of the ruling coalition government regarding the deferment of the upcoming election in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa not merely due to security reasons and financial constraints but on political grounds that created a perception that the ruling alliance was not sincere in holding elections in respective regions on the due dates. That philosophy not only causes uncertainty in the masses but also deepens the economic and political crises in the country. After all, the current political upheaval is the outcome of the wrong choices and irrational decisions of our leadership that hurt the core fabric of society, undermined the political system, and eventually proved to be disastrous for the country. The nation can't afford further escalation of the ongoing political, economic, and constitutional crises in the country, therefore, the treasury, the opposition, judges, and bureaucracy must exercise consciousness and restraint by adopting a lawful and plausible solution to the problem. So, the writ of the law could be maintained and the nation comes out of the prevailing chaos and pandemonium.

What is behind change in Iran's regional tactics?

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheh

MANY were surprised when Iran accepted China's mediation and appeared to seek peace and reconciliation with Saudi Arabia. Without discounting China's diplomatic achievement, Iran had its own reasons. At the start of 2023, Iran's economic outlook appeared bleak, with widespread protests at home and growing isolation abroad. While its neighbors were growing rapidly, Iran had stagnated. The failure to revive the nuclear deal meant there was no relief in sight from US sanctions; on the contrary, more sanctions were piling up as a result of Iran's intervention in the Ukraine war. That there were no prospects for regional peace meant that foreign investment was not forthcoming. The government was out of tricks to deal with popular discontent and policy-makers at the highest levels knew that.

Iran was on track for stagflation - minimal to no real growth combined with high unemployment and high inflation of about 50 percent. More than half of Iranians were living below the poverty line, according to official figures. The rial was trading at more than 420,000 to the dollar, hitting a record low of 447,000 on Jan. 21. By comparison, it traded at 70 to the dollar prior to the 1979 revolution. On Jan. 30, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei addressed the nation and criticized his government's failed policies. He admitted in a tele-

sional "disgrace," blaming it for their high rate of emigration. He attributed the sluggishness to exogenous factors, such as sanctions and fluctuating oil prices, but admitted that poor government management and overregulation were to blame. Surprisingly, he cited the over-focus on the nuclear program as one of the contributing factors to Iran's poor performance.

On youth unemployment, Khamenei said that the country can no longer take pride in the growing numbers of university grad-

uates because it cannot provide them with jobs, making it a disgrace instead of an honor. He lambasted government red tape and the "arbitrary interventions of regulatory and non-regulatory institutions." Khamenei called for sustained economic growth over the medium and long terms. "We must concentrate our efforts for at least

seven, eight or 10 years," he said, with a focus on knowledge-based companies and job creation. The unusual public rebuke of the government was likely meant to deflect criticism directed at the government by protesters. Khamenei's choice of 2011 as the starting date of Iran's malaise was interesting because it coincided with the change in Iran's regional policies following the so-called Arab Spring. It may indicate a long-overdue reckoning about the devastating effects at home of Tehran's overreach in

In 2022, the GCC countries grew at a clip rate of 6.4 percent on average and saw their combined gross domestic product exceed \$2 trillion for the first time. Iran, by contrast, struggled to return to pre-pandemic levels of growth, with its nominal GDP registering a mere \$407 billion in 2022, according to the World Bank, or 20 percent of that of the GCC. The per capita comparison is even bleaker. With a population of 84 million, per capita GDP in Iran was \$4,809 in 2022, less than 15 percent of the average per capita income in the GCC states. The little growth that Iran managed post-COVID-19, aided by rising oil prices, was nearly wiped out by the high inflation rate of about 50 percent, compared to an average of 3.7 percent in the GCC countries, and by currency depreciation, which made imports more expensive.

neighboring countries since 2011. Interventions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen have been devastating to those countries but also costly to Iran. Instead of adding to its prestige, they have lowered Iran's international standing and soured its relations with the Arab world. More importantly for a domestic audience, they have deprived the

Iranian people of the resources they need to have a decent standard of living.

Instead of growing as their neighbors have, Iranians have seen their standard of living stagnate. Post COVID-19, the Gulf has been the fastest-growing region in the world, while Iran bucked that trend. In 2022, the GCC countries grew at a clip rate of 6.4 percent on average and saw their combined gross domestic product exceed \$2 trillion for the first time. Iran, by contrast, struggled to return to pre-pandemic levels of growth,

with its nominal GDP registering a mere \$407 billion in 2022, according to the World Bank, or 20 percent of that of the GCC. The per capita comparison is even bleaker. With a population of 84 million, per capita GDP in Iran was \$4,809 in 2022, less than 15 percent of the average per capita income in the GCC states. The little growth that Iran managed post-COVID-19, aided by rising oil prices, was nearly wiped out by the high inflation rate of about 50 percent, compared to an average of 3.7 percent in the GCC countries, and by currency depreciation, which made imports more expensive.

Labor participation rates have declined and unemployment among university graduates has risen, especially among women, whose unemployment rate exceeded 25 percent, no doubt contributing to the intensity of the women-led protests that have engulfed the country since last September. While the

protests in Iran have their roots in other issues, such as undue restrictions on women, economic discontent certainly plays a role. Khamenei mentioned some of the sources of that dissatisfaction and there are many more. Led by the so-called Generation Z, or Zoomers, the protesters have frequently cited failed government economic and social policies and bemoaned Iran's falling behind compared to its neighbors and the rest of the world.

While Iran's apparent change in regional policy is welcome, it has to go beyond tactics or the resumption of diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia. For Iran to return to the fold and benefit from the synergies of regional integration, the changes have to go further. One of the main issues for the region and the rest of the world is the commitments Tehran made in the joint statements it issued with Saudi Arabia in Beijing on March 10 and again on April 6, including respect for the rules of conduct between states, namely respect for international law and the UN Charter. The people of the Middle East, including Iranians, will reap the benefits of detente and de-escalation, if not peace and integration, when the nations of this region focus their energies on making peace and achieving prosperity, instead of the endless and nihilistic wars waged for the past four decades, which have drained their resources and sown enmity and hate between their peoples.

What will post-Djukanovic Montenegro look like?

Hamza Karcic

ON April 2, Montenegro held a landmark presidential run-off that saw 36-year-old former Economy Minister Jakov Milatovic declare victory against longstanding incumbent Milo Djukanovic. Djukanovic's ousting from power raised important questions about the future direction of the small Balkan country and its commitment to a pro-Western course.

Sixty-one-year-old Djukanovic was a fixture of Montenegro's politics for more than three decades. An economist by training, he first became Montenegro's prime minister back in early 1991 at the young age of 29. Since then, he almost always remained at the helm of Montenegro, alternating between serving as prime minister and president. Even during the brief periods he was officially out of government, there had been little doubt, both in Montenegro and abroad, that Djukanovic maintained control over the country's affairs. Djukanovic's early political career was riddled with controversy. When he first entered the political scene in the early 1990s, he was a close ally of Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic? and was right by his side when he embarked on bloody wars of aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1991-92, Djukanovic's cabinet actively supported the months-long siege of Dubrovnik which devastated the historical coastal city

and claimed many civilian lives. In the spring of 1992, at the beginning of the Bosnian war, Montenegrin police arrested more than 60 mostly Bosniak refugees in the western coastal town of Herceg Novi and handed them over to Bosnian Serb troops. Only a few survived. Numerous Montenegrin soldiers and volunteers went on to participate in atrocities in Bosnia. All this took place under Djukanovic's leadership.

In the late-1990s, however, the Montenegrin leader realised that the tide was turning against Milosevic? and swiftly turned his back on the Serbian leader. He distanced himself from policies supported by Milosevic?, dropped pro-Serb talking points, embraced Montenegrin nationalism and slowly reinvented himself as an independently-minded, pro-Western reformer. Djukanovic led his country out of the Serbia-

Montenegro Union in 2006 with a referendum and made ensuring the newly independent nation's accession to leading Western institutions his political priority. Montenegro officially applied for European Union membership in 2008 and accession talks started in 2012. With 33 chapters opened and three conditionally closed, the country has gone the furthest in the European integration process among the remaining post-Yugoslav states that are still not part of the

union. Montenegro also joined NATO in June 2017. Over the years, Djukanovic's early days as a Milosevic? ally have mostly been forgotten and his rule in Montenegro came to be seen as a positive one guided by a pro-European vision. And to his credit, he did put Montenegro on the path to becoming a peaceful, prosperous and well-integrated European nation.

He built constructive ties with all of Montenegro's neighbours and recognised Kosovo's independence in 2008. Ethnic minorities in Montenegro, including Bosniaks and Albanians, have largely been content with the rights they have been given under his rule. He also approved Montenegro paying compensation to the relatives of Bosniak refugees it deported in 1992. In 2021, Montenegro's parliament adopted a resolution condemning the Srebrenica genocide and banning its denial.

Of course, Djukanovic's time in power has not been entirely without controversy. He has repeatedly been accused of corruption and faced criticism for his alleged links to organised crime. He was featured in the Pandora Papers and faced allegations of money laundering. He has also been criticised at home and abroad for his attacks on independent journalists. Nevertheless, as the leader who made Montenegro's independence possible, entered it into NATO and

put it on a direct path to full EU membership, Djukanovic's presidency seemed as secure as can be until very recently.

However, things started to change for the seasoned politician in August 2020. At the end of a fiercely fought parliamentary election, his Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS) got the most votes but failed to secure a large enough majority to form a government on its own. Dritan Abazovi?, a young populist hellbent on loosening Djukanovic's grip on Montenegrin politics, emerged as kingmaker and formed alliances with pro-Serbian and pro-Russian political fractions to keep DPS out of government.

After a brief stint as deputy prime minister in Zdravko Krivokapi?'s government, Abazovi? became prime minister in April 2022. As the prime minister of a broad coalition of nominally pro-European but in reality pro-Serbian parties, Abazovi? promised to tackle corruption, implement reforms that would speed up Montenegro's accession to the EU, and pursue policies to ensure good relations with all of the country's neighbours. Despite his declared reformist and pro-European agenda, however, many in Montenegro viewed Abazovi? as serving no other purpose than fostering the conditions for the ousting of the long-term president - to the benefit of Serbia and Russia.

And soon they were

proved right. As Montenegro went to presidential elections in a state of political turmoil with Abazovi? himself suffering a vote of no confidence in August 2022, Djukanovic finally lost his grip on power.

In the first round of the election, Djukanovic got 35.3 percent of the vote, while his government-supported rival Milatovic, who campaigned on a promise to improve Montenegro's ties with both Europe and Serbia, got 29.2 percent. Then, in last week's run-off, all the anti-Djukanovic forces in the country - including those working to steer it away from Europe and closer to Serbia and Russia - united behind his rival and carried him to the presidency. Milatovi?'s resounding victory marked the likely end of Djukanovic's long and impactful political career. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for June this year but the veteran politician is highly unlikely to be able to secure another comeback. What happens next in Montenegro is subject to much speculation in the Balkans and beyond. Whether Djukanovic will contest the next elections or not remains uncertain. More crucially, there are vital questions about the direction in which Milatovi? will take the small but strategically important Balkan nation of 600,000.

As an economist who studied in the United States and holds a master's degree from Oxford University,

Milatovi? no doubt has experience in the West. In his victory speech, he made a pledge to make the country a full member of the EU in five years. He also promised a new chapter in relations with all of Montenegro's neighbours. Conspicuously, however, the president-elect failed to mention the new administration's continued commitment to NATO. In fact, he did little to reassure those worried about the influence the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian forces that brought him to power may have over his presidency.

Before his ouster, Djukanovic had warned that Serbia is seeking to establish a "Serbian world" where it would exert control over all Balkan states with historic links to Serbia, including Montenegro. With Serb nationalists celebrating Djukanovic's ousting across the Balkans and Milatovi? declaring his ambition to strengthen ties with Serbia, it appears, at least for now, that the change in leadership in Montenegro will help Belgrade's ambitions for regional hegemony. It was telling that Milatovi?'s supporters celebrated his victory by waving Serbian flags.

Of course, only time will tell whether Milatovi? will do what is expected of him and bring his country closer to Serbia. But for now, it seems there is more reason than ever before to worry about Montenegro's commitment to the West and the stability of its neighbourhood.

Aljazeera

Trudeau won't keep his word to protect a Muslim

Andrew Mitrovica

SINCE his move from teacher to politician, Justin Trudeau has built his "brand" on one defining principle: He is the antidote to cynicism. From the moment in 2013 when he began his formal political life, which would, ultimately, lead to the prime minister's office, Trudeau told Canadians he was determined to practice politics differently.

Early on, Trudeau made it plain that his pursuit of "sunny ways" was meant to be a tangible alternative to the dark, calculating modus operandi of his immediate and hard-hearted predecessor, Stephen Harper. "Canadians are becoming cynical," Trudeau said on the cusp of becoming prime minister in 2015. "And who could blame us?" The irony, of course, is that - despite his signature pledge to restore optimism and faith that government could and should do the right thing for the right reasons - Trudeau has, as prime minister, fuelled the kind of corrosive cynicism he has long bemoaned.

Like every other ambitious politician who assumes high office,

Trudeau has broken his word when convenience and parochial interests trump doing the right thing for the right reasons. Trudeau broke his word to hundreds of injured Palestinian children in Gaza who, as opposition leader, he agreed ought to come to Canada to have their fractured bodies and spirits repaired by generous Canadian doctors, nurses and hospitals wanting to help.

When pressed time and again as prime minister to keep his word to kids in desperate need, Trudeau chose pessimism over hope, hypocrisy over humanity and Stephen Harper's cynical ways over "sunny ways". What a last-minute and shameful exercise in cynicism to say no to disfigured children whom you, Mr Prime Minister, once said yes to aiding. More recently, Trudeau has broken his word to Hassan Diab, a Canadian husband, father and teacher who has, for almost 15 years, been the target of myopic French prosecutors more interested in vindictiveness than the truth.

Last week, Diab went on trial in France in absentia in connection with a bombing outside a Paris

synagogue 40 years ago. The trial is expected to last three weeks. Diab's fate will be decided by five French judges who have heard testimony from prosecution witnesses that, taken together, has amounted to a predictable rehash of already discredited conjecture and subterfuge designed to implicate Diab. Zealous French prosecutors began to train their crosshairs on Diab in November 2008. That's when agreeable Canadian police arrested the sociologist and part-time university lecturer in Ottawa pending an extradition hearing. Diab was jailed for four months without charge.

The extradition judge, Ontario Superior Court Justice Robert Maranger, dismissed France's case against Diab as "weak" and said a conviction was unlikely if he were given a fair trial. Still, Maranger ruled that Canada's existing extradition laws left him little choice but to agree reluctantly to France's request. So after his appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada failed, Diab was shipped to France in 2015, where he

spent another three years in prison - often in solitary confinement. In early 2018, two French investigative magistrates ordered Diab released after they discarded the allegations against him due to a lack of any convincing or incriminating evidence.

Throughout this Kafkaesque ordeal, Diab has insisted on his innocence. The facts back him up. First, they suggest that Diab was, in all likelihood, studying and writing exams in Beirut during the time the real bomber was thought to be in Paris. Second, the only "evidence" tying Diab indirectly to the bombing was handwriting "analysis" of a few words the suspected bomber allegedly wrote on a Parisian hotel register.

Two prosecution "experts" testified that the handwriting samples were a match. One problem: Some of the handwriting samples the experts compared against the hotel register belonged not to Diab, but to his ex-wife. After Diab returned to his home and family in Ottawa, Trudeau said, "What happened to [Diab] never

should have happened, ... and [we need to] make sure that it never happens again." But it is happening again, and Trudeau and his callous government have done nothing to stop the blatant persecution of a Muslim Canadian.

Instead, they have abandoned Diab to wolves set on convicting a Canadian to satisfy a stubborn strain of Islamophobia that infects France and the blind antipathy of pressure groups in search of a scalp rather than justice. Trudeau's rhetoric about ensuring a stop to the state-sanctioned injustice visited on Diab year after grinding year is just that - hollow rhetoric.

Cavalier Canadian diplomats have refused a written plea by Diab that they attend the trial as observers, given the seriousness of the charges and potentially dire consequences.

"Consular services are provided to Canadians abroad," a diplomat wrote to Diab via email. "Unfortunately, we will not be in the position to attend your trial as requested." How's that for standing up for a Canadian and to ruthless French authorities fixated on tarring him

as a bomber? If found guilty, Diab is facing the prospect that France will file another extradition request to get their malicious clutches on him permanently.

Amnesty International and a host of human rights activists have called on Trudeau to "immediately make it clear that any future request for Hassan Diab's extradition to France is unacceptable and will not be entertained". In other words, the prime minister must keep his word and defend an innocent Canadian who continues to suffer a grievous injustice perpetrated by French prosecutors intent on skewering the proverbial sacrificial lamb. Trudeau's response to date: silence.

Trudeau's learned critics may have more faith in Canada's delinquent prime minister than I do. Any "leader" who turns his back on children in need is more than capable of turning his back on Hassan Diab and his tormented family. The duplicitous dauphin's disingenuous tenure as prime minister has made me even more cynical, and who, to borrow a phrase, can blame me.

What future for Israel: chaotic, catastrophic, or constructive?

PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's first 100 days in office have been a total disaster, putting Israel at a historic crossroads and opening the way to a number of future scenarios, ranging from the chaotic to the catastrophic. Since announcing his new government of fascists and fanatics at the end of 2022, the smug Israeli leader has seen his popularity tank, his agenda implode, and his policies in tatters. He who has long boasted of bringing Israel prosperity and security has provoked the country's military and business leaders to rebel against his government, along with vast sectors of the media and academia.

Israel's allies have also turned against him, with US President Joe Biden publicly scolding him and his new regional friends refusing to see him. Even the Saudi leadership which initially showed some promise eventually decided to normalise relations with Iran instead of Israel, to the detriment of Netanyahu's regional agenda; one that aims to improve Israel's Arab relations at the expense of Palestinian rights. All this, coupled with unprecedented public opposition and weeks of mounting street pressure, have weakened Netanyahu's grip on power and forced him to delay his cornerstone legislative agenda; a move that disappointed his coalition partners without satisfying his political detractors who insist Netanyahu scrap his illiberal "reforms" altogether. In the process, Netanyahu has alienated his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, whom he sort of fired (then unfired) for speaking out against the "reform", and angered his justice minister, Yariv Levin, who is

Marwan Bishara

the main architect of the new judiciary agenda, all the while empowering his fanatic and fascist ministers of finance and national security, Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Ben-Gvir and Smotrich exploited the crisis to extract concessions from the prime minister, including the formation of a "national guard" to function as their private militia of fascist enthusiasts against the Palestinian minority in Israel, which they view as the enemy within. They also pushed for further expansion of the illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territories and a greater crackdown on Palestinians in Jerusalem and beyond, all of which have led to greater deterioration of the security situation. Netanyahu's mishandling of the judicial overhaul has also alarmed Israel's attorney general, Gali Baharav-Miara, who said Netanyahu is "breaking the law" by ignoring a clear conflict of interest over his ongoing trial for corruption and getting directly involved in his government's judicial overhaul plan. But this is the very point of Netanyahu's judicial overhaul - to put his person and interest above the law; to place his government and its agenda above the Supreme Court; to create the conditions for himself to rule as a sovereign president or as a powerful autocrat, Putin style. In other words, his future depends on it.

So, do not expect Netanyahu to give up or give in; not when his political base considers him "king", his party leadership believes him to be indispensable for its success, and his rogue coalition partners need him in order to

stay in power. Rather the contrary. While he remains open to a minimal compromise mediated by the president to give his broader agenda greater legitimacy, the likeliest scenario, in the short term, is for Netanyahu to rush through much of his legislative agenda soon after the Knesset break. It is what he and his adamant partners in the party coalition need and desire to implement their extremist social, political and religious agendas. Such arrogance and indifference to the public appeal could prove reckless, allowing for further political escalation on the streets of Israel, while instigating further crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Such recklessness would push the military and economic elites supported by the US to rebel against the government and disrupt everyday life, and could prove utterly destabilising for Israel. And such instability may well push the country towards new elections, especially if some Likud members, such as Gallant, decide to put country before party, denying the government its parliamentary majority. If Netanyahu "the magician" wins yet another election and forms another, more empowered government of fanatics and fascists, Israel may turn into a combination of autocracy and theocracy, ending all hopes or illusions of peace in Palestine and paving the way for the apocalypse.

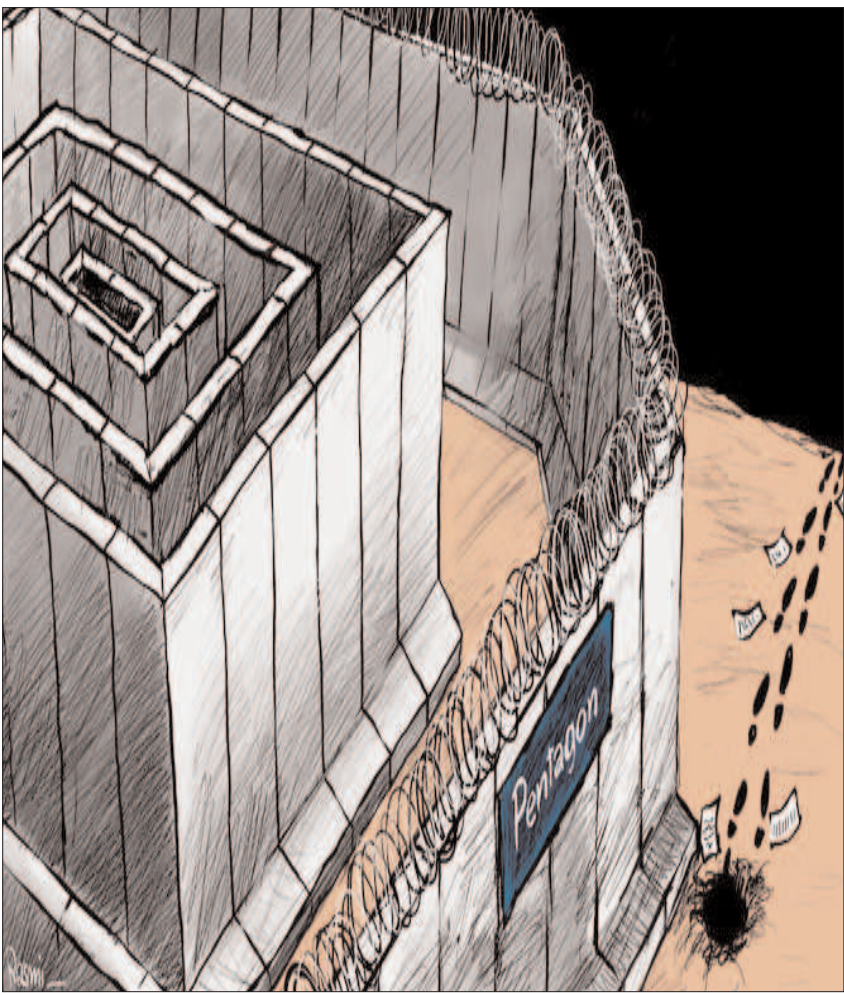
But, if today's polls are anything to go by, a new round of elections may not bode well for Netanyahu and his coalition government. With his popularity tanking, he may become more of a liability than an asset to his party and

perhaps even be voted out of the leadership. Although such a scenario remains remote for now, it has become less so over the past 100 days.

But then again, Netanyahu's failure does not mean democracy will flourish and peace will prevail. After decades of occupation and oppression, Israel's society and polity are so terribly dominated by the violent right and far-right parties that any future constellation of a governing coalition is bound to be extremist, whether it is more or less religious, whether headed by Benjamin Netanyahu or General Benny Gantz.

Worse, a coalition of secular right-wing parties would be sure to pursue the same oppressive policies in occupied Palestine while also being free of the domestic and foreign pressures constraining the current government. Such a coalition would, on the intermediate run, only reinforce the vicious cycles of militarisation and fascism, occupation and fanaticism, as these perpetually feed into each other. The only way to break these vicious cycles of extremism and instability, fanaticism and violence is through Israel producing its own De Gaulle capable of ending its occupation of Palestine, as the French did in Algeria, or its own De Klerk, brave enough to end its apartheid, as has South Africa.

Such Israeli will and courage could transpire only if a third scenario of a prolonged and messy crisis cripples and isolates Israel and forces its elites to break out of their self-righteous delusions of being democratic, liberal and enlightened in an apartheid state, and begin to tackle the very root causes of the ongoing turmoil (or fauda and fascism).



Macron's response to pension protests

Oliver Haynes

IT'S been a great few months for the rats of Paris. As they've grown fat, feasting on rubbish in the streets, citizens have been struggling to catch a train and facing fuel shortages at the pumps. Tomorrow, another rolling strike of refuse collectors will start and the streets of the capital will again fill with the pungent aroma of social conflict.

President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, is missing in action, hiding in the Élysée Palace or travelling abroad. A recent front page of the left-leaning *Libération* newspaper declared that he was becoming increasingly out of touch with the people.

If anything, the accusation is too kind. Macron has been playing a dangerous game with French democracy, particularly since his use of article 49.3 of the constitution to pass a pension reform without parliamentary support. These reforms, which will raise the age at which people can claim state pension from 62 to 64, remain highly unpopular, while the various social and trade union-led movements to oppose them command high levels of support. The most recent polls show that 68% of the public remain opposed to the reforms and 67% support the movement contesting them, while a further 11% are nonplussed. This week, France's constitutional council is expected to rule on whether the reform is struck down or not.

So who is Macron doing this for? He insists it is in the general interest, that with an ageing population the system has become unsustainable and that it must be done now because the longer France waits, the more the system will degrade. Opponents argue that tax cuts he made in 2021, if reversed, could pay for the current pension shortfall. What's clear is

that, electorally, his actions are pleasing only a minority, what French economists Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini call the "bourgeois bloc": the affluent middle to upper class, roughly the 27% of the electorate that voted for Macron in the first round of the 2022 presidential elections. While life on the inside of the bourgeois bloc might be pleasant enough to consider two more years' work to be no big deal, the outlook for others is not so rosy. Take Laura, who works as a signaller on France's train network, (though she is currently on strike with her union, Sud Rail). I spoke to Laura on the phone after she had finished a day's picketing. She told me how she often works weekends and bank holidays, at night, or early in the morning, with her schedule changing constantly. Many of her colleagues are "broken by the job, well before the age of 64", she said.

In her view, this is about more than pension reform, with many people in the wider social movement pushed to protest by their experiences of inflation or precarious work - and the sense that this reform could be the thin end of the wedge.

The stakes are high: it's fair to say the president's actions are weakening the public's already shaky trust in French democracy. It's not just article 49.3. Police violence has been an astonishing theme of French politics in recent years. During the "yellow vest" protests, one woman was killed by police and hundreds were injured, including dozens losing eyes or hands. Recent protests over reservoirs in Sainte-Soline, near Poitiers, left two protesters in a coma after police allegedly deployed military-grade weaponry, using more than 5,000 tear-gas canisters in two hours. Two men at pension reform

protests have lost testicles, a woman has lost a thumb and a 19-year-old I recently interviewed believes he was deliberately run over by police who chased him on motorbikes. (The police dispute this account.) Violence has been used against trade unionists, protesters, reporters and even politicians, like the France Insoumise MP Antoine Léaumont who was hit by a teargas canister while watching protests from across the road. Then there's the rhetoric: Macron's interior minister, Gérard Darmanin, has embraced a Trumpian register, declaring war on "far-left intellectual terrorism" and threatening to cut subsidies to the Human Rights League NGO for its criticism of police violence.

Watching all this with delight is the far right. The left does stand to make some electoral gains from the crisis, especially as the leaders are unions supported by leftist parliamentarians. But it is the likes of the Rassemblement National that are best poised to take advantage. Marine Le Pen has successfully "demonised" her party over recent years, and made her personal brand of cat-loving nationalism appear softer to voters (in part because her rhetoric has spread across the spectrum). However, the dangerous implications of a far-right victory remain clear.

Her plan, had she won in 2022, included a proposal that could have given her an instant parliamentary supermajority. Voting preference polling this far from an election is of limited use, but a spate of recent polls suggest that Le Pen has seen a boost from all this chaos. Both of Macron's election victories were met with cheers from liberals. He was supposed to be the bulwark against the far right but, if events continue along this path, he may well end up helping it to power.

Let's be clear: Joe Biden isn't the problem for Northern Ireland - it's the Brexit diehards

Martin Kettle

NORMALLY it is difficult for a visitor to arrive in Ireland without seeing large signs proclaiming how welcome they are. The fusillade of unionist hostility that marked Joe Biden's visit to Belfast suggests a very different message. You would almost think that everything in Northern Ireland would have been sweetness and light if only the US president had had the decency to have stayed away.

Unionist politics deployed big guns against Biden's visit. The former Democratic Unionist party leader Arlene Foster can be quite pragmatic; on Wednesday, even she declared that he "hates the United Kingdom". Her former deputy, Nigel Dodds, dismissed the president as "transparently pro-nationalist". Predictably, the DUP MP for East Antrim, Sammy Wilson, suggested an even darker purpose, charging Biden not just with the crimes of being "anti-British" and "pro-republican" but of "trying to force the UK to fit into the EU mould".

It would be easy to dismiss these attacks, and to treat them simply as the cries of wounded unionists whose one-time hegemony within Northern Ireland politics has been diminishing. That historical shift in unionist fortunes is certainly a factor here. The attacks on Biden should, though, be taken seriously in their own right. They speak to the lack of trust that still permeates Northern Ireland politics, a quarter of a century after the Good Friday agreement ended 30 years of the

Troubles. One immediate explanation for the ferocity of the language against Biden is that on 18 May the DUP's electoral credibility is on the line in Northern Ireland's local elections. On the one hand, the party is desperate not to bow to pressure to resume power-sharing and find itself "out-unionisted" at the polls by groups such as Traditional Unionist Voice. On the other, it is looking for big wins and strong turnouts in unionist areas that will strengthen its campaign against Rishi Sunak's remodelled post-Brexit plans and enable the party to re-enter power-sharing from a position of increased strength. Biden's visit has provided a big platform for an election that will have significant consequences. No one expects that power-sharing will be on the agenda until after these elections.

But a second explanation for the hostility is the ambiguous and anachronistic narrative about Irishness in which this president wraps himself, and which he has now taken on to the Irish Republic. Biden's self-identification as an Irish American leader is central to his politics. His Irish ancestry is a fact. So, as it happens, is his English ancestry (he hails from Sussex), to which, very unusually and surely on diplomatic advice, he referred when he spoke on Wednesday at Ulster University in Belfast. But it is the Irishness with which he identifies, not the Englishness, and his particular version of Irishness is freighted with

histories and cultures that are weakening in the 21st century. Hostility to the British and the English - the main charge from the DUP - is part of this. In fact, in Ireland itself, though you should not oversimplify, anti-British feeling is diminishing, or was until Brexit. Even so it's only a part of something larger. As Fintan O'Toole argued this week, Biden comes from a family-priest-school Irish American experience that still exerts idealistic sway in the US, but from which modern Ireland has decisively moved away, not least because of child abuse scandals. That old Catholic Irishness was actually one of the causes of the 20th-century conflict, the anniversary of whose pragmatic end Biden is in Ireland to mark.

At some level, Biden surely understands that Catholic Ireland has been irrevocably changing during his lifetime. In a similar way, he surely also sees that a Britain with a Hindu prime minister is not exactly the same as the Britain of the Famine or of the Black and Tans. Yes, Biden's Aunt Bertie once told him: "Your father is not a bad man. He's just English." And, yes, Biden famously (at least in this country) brushed the BBC aside on the campaign trail in 2020 by saying he didn't need to speak to it because he was Irish. But the DUP draws historically inflexible conclusions from such anecdotes. The public Biden is, above all other things, a highly experienced politician. He has spent his whole

career trying to negotiate deals to get legislation enacted as pragmatically as possible with opponents. He is pretty good at it. He is undoubtedly easy to underestimate, partly because of his age and partly because of a speaking style that is shaped by his determination to overcome his stammer. But a lifetime on Capitol Hill and the White House means he is well equipped, not badly equipped, to understand the subtleties and anxieties of Northern Ireland.

His conversational speech in Belfast showed this. It was certainly not a speech for the ages. But it read the uncertainty of the room correctly. It was essentially optimistic, and it cast the US as the enabler of progress. But it said absolutely nothing about Irish nationalism or unification. There was no partisanship in it at all. It showed that Biden - and his speechwriter - gets the big picture and the subtleties of Northern Ireland a lot better than the critics claim. This week's attempt by the DUP to cast Biden as an interfering Irish nationalist is simply false. It helps no one to pretend this. There is no doubt that Washington and London would have preferred the 25th anniversary of power-sharing to have been more full throated. But the fault for that does not lie with the man in the White House. It lies with those who created the post-Brexit logjam of the peace process but who have absolutely no strategy at all for ending it.

The Guardian

It's almost too late to rescue the West from the disaster of low interest rates

David Frost

THE Tories' poll ratings are slowly ticking up again. Rishi Sunak's Government seems to have a grip on things. So are we safely out of last autumn's crisis? I wish we were, but I fear we aren't. It's easy to blame those problems on mismanagement under Liz Truss, and obviously there's an element of that, but last year's shock was caused by real problems. The recent bank crashes show that these have not gone away. All Western economies are now facing the consequences of two decades of fundamental economic mistakes. Interest rates are the warning sign. They are far too low for a free market economy.

Why this is a problem, and much else, is explained by the economist Bernard Connolly in his latest book, *You Always Hurt the One You Love: Central Banks and the Murder of Capitalism*. Yes, today it seems easier to borrow and spend. But problems are stored up for tomorrow - and unfortunately tomorrow is fast becoming today. Interest rates matter because they are a vital price signal - the price of money. Rightly used, they can control boom and bust. When a burst of innovation comes, as with the internet in the late 1990s, you want people to invest in that today and spend the money on the fruits tomorrow. What you don't want is super-investment today and no demand tomorrow. Raising interest rates in the boom is the way of achieving this. It makes it more worthwhile both to invest in innovating sectors than in others and to save money at decent rates of interest for consumption tomorrow. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. By the time it was clear that

the economy was overheating, and central banks finally woke up, they had to push interest rates higher than otherwise necessary. But overinvestment and overspending in the boom had by now created a risk of an almighty crash as people retrenched in the bust.

No problem, said the central bankers. We'll bring interest rates down lower than where we started. Inflation is under control anyway, and this will keep people spending instead of saving and avoid a crash. This worked at first, but it started to get our economies used to the dopamine hit of artificial stimulus - operating at interest rates that were too low. This is where so many of our problems began. In these circumstances, zombie firms that should go bust survive, producing goods inefficiently. Investment doesn't go to the most productive. Incentives to innovate fall, productivity slows and the economy stagnates. Worse, people begin to believe that asset price increases are real, rather than fuelled by cheap credit and fake money, and start borrowing against them - and voters and companies start to think that they will always be bailed out. Then, when the next crisis hits, as it did in 2008, the economy is even less able to withstand normal interest rates. So they had to go lower still. And so the cycle continued. That's why real interest rates were positive in the mid-1990s, but by the banking crash were well below zero, and fell even further after the Covid crisis - helped of course by oodles of quantitative easing.

This isn't just a British problem.

Every economy has its own difficulties, which makes the underlying malaise worse. In Britain, we have high immigration and not enough houses, hurting productivity and driving asset prices even higher. The Eurozone can't establish conditions that suit Germany and southern Europe at the same time - one reason why the European Central Bank's monetary policy has performed even more poorly than everyone else's. And of course everyone's situation can be made worse by policies like net zero that drive debt-fuelled investment in useless projects. So now we've got addicted to the Kool-Aid. We can't easily raise rates to control inflation. Indeed UK real rates of around minus 6 per cent last autumn apparently nearly collapsed UK pension and mortgage markets. The IMF warned this week that rates held near current levels might prove a financial crisis, and who knows what further horrors like Silicon Valley Bank lurk in the depths? But equally, we can't keep pushing rates even lower and printing more money each time there's a problem. There's just too much inflation and debt around. Sooner or later that crisis will come. Then Western governments, deprived of other policy tools, may have no option than to take direct control of the financial sector to avoid a crash. If that happens, we won't live in a free market economy. Governments will direct investment. Productivity will fall further. Whether you can make a living won't depend on your own abilities but on whether government thinks you are worthy or not.

There is one thing we could do to avoid this grim prospect. Get into a virtuous circle. Reform to drive up productivity so that we can withstand higher interest rates. Then those more normal interest rates can start to get investment and the price mechanism going again. But we've left it very late. Tinkering won't raise our productivity growth from 0.5 per cent to 3 or 4 per cent. We need to do not one thing but everything: change planning to deal with our backlog of four million homes; stop wasting money on energy companies that don't generate energy; bring market reforms to our wasteful and expensive public social services; build more roads, ports and airports with private money; get spending and tax down and simplify the tax system; remove burdens on job creation; incentivise education that pays off rather than worthless degrees ... the list is endless. At the moment, any single one of these seems beyond us, and the total reform programme is well beyond the current Overton window of politics. Unless we can change that, we will slip further into genteel decline. This week, Liz Truss rightly pointed out that the West is losing touch with the economic fundamentals that made us succeed. All in the Conservative Party can surely agree on that. If so, we can start explaining why, and how we are going to fix it, in our election manifesto. It's not the moment to tell voters: "It will all be fine. Don't worry, we have your back." That won't prepare the country for the very difficult decisions that are coming. We must tell it like it is and get a mandate for change, or be swept away by the storm.

The Telegraph

White House can't always call the shots

Li Yang

IF the Joe Biden administration really deems Sino-US relations and France-US relations as normal and equal relations between state and state, it would not have expressed its confidence in the US-French relationship in such a hurry after French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to China last week.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the Biden administration remains "comfortable and confident in the terrific bilateral relationship we have with France." Kirby cited President Biden's personal relationship with Macron and said the two countries are "working together on so many different issues," including naval operations in the Asia-Pacific.

After visiting China,

Macron told the media that Europe should be wary of being "caught up in crises that are not ours, which prevents it from building its strategic autonomy". "The paradox would be that, overcome with panic, we believe we are just America's followers," the French president said, "The worse thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers..."

These remarks reflect any country's yearning for the freedom to act on its own, as well as the French leader's concerns about Europe's future and its interests. That US Senator Marco Rubio demanded the French president clarify whether he was speaking for himself or the whole of Europe indicates the lack of manners of some uncultivated politicians on the US

side, particularly those China hawks, who have regretfully been allowed to set the agenda of Washington's China policy for too long without being questioned. His remark shows the extent to which some in Washington take it for granted that European countries should be willing to act as "followers" of the US that must dance to its tune on the world stage.

The thriving of Sino-French relations does not conflict with US-France relations as long as Washington does not define the latter as a geopolitical tool to be wielded against China. The insecurity Washington has displayed speaks volumes of the ugly role it assumes in playing some countries off against one another, which is a root cause of the bitter turbulence the world is experiencing today.

China Daily

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Minister pledges to resolve EOBI related issues of KP industrialists

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistani and Human Resource Development Sajid Hussain Turi pledged to resolve industrialists issues related to Employees Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and others.

The Minister warned that strict action would be taken over harassment of the business community and non-cooperative and unsupportive attitude of the EOBI and other institutions concerned.

Sajid Hussain Turi was addressing during a meeting with KP businessmen and industrialists held in his office in Islamabad, said in a press release issued here on Thursday.

The Minister said regular complaints of EOBI staff's ill-attitude from all regions are in notice and not well received. He said stern action would be initiated.

President IAP Malik Imran Ishaq, Group leader Ghazanfar Bilour, Executive members IAP

Malik Niaz Ahmed and Faisal Afzal and member IAP Hassan Zahideen participated in the meeting.

Former Governor KPK Engr. Shaukat Ullah; chairperson and officials of EOBI also attended the meeting.

The Minister asked the EOBI chairperson to guide and enhance staff public dealing capacity.

Turi emphasized that the supportive and cooperative role of EOBI with employers is a dire need of the hour.

Shaukatullah said KP is our province wherein industrialization is in dire need of hour. He assured the industrialists' issues would be resolved on priority grounds.

Ex-governor KP said he always stands with businessmen and will continue to support and cooperate with them.

Malik Imran Ishaq on the occasion apprised the federal minister regarding industrialists' issues relating to EOBI in an elaborated and well-informed manner.

The IAP president dur-

ing the meeting established a stance that due to varying rate of contribution (Rs300; 700; 1200; 1500) collected from different parts of country and an evident deadlock of stakeholders and EOBI, the decisions of Lahore High court and Apex court must prevail and respected to maintain and ensure spirit of the law.

Participants on the occasion said that non-cooperative and authoritative behaviour which harasses and ridicules businessmen and industry is unacceptable and condemnable.

Ghazanfar Bilour, the group leader on the occasion thanked the federal minister Sajid Turi and ex-Governor KP, Shaukatullah for their keen interest toward resolving issues of manufacturers, especially pertaining to EOBI.

Bilour, who was also former president of FPCCI, said that industrialists have faced great hardships under the prevailing circumstances. He added Letter of Credits (LCs) are not opening, which has caused shortage of raw material for

industries throughout the country.

On the other hand, Ghazanfar said the government institutions have created problems for the business community on various pretexts.

He demanded a special incentive package to revive businesses, industries and the national economy on sound footings.

Earlier, the IAP president Malik Imran Ishaq apprised the federal minister regarding industrialists issues with facts and figures.

The meeting decided to form a committee to identify and highlight instances of institutional harassment for correction to the Federal Minister.

The meeting said that another sitting shall be arranged and supervised by the federal minister himself including secretary Human Resources, Chairperson EOBI and stakeholders from Peshawar, Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi businesses and industrial platforms to assess all dimensions of issues related to EOBI.



ISLAMABAD: President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari exchanging views with Chief Commissioner Regional Tax Office Islamabad Khurshid Ahmed Khan Marwat on resolving tax issues of business community during his visit to ICCI.

Total liquid foreign reserves reach near \$ 9.56b

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan stood at US\$ 9,564.5 million while reserves held by the central bank reached at US\$ 4,038.3 million.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued on Thursday, informed that during the week ending on April 07, 2023, foreign reserves of the central bank decreased by 170 million to US\$ 4,038.3 million due to debt repayments.

Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at US\$ 5,526.2 million, it added.

In the previous week ended on March 31, total liquid foreign reserves held by the country was US\$ 9,759.8 million. Among them foreign reserves held by the SBP were US\$ 4,207.9 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were US\$ 5,551.9 million.

Rupee gains Rs1.67

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan rupee appreciated by Rs1.67 against the Dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs 284.90 against the previous day's closing of Rs 286.61.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 290 and Rs 292, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 33 paises to close at Rs 313.34 against the last day's closing of Rs 313.01, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and stood at Rs 2.14; whereas a decline of 14 paises was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs356.09 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs 355.95.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal dipped by 46 paises each to close at Rs 77.58 and Rs 75.94, respectively.

Gold prices decreased

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs 500 and was sold at Rs 217,500 on Thursday day against its sale at Rs 218,000 the previous day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also decreased by Rs 429 to Rs 186,471 from Rs 186,900, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold went down to Rs 170,932 from Rs 171,325.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs 30 to close at Rs 2550 and that of ten-gram silver also rose by Rs 25.71 to close at Rs 2,686.21 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market rose by US\$ 18 to \$2027 against its sale at \$2009, the association reported.

Chief Commissioner RTO to form Tax Advisory Committee

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Commissioner, Regional Tax Office Islamabad Khurshid Ahmed Khan Marwat said that he would provide all possible cooperation to facilitate the taxpayers in tax compliance.

He announced to form a Tax Advisory Committee comprising representatives of ICCI and RTO to address the issues of taxpayers. He said that TAC would hold monthly meetings to facilitate the taxpayers.

He said this while addressing the business community during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Freedun Akram Shaikh and Said Munaaf Commissioners RTO accompanied him at the occasion.

Khurshid Ahmed Khan Marwat said that POS would stay and said that ICCI should cooperate in expanding its coverage to bring new taxpayers in this system. He said that ICCI should prepare budget proposals and share them with RTO Islamabad that would be forwarded to FBR for

consideration and implementation.

He said that he wants to register new taxpayers and said that ICCI and market associations should cooperate in this drive to ensure equal distribution of tax burden on all sectors.

Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, ICCI briefed the Chief Commissioner RTO about the tax issues of the business community. He welcomed the formation of ATC as it would help address hardships of taxpayers.

He urged the FBR to provide a level-playing field for integration of businesses with POS. Otherwise, the survival of POS integrated businesses would be in danger.

He said that FBR should introduce incentives for taxpayers in proportion to their tax contribution that would help promote tax culture. He proposed the FBR to focus on new taxpayers instead of putting more burden on the existing taxpayers.

He said that RTO had set up a facilitation camp in the F-10 market to register traders in tax net and help them in filing of tax returns but the camp has been closed. He said that such camps should be set up in all major markets to facilitate traders in tax registration. The Chief Commissioner assured that he would look into this issue.

Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI highlighted the high tax rate on rental income and input issues of steel industry and said that FBR to address these issues.

He urged the FBR to promote a friendly taxation system that should help promote business activities and improve tax revenue.

Mian Muhammad Ramzan Convener ICCI Tax Committee, Zahid Hussain Chairman Pakistan Furniture Association, Mian Waqas Masud, Khalid Chaudhry and others also highlighted tax issues of various sectors and gave proposals to simplify the tax system.

3-day Pakistan Shopping Festival starts from today

LAHORE (APP): A 3-day Pakistan Shopping Festival will start from Friday, April 14, with the theme 'Biggest Sale of the Year', which aims at providing the biggest wholesale shopping festival at one place.

The event is being organised by the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) in collaboration with Brand Hub at Expo Centre, Lahore from April 14 to 16.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that the Chamber, being the pioneer and leading entity, aims to serve the business community and conduct its practices in a very professional manner. Keeping its tradi-

tion alive, the LCCI management, in collaboration with Brand Hub, has taken the lead to organise 'Pakistan Shopping Festival' from April 14 to 16, 2023 at Expo Centre, Lahore. He said that the purpose was to create a soft image of the country, encourage entrepreneurs and strengthen the liaison among the business community by generating various activities.

He invited the businesspeople to participate in the Pakistan Shopping Festival, which comes with a host of value added marketing and advertising options. Being part of the 'Business Expo', the businesspeople could

market their products like no other event offers in Lahore.

The unique features of LSF-2023 are included more than 30,000 LCCI members would be invited, all trade bodies and trade associations have also been invited, supported by the Government of Punjab, exclusive electronic, newspaper media and social media coverage, extensive indoor and outdoor advertising opportunities at Expo Centre and prime locations in Lahore city, participation of national celebrities from all walks of life and verity of sponsorship opportunities in diversified colourful events.

China's foreign trade returns to growth

BEIJING (APP): China's total goods imports and exports expanded 4.8 percent year on year in the first quarter of 2023, reversing a decline of 0.8 percent in the first two months of the year, official data showed Thursday.

Foreign trade has been improving over the past three months. After dropping 7 percent year on year in January due to the Spring Festival holiday, it recovered to an expansion of 8 percent in February before surging 15.5 percent in March.

The first-quarter growth rate accelerated by 2.6 percentage points from the pace recorded in the fourth quarter of last year, according to the General Administration of Customs (GAC).

"China's foreign trade has displayed resilience in the first quarter. The steady growth laid a foundation for promoting stability and improving quality of foreign trade throughout the year," said Lyu Daliang, an official with the GAC.

In the first three months, exports grew 8.4 percent year on year to 5.65 trillion yuan (about 823 billion US dollars) while imports rose 0.2 percent to 4.24 trillion yuan, bringing the total trade to 9.89 trillion yuan.

During this period, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remained China's largest trade partner. China's trade

with ASEAN countries rose 16.1 percent year on year, 11.3 percentage points higher than the country's overall trade growth rate.

Trade with countries along the Belt and Road jumped 16.8 percent year on year, while that with other members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership grew 7.3 percent during this period.

New drivers are taking hold, as China saw a 66.9-percent increase in the exports of three green products, namely solar batteries, lithium-ion batteries, and electric vehicles. These three products contributed 2 percentage points to the overall export growth in the first quarter.

operating profit for the same period climbed 16 percent to 220 billion yen, the retailer said.

Fast Retailing said sales were steadfast in regions such as Southeast Asia, North America and Europe, with signs of recovery also evident in greater China.

SoftBank Group lost 0.96 percent to 5,128 yen, Sony Group trimmed 0.79 percent to 11,900 yen and Toyota dipped 0.60 percent to 1,812.5 yen.

Most Asian markets drop after recession warning, rate hike seen

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets mostly fell Thursday after minutes from the Federal Reserve's most recent policy meeting showed officials saw a US recession at the end of the year, while inflation data could not temper expectations of another interest rate hike.

A smaller-than-forecast rise in prices last month provided some much-needed hope to investors that a year of monetary tightening was finally showing results, but analysts said the details showed there was still some way to go.

The five-percent rise in the March consumer price index was the lowest since May 2021 but core inflation, which excludes food and energy prices, accelerated to 5.6 percent from 5.5 percent the previous month.

The reading came after Friday's jobs report showed

another healthy increase in recruitment and helped reinforce expectations the Fed will hike rates in May, for the tenth time in just over a year.

Traders await the release of wholesale inflation later in the day, and first-quarter earnings Friday from top banks including JPMorgan and Citibank.

Wall Street swung after the release but turned negative towards the end of the day after the Fed minutes, which highlighted concerns about the impact of last month's banking crisis, in which three US lenders went under and Credit Suisse was taken over.

"The staff's projection at the time of the March meeting included a mild recession starting later this year, with a recovery over the subsequent two years," according to the minutes of the Fed policy meeting,

where rates were lifted by 25 basis points.

They also said "some additional policy firming may be appropriate" to help bring inflation down to the Fed's target of two percent.

In light of the banking turmoil, officials "commented that recent developments in the banking sector were likely to result in tighter credit conditions for households and businesses and to weigh on economic activity, hiring and inflation" but the extent of the effects was uncertain.

Edward Moya at OANDA said: "The initial stock market rally was rightfully faded as inflation is still too high and as rate cut bets are still aggressively getting priced in. Investors also might not necessarily want to aggressively pile into risky assets before the big banks kick-off earnings season."

In early Asian trade, Hong Kong was dragged by sharp losses in the tech sector after the Financial Times reported that Japan's SoftBank was looking to unload a majority of its holdings in Alibaba. The ecommerce giant fell more than five percent at one point, while rival JD.com was off around four percent.

There were also losses in Sydney, Singapore, Wellington, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta, though Tokyo, Shanghai and Seoul ticked slightly higher.

Oil prices inched lower, but held most of Wednesday's two-percent rally fuelled by a drop in US inventories and supply issues from Iraqi Kurdistan.

The two main contracts are now sitting around levels not seen since November, while traders are awaiting an outlook update from OPEC later in the day.

US stocks fall on concerns over rate hike, recession

NEW YORK (APP): US stocks ended lower on Wednesday as concerns over another rate hike in early May and economic recession dampened short-lived optimism from the lower-than-expected inflation in March.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 38.29 points, or 0.11 percent, to 33,646.50. The S&P 500 fell 16.99 points, or 0.41 percent, to 4,091.95. The Nasdaq Composite Index decreased 102.54 points, or 0.85 percent, to 11,929.34.

Seven of the 11 primary S&P 500 sectors ended in red, with consumer discretionary and communication services sectors leading the laggards down 1.54 percent and 0.89 percent, respectively.

Meanwhile, industrials and energy sectors led the gainers up 0.33 percent and 0.11 percent, respectively.

US stocks opened higher on Wednesday as US consumer price index (CPI) posted 0.1 percent of month-on-month growth in March, lower than market consensus forecast of 0.3 percent and 0.4 percent in the previous month.

Core CPI, which excludes food and energy, grew 0.4 percent month on month in March, in line with market consensus forecast and lower than 0.5 percent of expansion in February.

US stocks initially rallied after the March inflation report showed consumer prices were deceler-

ating, prompting bets that the Federal Reserve might be done tightening, said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA, a supplier of online multi-asset trading services.

The initial stock market rally faded as inflation is still too high and as rate cut bets are still aggressively getting priced in, said Moya. "There's still more to do I think to get core inflation back down to where we'd like it to be," Thomas Barkin, president of Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, said on Wednesday.

The Fed still has a probability of around 65 percent to raise the benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points in early May, according to data from the

CME FedWatch tool as of Wednesday afternoon.

Moreover, minutes from the March meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee issued on Wednesday afternoon drew widespread concerns on potential economic recession.

"Given their assessment of the potential economic effects of the recent banking-sector developments, the (Fed) staff's projection at the time of the March meeting included a mild recession starting later this year, with a recovery over the subsequent two years," said the meeting minutes.

Moya added that investors also might not necessarily want to aggressively pile into risky assets before the big banks kickoff earnings season on Friday.

Chinese shares close lower

BEIJING (APP): Chinese stocks closed lower on Thursday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index down 0.27 percent to 3,318.36 points. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 1.21 percent lower at 11,739.84 points.

The combined turnover of stocks covered by the two indices stood at 1.133 trillion yuan (about 165 billion US dollars), up from 1.125 trillion yuan on the previous trading day.

Shares in the tourism and media sectors led the gains, while those related to the electronic information and furniture sectors suffered losses.

The ChiNext Index, tracking China's Nasdaq-style board of growth enterprises, lost 0.97 percent to close at 2,405.76 points Thursday.

ڈسٹرکٹ پولیس آفیسر لودھراں

ٹینڈر نوٹس برائے تعمیر و کرایہ پولیس ویلفیئر شاہیں، تھانہ صدر لودھراں برائے سال 2023-27

ڈسٹرکٹ پولیس آفیسر لودھراں پولیس ویلفیئر شاہیں تھانہ صدر لودھراں مورخہ 26.04.2023ء کو بولی کے لیے درخواستیں درکار ہیں۔ جس کی تاریخ بولی برائے ٹینڈر آ کر ایس پولیس ویلفیئر شاہیں مورخہ 26.04.23ء کو 12 بجے دن کو درخواستیں وصول ہوتی ہیں جس کے بعد بولی کے لیے 12:30 بجے دن بولی کو لے کر جائے۔ بولی کو ملٹی کاپیڈ

حتمی ہوگا جو کسی عدالت میں چیلنج نہیں کیا جاسکتا۔ باقی شرائط وضاحتی موزن پرائیڈ جائیں گی۔

شرائط کارے ٹینڈر: ڈسٹرکٹ پولیس آفیسر لودھراں پولیس ویلفیئر شاہیں تھانہ صدر لودھراں مورخہ 26.04.23ء کو بولی کے لیے درخواستیں درکار ہیں۔ جس کی تاریخ بولی برائے ٹینڈر آ کر ایس پولیس ویلفیئر شاہیں مورخہ 26.04.23ء کو 12 بجے دن کو درخواستیں وصول ہوتی ہیں جس کے بعد بولی کے لیے 12:30 بجے دن بولی کو لے کر جائے۔ بولی کو ملٹی کاپیڈ

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(حسام بن اقبال) PSP، ڈسٹرکٹ پولیس آفیسر لودھراں



In brief

Munich suspend forward

LONDON (BBC): Bayern Munich have left Sadio Mane out of their squad for Saturday's league match against Hoffenheim amid reports he punched team-mate Leroy Sane. Reports in Germany alleged Mane hit Sane in the face following Tuesday's 3-0 Champions League defeat by Manchester City at Etihad Stadium. The pair reportedly had to be separated by team-mates after the altercation. Bayern said Senegal forward Mane has been dropped because of "misconduct" and confirmed he will also be fined. "Sadio Mane, 31, will not be included in the FC Bayern squad for this Saturday's home match against 1899 Hoffenheim," said Bayern in a statement on Thursday. "This is due to his misconduct after Bayern's Champions League match at Manchester City. Mane will not be given a fine." Bild said former Liverpool player Mane, a two-time African footballer of the year, had complained about the way Germany winger Sane spoke to him after the defeat. After flying back to Germany, Mane was picked up privately at the airport while Sane got the team bus.

Joyce is third-best heavyweight

LONDON (BBC): Right now, I'd put Joe Joyce behind Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk as the third-best heavyweight in the world. The 'Juggernaut' is like an oak tree with arms that don't stop punching. As a heavyweight you need a good jab, fitness, a solid chin and a nice right hand to finish it off. Joe has all of those attributes. He is massively underrated but he's the man in the division. He doesn't go shouting his mouth off, and then delivers in the ring. With the likes of Fury and Anthony Joshua having led the way in recent years, Joe has gone under the radar a little. But now he's being mentioned in the same breath as those two; his stock has risen massively. On Saturday he faces Zhilei Zhang, who is definitely not a walkover. He's a really credible opponent - a dangerous, heavy-handed heavyweight. But with the route Joe is on, with a world-title shot looming, he would literally juggernaut his way through anybody to become a champion. Joe only turned professional six years ago after winning silver at the 2016 Olympics. He probably should have been awarded the gold medal in a split-decision loss.

Walsh removed as West Indies coach

JAMAICA (INP): Cricket West Indies has decided not to renew the contracts of West Indies women's head coach Courtney Walsh and assistant coaches Robert Samuels and Corey Collymore following a review of the team's performance in recent times. "We are very grateful for the contribution of Courtney and his technical team over the past two and a half years and we wish them all the best going forward," CWI director of cricket Jimmy Adams said in a statement. "CWI remains committed to our international women's programme and will now be focusing on recruiting a new Head Coach and technical support team. An interim technical support team will be put in place during the recruitment period." Under Walsh, who took over from Gus Logie in October 2020, West Indies have won seven out of 24 T20Is and 11 out of 32 ODIs.

Much-anticipated Pakistan-New Zealand T20Is commence today

LAHORE (APP): After witnessing a nail-biting finish in the final of the HBL Pakistan Super League 8 just a month ago, the fans in Lahore are set to be treated with what promise to be exciting contests when Pakistan take on New Zealand in the first three of the five-match T20 International series on Friday [tomorrow] at the Gaddafi Stadium.

Babar Azam-led Pakistan will play their first T20I here since October 2022, when they played England in the lead-up to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Pakistan have won 10 of the 18 matches here since 2015 and the venue has provided viewers action their money's worth with 8.13 runs being scored per over. For the Kiwis, it is an uncharted territory as they have never played a T20I in Pakistan. They will hope to bank on the experience of their recent tour of Karachi when they played two Tests and three One-Day Internationals across December and January and the data available to them about the venue, but playing in Gaddafi Stadium against a full-fledged Pakistan side will be a challenging ask.

Pakistan already have an upper-hand as they have defeated New Zealand four times in the last five matches, the most recent one

being a convincing seven-wicket win in the T20 World Cup semi-final in Sydney. That only defeat was during the tri-series in Christchurch, which Pakistan won, just before the World Cup.

Babar Azam said on the eve of the match on Thursday: "It is a great feeling to be back in Lahore in Pakistan colours. This promises to be an exciting series as we bring the exciting young talent and the experience of senior players together in this solid squad. "The T20 World Cup is over a year away and we will look to utilise the next five games to see where we stand. They will also help us gear up for the crucial five-match ODI series that follows as more or less we have the same players in this team and that series will provide us a good opportunity to prepare for the Asia Cup and World Cup later in the year."

Tom Latham said: "It is an exciting tour for our side and we know we're coming up against a quality Pakistan team who will be a huge challenge. We're obviously missing a few of our senior players, but that's going to offer opportunities to others and I know the team are really looking forward to testing themselves.

"Conditions are com-

pletely different to what we're used to back home and it's going to be important that we adapt as quickly as possible. We'll lean on the experiences we had on the tour here a couple of months ago where we managed to play some good cricket in both the Test and ODI series.

"The HBL PSL has also just been here so we will try and get as much information as we can, but it will ultimately be about adapting as quickly as possible."

Gaddafi Stadium will stage T20I matches on 14, 15 and 17 April before the action shifts to Rawalpindi where the last two games of the series will be played on 20 and 24 April.

Pakistan squad: Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Iftikhar Ahmed, Ihsanullah, Imad Wasim, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood and Zaman Khan.

New Zealand squad: Tom Latham (captain, wk), Chad Bowes, Mark Chapman, Dane Cleaver, Matt Henry, Ben Lister, Adam Milne, Cole McConehie, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Rachin Ravindra, Henry Shipleigh, Ish Sodhi, Blair Tickner, Will Young.

‘Sports events beneficial for motivation of journalists’

PESHAWAR (APP): Minister of State for Water Resources Muhammad Ali Shah has said that organising sports events was extremely beneficial for the motivation of journalists and their mental and physical health. He was addressing the ongoing Peshawar Press Club Sports Gala here on Thursday.

Shah said that the extraordinary interest of journalists in the competitions made the sports gala more entertaining and vital for the members of the Peshawar Club who are always busy with hectic professional obligations. He also congratulated the Sports Committee for arranging the Sports Gala.

President Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik, former presidents M Riaz, Shamim Shahid, General Secretary Irfan Musazai and Chairman Sports Committee Zafar Iqbal were also present on the occasion.

In the 2nd round of the gala, Zaib and Yasir Ali, Abid Khan and Zafar Iqbal, Tanveer and Wajid Shahzad, Alamgir and Kashifuddin, Shahzad Mehmood and Shah Faisal, M Ali Sheikh and Irfan Musazai won their matches in badminton competitions. Similarly, Abbas Ali, Zafar Guraya and Adnan Shahid won their matches in snooker competitions.

Meanwhile, in table ten-

nis, M. Ali Sheikh was declared the winner. In the Ludo competition, Malik Qaiser, Zahid Mirukhel Fayyaz Ahmed, Asfandiar, Yasir Ali, Iqbal, Umeer Muhammad Zai, Shah Nawaz, Khurram Parvez, Safir Ahmed, Uzmattullah, Aziz, Basit Ali, Shahzad, Arshad Khan and Irshad Ali won their respective matches. Whereas, Zulfikar Chacha, Basir Qalandar, Shahzada Fahad, Safir Ahmed, Zahid Hussain and Ameer Ali Shah won the last event of the night in the Carrom Board. It is worth mentioning that over 150 male and female journalists are participating in five different games including table tennis, badminton, carrom board, snooker and ludo.

Markhor Ramazan Cup

Punjab Lions suffer huge loss against Rawalpindi Royals

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Royals handed a huge 124-run defeat to Punjab Lions in the 7th match of Markhor Ramazan Cup 2023 at Ayub Park National Cricket Stadium on Wednesday night. Punjab Lions took the field after winning the toss. But the decision turned against them as Rawalpindi Royals set a huge total of 258 runs for five on the board in 20 overs.

Royals got going at the back of standout top-order contributions from Umzair Mumtaz (75 runs off 47

balls) and Ghammy Zardar (70 runs off 41 balls) and some middle-order and lower-order hitting from Aamir Zeb (49 runs off 19 balls), Mohammad Azhar Ali Khan (29 runs off 10 balls), Lions' Ali Hassan and Kazim Shah took two wickets apiece for 44 and 54 runs respectively, while Rao Daniyal grabbed one wicket for 44 runs.

Replying to that, Punjab Lions could score only 134 runs in 18.1 overs, losing their all wickets. Sajid Ali was the pick of the bowlers

as he claimed four wickets for 28 runs in his four overs. Jallat Khan picked up three victims, while Mohammad Asif took two wickets and Sohail Tenvir got one wicket. Talib Hussain (34 runs off 30 balls), Awais Zia (21 runs off 13 balls), Mohammad Muzammil Hussain (16 runs off 14 balls), and Rao Daniyal (13 runs off 18 balls) were the main run-getters for Lions.

Uzair Mumtaz and Sajid Ali were jointly given the man-of-the-match award.

Premier League clubs to ban gambling sponsorship on front of matchday shirts

LONDON (BBC): Premier League clubs have collectively agreed to withdraw gambling sponsorship from the front of their matchday shirts by the end of the 2025-26 season.

However, after the deadline, clubs will still be able to continue featuring gambling brands in areas such as shirt sleeves and LED advertising. And clubs will be allowed to secure new shirt-front deals before the deadline. Eight top-flight clubs have gambling companies on the front of their shirts, worth an estimated £60m per year.

The announcement follows a consultation between the league, its clubs and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as part of the government's ongoing review of current gambling legislation. The decision will see the

Premier League become the first sports league in the UK to take such a measure voluntarily in order to reduce gambling advertising. Listen - The Sports Desk podcast: Is it time for football to cut ties with gambling? The league is also working with other sports on the development of a new code for responsible gambling sponsorship. The government was not expected to propose banning gambling sponsorship, with the plan being for the Premier League to agree voluntarily to a change. Reforms to the Gambling Act 2005 were largely agreed by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson before he stepped down last July, leading to a delay in a gambling white paper being published.

On Thursday, Lucy Frazer, who was appointed Secretary of State for

Culture, Media and Sport in February, said she "welcomed the decision by the Premier League".

"The vast majority of adults gamble safely but we have to recognise that footballers are role models who have enormous influence on young people," she added. "We want to work with institutions like the Premier League to do the right thing for young fans."

A DCMS spokesperson told BBC Sport last May that they are undertaking "the most comprehensive review of gambling laws in 15 years to make sure they are fit for the digital age".

Campaigners for a wider ban say gambling sponsorship in football has normalised the industry, and that tighter regulation is needed to protect children and other vulnerable groups.

WTA tournaments will return to China after boycott over Peng Shuai allegations

BEIJING (BBC): The Women's Tennis Association will resume tournaments in China this year having accepted an investigation into the sexual assault allegations made by former player Peng Shuai will not be carried out by the Chinese government.

Former doubles world number one Peng said in November 2021 she was "forced" into a sexual relationship with former China vice-premier Zhang Gaoli.

The WTA suspended its end-of-year events in China and said it would not return until there was an investigation and it had proof of Peng's safety. After making the accusation in a social media post, Peng briefly disappeared from the public eye and she then later



denied making the allegation. Zhang has not commented publicly on the allegation.

The WTA had called for the Chinese authorities to hold a "full, fair and transparent" investigation before any tournaments could go ahead. "We've been in this for 16 months and we are convinced that at this point our requests will not be

met," WTA chief executive Steve Simon told BBC Sport. "To continue with the same strategy doesn't make sense and a different approach is needed. Hopefully, by returning, more progress can be made." The decision means the final two months of the WTA season will once again be dominated by China. Simon said the

schedule will be "very similar" to the pre-pandemic year of 2019 when eight Chinese tournaments were staged in eight weeks from early September.

And crucially, the season-ending WTA Finals will resume its 10-year deal with the city of Shenzhen. Prize money this year, as it was in the first year of the contract in 2019, will be £11.2m. Simon says the "great majority" of players are in support of a return to China. And despite promising a hard-line stance with the Chinese government, in which there would be no room for compromise, he says he has not considered resigning. "No, I would never do that to an organisation."

‘Series against Pakistan a challenge for us’, Daryl Mitchell

LAHORE (APP): The visiting New Zealand cricket team batsman Daryl Mitchell has said that Pakistan is a world class team and series against the home side will be challenging. Daryl Mitchell while talking about the tour of Pakistan said "I am very excited for T20 and ODI series in Pakistan and look forward to thrilling cricket.

"This tour is quite challenging for us as there are young players in our team who have never played in these conditions before".

Daryl said that the conditions here are quite different from New Zealand and the young players will learn a lot to aim for success. He said the young players have put up good performance in their recent outing against Sri Lanka. The Kiwi player said 5 T20 and 5 ODI matches in Pakistan is long enough and his team will exhibit good quality cricket.

Punjab govt to organise month-long sports events

LAHORE (APP): On the directions of the caretaker chief minister Punjab, Mohsin Razqa Naqvi, approval has been granted for organising a month-long sports event at various levels of education and clubs throughout the province. The sports competitions will include cricket, hockey, football, volleyball, athletics and kabaddi, and will be held at the tehsil, district, division, and provincial levels. Players and clubs can register themselves online through the Punjab Information Technology Board's website.

In a meeting, chaired by the chief minister at his office, the CM sought a comprehensive plan from the sports department to provide opportunities to young people to make progress in sports. Mohsin Naqvi said that he wanted to encourage talent in rural and remote areas and reward winning teams.

Caretaker Information Minister Amir Mir, Sports Advisor Wahab Riaz, secretary sports, secretary finance, secretary information, commissioner and deputy commissioner Lahore.

ICC agrees deal with SuperSport to show ICC cricket in 52 African territories

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council on Thursday announced a new broadcast and digital deal with SuperSport International (Pty) Limited, which will bring ICC global events to fans across 52 territories in Africa.

The new direct deal will see the continuation of the successful partnership with SuperSport in the Sub-Saharan region which has been in place since 2007, the ICC said in a media release. The broadcaster, which has 22.1 million subscribers across 52 territories, provides an excellent platform to grow the cricket fan base and engage more people with cricket in Africa in line with the global growth strategy for the sport. The deal includes the next eight years of rights for all matches of the 12 men's senior events up until the end of 2031, including the

ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027 which will take place on African soil in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia for the first time since 2003.

The partnership will also include every match for the next four years of women's events, which following the success of the recent ICC Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa, has seen an incredible increase in interest, and left a wonderful legacy for women's cricket. There was huge growth in terms of South Africa viewership for the 2023 event, shattering past records with an increase of 790% of fans tuning in to support the World Cup compared to 2020. In addition, all matches of all U19 World Cups, both men's and women's, will be covered as part of the deal. Digitally, fans will be able to access all the ICC major event content via

the DStv app. ICC Chief Executive, Geoff

Allardice said: "We are delighted to be continuing our successful and proven partnership with SuperSport. There is a real opportunity for more fans to engage with ICC events and enjoy cricket across the 52 territories."

"Following the hugely successful ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2023 and the legacy left for women's cricket in South Africa, I am confident that this strategic partnership will play a major part in building the momentum for women's sport in the region too." MultiChoice South Africa CEO, Marc Jury said: "We are delighted to have secured another deal with the ICC, continuing our excellent partnership. We are excited to deliver ICC cricket coverage to Africa for the next few years and provide new experiences for fans across the continent."

KP youth affairs department's entire working online initiative welcomed

PESHAWAR (APP): Though belated, but in a welcome move the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Youth Affairs Department Thursday put its entire working, services and development initiatives online to streamline affairs and increase accountability and transparency across the board.

This was informed by Additional Secretary Sports Hameedullah Khattak while chairing an annual review meeting held here on the directives of the Secretary Captain (Rtd) Mushtaq Ahmed. Secretary, Department of Youth Affairs and Sports issued directives to the district youth officers to prepare an annual calendar for holding various events besides reviewing challenges and problems being faced by the youth in their respective districts. He directed that the plan should be presented before the next review meeting in order to

resolve issues in this regard, if any, timely and ensure the holding of those events on the scheduled time frame.

Additional Secretary Hameedullah Khattak said consultative meetings would be organized for the youth under the supervision of the department in order to make a policy and strategy viable and it could be executed accordingly.

He also underlined the need for the district youth officers to launch awareness-raising sessions in their respective areas and in this regard policy guidelines would be given to them to ensure the participation of maximum youth. He said such efforts would motivate youth to actively get engaged in the counseling process for the resolution of their problems and farming the next course of action for their betterment.

French Open finalist Ruud upset in Monaco by qualifier Struff

MONTE CARLO (AFP/APP): French Open finalist Casper Ruud bowed out of the Monte Carlo Masters on Thursday suffering a 6-1, 7-6 (8/6) third-round defeat to German Jan-Lennard Struff who has beaten the Norwegian on all three occasions they have met.

The 100th-ranked Struff -- who came through the qualifiers -- will play Russian Andrey Rublev in the quarter-finals after the latter beat his compatriot Karen Khachanov 7-6 (7/4), 6-2.

Ruud was on a run of nine successive victories on clay -- having won in Gstaad last July and then Estoril last Sunday -- but he looked out of sorts in Monaco.

The world number four -- who also reached the US Open final last year - saved two match points and battle back from 5-2 down to lead 6-5 in the second set but Struff levelled.

The German then took a hard fought tie-break -- Ruud saving a third match point -- when the Norwegian sent a return out to reach the last eight.

Ruud was not the only Grand Slam losing finalist to exit in the last 16.

Matteo Berrettini, who lost to Novak Djokovic in the 2021 Wimbledon final, withdrew due to a muscular problem the Italian suffered in Wednesday's three-set marathon win over Francisco Cerundolo.

Berrettini's withdrawal allowed Denmark's ninth-ranked Holger Rune to move into the last eight of the tournament for the first time. The 19-year-old will face the winner of the match between in-form Russian Daniil Medvedev and Germany's Alexander Zverev, who is still battling back to form after a long absence due to tearing ankle ligaments in the French Open semi-finals

last year against Rafael Nadal.

Berrettini's compatriot Jannik Sinner enjoyed better fortune saving a match point before beating Poland's Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1.

The 21-year-old Sinner is likely to face Serbian legend Novak Djokovic, who plays another Italian, 16th-seeded Lorenzo Musetti later on Thursday.

"I needed such a match," said Sinner.

"I am now into the rhythm. I am not yet at my best level but each day I am making progress."

The 2021 French Open finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas breezed through his third round match, the Greek swatting aside Chile's Nicolas Jarry 6-3, 6-4.

Tsitsipas awaits the winner of the match between big-serving American Taylor Fritz and Jiri Lehecka of the Czech Republic.



In brief

IRSA releases 68,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 68,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 68,500 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1436.08 feet and was 38.08 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 20,800 cusecs while outflow as 20,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1112.90 feet, which was 62.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 20,200 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded 29,500, 27,800, 30,000 and 6,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 5,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Bike lifter arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested a bike lifter besides recovering five stolen motorcycles and other items from his possession. According to a police spokesman, a team under the supervision of SHO Bani Police Station managed to net a bike lifter namely Haseeb Qureshi and recovered five stolen motorcycles and other items from his possession. A case had been registered against the accused while further investigation was under way. Superintendent of Police Rawal (SP) Faisal Saleem said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind the bars. He said the operations against the lawbreakers would be accelerated further.

CASS hosts virtual book launch

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) here on Thursday hosted a virtual book launch for the co-edited volume 'Activist Retail Investors and the Future of Financial Markets' by CASS Advisor on Economic Affairs & National Development Dr Usman W Chohan and Prof. Sven Van Kerckhoven, published by Routledge, UK. The event was attended by CASS team and researchers and was well-received as the culmination of a successful project that spanned 14 authors from five continents from various disciplines including economics, information technology, sociology, law, cultural studies, public administration, and others. The resulting volume of 14 chapters reflected, in the speakers' opinion, a comprehensive analysis of the subject from multiple perspectives that would likely stand as a lasting text on the subject of activist retail investors, said a news release. Six authors from the book participated in the event as speakers, including Dr Usman W. Chohan (Pakistan), Prof. Sven Van Kerckhoven (Belgium), Prof. Sean O'Dubhghaill (Ireland), Dr IlkerAlsan (Switzerland), Dr Scott Timcke (South Africa), and Prof. NizanPackin (United States). The editors of the volume highlighted that the global scope of the contributing authors, although challenging, provided an opportunity for rich international collaboration; and the book's multidisciplinary approach was a powerful contribution to the literature.



ISLAMABAD Ambassador of Iran Seyed Muhammad Ali Hosseini called on Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf at Parliament House.

Iranian Ambassador bids farewell to Raja

ISLAMABAD (APP): Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Seyed Mohammad Ali on Thursday met with National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf at the Parliament House to discuss matters of mutual interest, including strengthening bilateral cooperation in various fields, promoting regional peace and security, besides enhancing trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Iran.

Speaker Ashraf congratulated Seyed Mohammad Ali on his successful diplomatic assignment in Pakistan and appreciated his contributions to further strengthening the brotherly ties between the two countries. He expressed gratitude to the Supreme Leader and President Raisi for their continued

support to the Kashmir cause and assured Iran of Pakistan's support on its core issues, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of action (JCPOA) and human rights issues.

The speaker felicitated the Iranian Ambassador on the revival of Iran and Saudi Arab diplomatic relations. Underscoring Pakistan's close fraternal relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, he termed it as a positive step that would lead to improving regional peace and stability as well as increasing cooperation among Muslim countries to overcome the current challenges faced by Muslim Ummah.

The two sides reiterated their commitment to fighting terrorism, which poses a common threat to both Iran and Pakistan, through joint concerted efforts.

They also acknowledged the positive trajectory in bilateral relations, including enhanced engagement at multiple levels and frequent exchange of visits and telephone calls between the leadership on all matters of significance.

Both sides also agreed to hold an Iranian art/photo exhibition at the Parliament, displaying rare manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an and other sacred documents. The event would be in continuation of the golden jubilee celebratory activities of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan passed in 1973.

The speaker concluded by thanking Seyed Mohammad Ali for his productive and fruitful tenure in Pakistan and wished him all the best for his next diplomatic assignment.

ANF seizes 34 kg drugs; arrests five

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has recovered 34 kg of narcotics in four operations and managed to net five accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday.

He informed that in an operation, over 2.4 kg of Ice drug was recovered from the possession of two Jeddah-bound passengers, a woman, resident of Swabi and another resident of Peshawar, going on flight no PK-270.

In the third operation near Islamabad 'Kak Bridge', 10.8 kg charras was recovered from a rickshaw. Three drug pushers were also rounded up in the operation. He informed that ANF and FC in an operation in Khyber recovered 21 kg charras concealed in a remote place. Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process, he added.

CDA set to develop several new parks

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is all set to develop several new modern parks in Islamabad to provide better recreational facilities to the residents. The civic authority has already developed around 37 public parks in the federal capital during the last ten years and is working on a policy to increase their number in the coming years. "We need three to four months to develop a new park after completion of the codal formalities," official sources in the CDA told APP on Thursday.

At present, they said the federal capital had six amusement parks, which were considered sufficient to cater to the recreational needs of Islamabad residents. "But the policy has been made that whenever a new sector will be developed, an amusement park will be constructed along," they added. The sources said that the CDA was developing several new sectors, including I-11, I-12, I-14, I-15, I-16, D-12, and Park Enclave, adding that Model Villages and parks were also being developed in those areas. "As and when these areas are developed and completed, the new parks will be there to meet the demand and requirement of the general public as per CDA approved layout plan," they added.

Canadian High Commissioner calls on Chairman NDMA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ms. Leslie Scanlon, High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan Called on Chairman NDMA, Lt Gen Inam Haider Malik in his office today.

Both discussed various aspects of possible mutual cooperation and areas where Pakistan needs immediate assistance for a proactive approach to mitigate and manage future disasters.

Chairman NDMA apprised the High Commissioner of lessons learnt from devastating Floods 2022 and informed about coordination with Pakistan Foreign Missions for humanitarian assistance on need basis. He also highlighted remodeling of National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) as Digital Hub to connect all disaster management stakeholders for generating a common operating picture for Pakistan, this will also incorporate humanitarian agencies and international partners. Pakistan requires cooperation of international community for developing an avant-grade early warning system, which can predict changing weather patterns well before disaster strikes.

Chairman NDMA also laid stress on

local requirement based assessment during pre-disaster phase, strengthening of District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) and preparing the vulnerable communities about the adverse impacts of looming disasters through public awareness campaigns. Chairman also highlighted upgraded National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) as Think Tank to connect Pakistani universities with world academia and learn from global good practices and replicate same as per Pakistan's requirements.

The Canadian High Commissioner appreciated the envisioned NEOC and endorsed the need for developing such a high-tech crisis response centre in Pakistan, which has been continuously hit by intense/erratic changing climatic behavior. She briefed that Government of Canada has committed to assist flood affectees of Pakistan through funded-projects which would focused on recovery, reconstruction and resilience. She has assured to discuss the further assistance requirements for futuristic NEOC and restocking of disaster management reserves in upcoming official meeting back in Canada.

International Quds Day to be observed on Friday

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coinciding with the Zionist aggression against the innocent Palestinians, the International Quds Day will be observed on April 14 (Friday) with traditional zeal and fervour, displaying unconditional support for the innocent people of Palestine.

The significance of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the eyes of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatullah Khomeini was translated into the expression of defiance across the Muslim world against the unwarranted occupation of Palestine by the Israeli forces and the subsequent occupation of Al-Aqsa Mosque which is considered to be the first Qibla of Islam.

For this matter, Quds Day is marked with a reiteration of the pledge to continue supporting the freedom movement of Palestine. Therefore, the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan is one of the symbols of unity among Muslims all over the world, which is known as International Quds Day, during which, support is extended to the oppressed Palestinian nation and the Palestinian cause every year, said a press release from Iran embassy on Thursday.

This occasion is commemorated by most Muslim countries and free thinkers around the world.

Undoubtedly, Palestine is the first and the most important issue of the Islamic world. Although Al-Quds has special significance to Palestine and the Palestinian cause, but beyond that, it is the axis of unity and integration of the Islamic world. It is the day of unity of Muslim countries in fighting against oppression, massacre and occupation.

This day is an opportunity for the world

to remember more than 70 years of oppression of the displaced Palestinian nation and to renew the commitments regarding the formation of an independent Palestinian state based on the principle of self-determination.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been a supporter of the cause of Palestine and has openly declared it. Supporting the oppressed people of Palestine is not a short-term and tactical policy and not only rooted in religious beliefs, but most importantly, it has humanitarian aspects and a humanitarian duty based on objectives and nature of the Islamic Republic and its Constitution.

As expected, the heroic nation of Palestine has no expectations from the arrogant powers that support international Zionism.

However, Islamic countries as well as international institutions that claim to protect human rights are expected to take appropriate and timely action against these chronic and continuous crimes and condemn this oppressive regime in words and deeds and frustrate it from the continuation of these crimes.

It is appropriate for the countries of the region and the world to avoid any action that causes this regime to become more arrogant which strengthens and encourages this regime to continue committing its crimes in occupied Palestine.

The so-called peace plans that are presented and followed under different titles and under outdated excuses are not an action to result in the fulfilment of the rights of the oppressed Palestinian nation and stop the crimes of the fake Israeli regime.

Commissioner visits Sir Syed School, SSC exam center to review arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP):

Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta here on Thursday visited Sir Syed Science School, Tippu Road, center of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) annual examination and reviewed the arrangements made by Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Rawalpindi.

The Commissioner visited various examination halls, rooms and inspected the arrangements and the exams holding process.

The Commissioner also checked attendance sheets of the staff and students,

roll number slips, seating plan, lights and fans.

Strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against cheating mafia and no one would be allowed to violate the rules, he said and informed that separate raiding teams had been formed to make the monitoring system more effective.

He directed the monitoring teams to perform their professional duties without any discrimination.

The Commissioner informed that sealed question paper envelopes are opened in front of cameras.

"Transparent examination is the first responsibility of all of us," he said adding, there would be no compromise on the transparency of the examination system. He directed the authorities concerned to ensure transparency in the examination process.

Deputy Commissioners, Additional Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners of all the districts were monitoring all the examination centers on daily basis, he informed.

The Commissioner also reviewed the security arrangements made for the examination centre.

PMDC's registration certificate issuance process continues

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) has continued issuing registration certificates to doctors across the country through its online portal service.

According to an official of PM&DC, the Council had launched this interactive online portal to facilitate doctors throughout the country. He said that a large number of registration certificates had been issued while PMDC also started issuing good-standing certificates and renewals.

He said that taking up all the relevant matters and affairs, the PM&DC started its registration portal as a priority after making all necessary arrangements for the transition from PMC to PMDC.

"We invite all the local graduates, who are waiting for their permanent registration for a long time to apply online for registration." These graduates waited for quite a long time to get themselves regis-

tered but failed due to the rigid rules imposed by past PMC, he added.

He said that one of the objectives of PM&DC was to make the registration portal in a way that was seamless to use, easy to navigate, and must be user-friendly.

He said that the council has also issued permanent registration certificates to Pakistani doctors in large number, without the requirement of the National Licensing Examination (NLE). This exam was mandatory earlier as per the previous law of the Pakistan Medical Council (PMC) as the local graduates had to appear and pass the NLE exam before getting their permanent registration, even after graduation from Pakistani medical and dental colleges, he added. He said that in this regard, several protests and demonstrations were held by different doctor forums and organizations at different levels and the past government appealed repeatedly to withdraw the said black law.

DC directs RWMC to eliminate dengue

RAWALPINDI (APP): Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema on Thursday directed the officials of the Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) to ensure the de-silting of drains, empty plots, sprinkling the lime to eliminate dengue and germs in the city. He expressed these views during a surprise visit to the 6th Road Metro Station. On the occasion, RWMC's Chief Executive Officer Rana Sajid Safdar gave a detailed briefing to the DC about the anti-dengue campaign and the overall sanitation situation of the city.

Later, the communication team of Rawalpindi Waste Management Company organized an anti-dengue awareness seminar in the conference room of the head office. The seminar aimed to create awareness among the staff and the general public about anti-dengue measures.

CEO RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar said

that efforts were underway to provide a hygienic environment to the city's residents. In addition, he said that today, the communication teams distributed waste bags and pamphlets in various areas of all tehsil of the district to highlight the importance of cleanliness and dengue prevention. To eradicate dengue larvae, he added that comprehensive Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) and an action plan were being followed, and weekly reports were being submitted to the city district government and the government of Punjab. Furthermore, he urged the residents to keep an eye on junkyards, schools and under-construction buildings, which led to the spread of dengue larvae and left no place wet or stagnant water. In case of any complaint, citizens were asked to register their complaints on helpline number 1139, which would be rectified immediately, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Adviser to PM Engr Amir Muqam chairing progress review meeting of SNGPL ongoing development schemes in KP at National Heritage & Culture Division.

MoD repaired 2 helicopters

KABUL (Agencies): Two helicopters repaired and ready for operations by the engineering team of the Air Force of Ministry of National Defense. The technical, professional teams and engineers of the Air Force, has been able to repair another two Russian M-17 helicopter and the American Black Hawk helicopter. The commander of the Air Force, Mawlawi Abdul Ghafar Mohammadi, while appreciating the efforts of the technical teams and engineers, committed to repair more planes.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 23, 1444 — Friday, April 14, 2023

2 insurgents killed in raid

KABUL (Agencies): In an operation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's security forces, two insurgents killed in the Karte Naw part of Kabul, said Islamic Emirate's spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid on Thursday. An operation conducted by special forces in Karte Naw area of Kabul, late Wednesday night, in an insurgents hideout where two of them killed, said the Islamic Emirate's spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid.

17.6 million Afghans need health assistance

KABUL (TOLONews): The World Health Organization in Afghanistan tweeted that in 2023 17.6M Afghans are estimated to be in need of life-saving humanitarian health assistance.

Ali Ahmad, 3, has cerebral palsy, and his mother said it has been 15 days since they came here to Kabul from Bamiyan for treatment.

"He is not fine yet, doctors in Bamiyan recom-

mended I bring the patient to Kabul for treatment," said Sughra, mother of Ali Ahmad.

"He doesn't have a father, he has one brother and he took out a loan for his brother's treatment," said Guljan, the mother of a patient.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Health said that considering the population of the country, health assistance needs will increase.

"Afghanistan's population is near to 40 million people, and 17.6 is the estimate (in need of life-saving health assistance) by the WHO, but maybe it's more than it," said Sharafat Zaman Amrkhil, spokesman for the MoPH.

According to the Ministry of Public Health, efforts are underway to provide more health facilities in all provinces and remote regions.

240 private schools closed in 2 years

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Kabul Private Schools Association says about 240 of the 1,300 private schools in Kabul have been closed during the past two years due to economic problems.

Islamuddin Yarmal, the association head, told Pajhwok that there were a total of 1300 private schools operating in Kabul two years ago, but 230 to 250 of them had to be closed due to financial crisis.

He said some of these schools had been closed due to the coronavirus and others due to political developments.

He said: "The closure of a primary school renders up to 15 teachers unemployed, a middle school 20 teachers and when a high school is closed, it renders 25 teachers unemployed," he said, putting the number of teachers becoming unemployed due to the closure of the private schools at more than 4,600.

Yarmal added: "The economic problems of parents have increased so much that now they want to stop sending their children to schools from the first to the sixth grade."

He called on international organizations to support private schools in order to prevent more schools from being closed in the country.

A private school principal in Kabul, Shah Mahmood Ahmadi, told Pajhwok that the number of students in many private schools had decreased by 20 to 40 percent due to the deteriorated economic situation of the families.

He said private schools had reduced fees, but still some families could not afford to send their children to these schools.

Mohammad Israr, a student of Ettimad private School in Kabul, told Pajhwok that the number of students in their school was less this year compared to the previous years, but he did not know the reason.

The Ministry of Education did not respond to Pajhwok's request for comments.

However, Mullah Abdul Wasi Khadim, the director of the Administrative Affairs of the Office of the Prime Minister, met with the president and members of the Private School Association on March 6 this year.

The meeting was attended by private schools association president Mohammad Azim Maidanwal and some members.

They demanded reforms in the regulation of private schools, making the license permanent, eliminating multiple licenses, canceling the bank guarantee and lowering the tax.

For his part, Mullah Khadim assured that the Islamic Emirate would provide facilities to private schools within available resources and share their problems with relevant institutions.

Recently, Union of Private Universities officials told Pajhwok that many private universities would be closed if their economic problems remained unaddressed.

Muttaqi heads to Samarkand to attend 4th ministers' meeting

KABUL (Khaama Press): Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting foreign minister, left Kabul for Samarkand, Uzbekistan, to attend the fourth meeting of foreign ministers among the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan.

Hafiz Zia Ahmad, Deputy Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry, tweeted on Thursday that Muttaqi is expected to meet with the Foreign Ministers of Regional countries on the sidelines of the Samarkand meeting.

On Thursday, the fourth meeting of the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries will occur in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

In the meeting, Russia, including six neighbouring Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, will attend to discuss



Afghanistan and the current regional situation.

An earlier statement said the meeting's main focus would be to assist in a political settlement in Afghanistan and stabilize the country's socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis.

Wednesday, the spokeswoman for the Chinese foreign minister responded to a question by saying that China hoped to have an in-depth discussion about the state of affairs in Afghanistan with the parties present at the meeting, strengthen

the consensus among neighbouring nations on the issue, and steadfastly carry out the decisions and agreements reached third meeting.

The third regional conference was held in the Chinese city of Tuxi last year on March 31 2022.

\$40 million unannounced aid package reaches Kabul

KABUL (Pajhwok): Since last month, the arrival of humanitarian cash aid in Kabul has not been reported, but a source in central bank confirmed the receipt of a package of \$40 million assistance on Wednesday.

After the regime change, the US imposed sanctions on the interim government and froze Afghanistan's over \$9 billion reserves.

The Biden administration's move triggered a grave economic crisis in the country but later the international community started lending humanitarian support to Afghanistan.

On December 1, 2021, DAB announced the arrival of \$16 million in humanitarian cash aid in Kabul and said the money had been handed over to a private bank. It was called the start of periodical arrivals of humanitarian cash aid in the country.

According to the central bank, Afghanistan has received nearly \$2 billion (\$1990.4 million) in humanitarian assistance.

Based on reports, cash aid packages reached Kabul once a week, sometimes twice a week, or even once in a fortnight. They are deposited in a private bank.

However, this aid was once delayed for 27 days, then for 26 days, two times for 25 days, once 23 days and once for 20 days.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) said the aid poured into Afghanistan for use by institutions under it.

DAB reported the arrival of the latest \$40 cash aid on March 14 in Kabul. The bank has not yet announced the arrival of another aid package.

Last week, UNAMA last asked its employees in

Afghanistan not to come to work until next notice after the Islamic Emirate banned female Afghan staff of the UN.

But a credible source in the central bank, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told Pajhwok a package of \$40 million assistance had reached Kabul on April 10 and was handed over to a private bank.

With the delivery of the fresh package, the source said, the aid given to Afghanistan had reached \$2.34 billion.

Every time, the central bank has announced the arrival of cash aid. However, it did not report the delivery on April 10.

The source said nothing about the reason for not announcing the receipt of aid this time.

Pajhwok contacted UNAMA for comments on the latest cash aid, but it

has not responded yet. Secretary General António Guterres has warned the ban on female UN staff would further weaken the delivery of life-saving assistance.

The decision would harm the Afghan people, millions of whom were in need of humanitarian assistance, he feared.

The EU has also slammed the ban on female Afghan workers of the UN as a "violation of international laws".

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has sought \$4.6 billion in humanitarian aid for the current year.

However, it has received only five percent of the aid request. OCHA has asked the international community not to leave the Afghans alone in this difficult situation.

‘Business licenses for women increased’



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that in 1401 (solar year) business licences given to women have increased by 66%.

A spokesman for Industry and Commerce said that women's participation in business will have a good impact on the country's economic progress and will reduce poverty.

"Women's business activity in 1401 (solar year) had a 66 percent increase compared with last year. In

1401, 641 women received licenses..." said Abdul Salam Jawad, spokesman for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

Meanwhile, the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that they have held exhibitions abroad for Afghan women.

"We hold exhibitions, we want to reopen the airlines or the air corridors to them and we are still able to create exhibitions abroad for Afghan women," said Salma Yosifzai, CEO of the

Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Some businesswomen called on the Islamic Emirate to provide more trade opportunities for them.

"We ask the Islamic Emirate to pay more attention to businesswomen so that we can at least be self-sufficient," said Aqila, a businesswoman.

"The number of women is falling; previously, there were 100 women working with me, now there are 20," said Bibi, a businesswoman.

Atmar calls for revival of intra-Afghan negotiations

KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghanistan's foreign minister during the republic regime has called for the revival of intra-Afghan negotiations to put an end to the decades-long miseries of Afghanistan.

In an open letter to the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries Mohammad Hanif Atmar said there was overwhelming support for peaceful means to address the fundamental challenge of political inclusion and state legitimacy.

He wrote to give peaceful settlement a chance, the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' (IEA) will had to heed the prevailing demand of the Afghan people for peace and legitimate governance, and honour their own obligations to participate in intra-Afghan negotiations.

IEA had committed themselves to these negotiations on the basis of the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan (the Doha Agreement), to which the Taliban still insist to be committed, he added.

The High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR), which the Afghans and the international community welcomed as a representative body during the 2020-2021 peace negotiations in Doha, can be revived to represent the non-Taliban Afghans at the intraAfghan negotiation, he said.

Atmar said the humanitarian disaster, affecting the majority of the Afghan population and causing widespread hunger and suffering, was going to get worse in the months to come.

A severe underfunding of the UN humanitarian appeal and the irresponsible



ban by the IEA on the work of Afghan women, including those working with the UN and humanitarian organizations, was among the factors compounding the humanitarian crisis.

He added prospects for the country's economy remained grim as the economic crisis – fuelled by the collapse of the country's financial sector and disruption in trade, investment and development assistance, among other reasons – showed few signs of a possible recovery.

The systematic violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Afghan people, especially those of women, and the disrespect for the rule of law surely deepen these crises, he believed.

Atmar's letter comes as Uzbekistan is hosting the gathering of foreign ministers from the countries neighbouring Afghanistan from April 12 to 13.

1,600 tankers rejected at border areas for low quality fuel: ANSA

KABUL (TOLONews): Officials of the Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA) said that they had turned back more than 1,600 oil tankers that were not standard.

According to the officials, from a total of more than 83,000 oil tankers, 1,600 of them were turned back because of their low quality.

"A delegation of the Afghanistan National Standards Authority visited Uzbekistan to discuss the import of standard gas and other materials," said Wadidullah Badri, chief of staff for the office of ANSA.

The acting head of ANSA, Faizullah Tamim, urged the traders to import standard materials to the country.

"We call on traders and citizens to refrain from importing, producing and



delivering non-standard materials into the country' markets," he said.

"The Afghanistan National Standards Authority has launched an

assessment of oil stations across the country and closed hundreds of oil stations," said Fazal Rahman Masour, an official of Afghanistan National

Standards Authority.

The officials said that eight projects are underway to increase the standardization process in 1402 in Afghanistan.

Being forced to drop out, students hit out at professors

KABUL (Pajhwok): Students of public universities in Nangarhar, Kandahar and Helmand provinces claim some professors have given them low marks, dashing their hopes for foreign scholarships.

Pajhwok Afghan News has gained a copy of result sheets of some faculties of Nangarhar, Helmand and Kandahar universities.

The results show 35 of 48 first year students of the engineering faculty at the Helmand Higher Education Institute were forced into compartments exams while 13 others succeeded in calculus.

A compartment refers to less than 55 marks — pass marks — in an exam. The student has to retake the

exam in the relevant subject to qualify.

Of 90 third year students of the Economics Faculty of Kandahar University, 40 were awarded less than 60 marks and more than 20 forced into compartments.

At the Nangarhar University, 75 of 129 4th year students of the medical faculty have secured pass marks while 14 others have to reappear in the next exam.

Similarly, 11 of 35 students of the same university have been declared successful in Nutrition and 10 have fallen short of the target.

Meanwhile, students worried about their scholarship prospects and entitlement for sitting competitive exams in the future.

A Nangarhar University

student, who declined to be named, said: "I was expecting to be among the top 10, because my percentage was pretty high."

"Unfortunately, someone told the teacher something about me and I had to faced compartment. The teacher asked me for 10,000 afghanis to ensure my success."

"I applied for rechecking. Obviously, I had answered all questions but the teacher insisted on useless things in the paper. He made me leave the university, I was almost suffering from mental torture," he claimed.

Abdul Ghaffar, another student of the Nangarhar University told Pajhwok: "We are worried about per-

centage for competitive exams. Without the required percentage, we are bound to face problems in the future in getting admissions to master's and doctoral programmes."

"For many, teaching opportunities have also vanished and applying for scholarships for studies abroad is another big issue."

He said with this in mind, students were striving to attain the required marks. "A professor who cannot teach properly often includes tough questions in the paper so that students get low marks."

Qahar Atif, a student of Kandahar University, said many pupils planned to become teachers in the

future. They, therefore, did not want to face compartment or low percentage. He alleged some teachers were doing so out of animosity towards students.

In Afghan universities affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education, more than 75 marks are considered high and below 55 a compartment.

Forced to leave university

A student of the engineering faculty of Kandahar University, who did not want to be named, claimed: "Some teachers look at us like enemies."

He complained: "I've developed mental problems due to these teachers. The doctor asked me to choose between mental peace and

the engineering faculty."

Another student of Nangarhar University charged: "Pupils here have been forced to quit." Some professors do not focus on teaching and tell students to memorize entire chapters, he grumbled.

Sharif said: "My younger brother is enrolled in the engineering faculty of Pakia University. Teachers had scared him into putting his semester on hold..."

Another student, who also wished to go unnamed, revealed a delegation from the Ministry of Higher Education visited the Nangarhar University to investigate the issue after complaints on social media about students being given low marks.

But Nangarhar University Chancellor Dr Khalil Ahmad Behsudwal said he had appointed a delegation, led by members of the examination committee and including some professors, to probe the problems of students.

The delegation had evaluated the papers of all students of the faculties where complaints were filed. There was no problem and students were satisfied, he insisted.

Kandahar University Chancellor Ikram Shah Asim said before the exams, a committee was constituted at every faculty.

The examinations were held under its supervision and evaluation, he said, acknowledging every stu-

dent reserves the right to refer to the committee to his papers rechecked.

Ahmad Zia Elham, director of public relations at the Sheikh Zayed University in Khost, said: "Since the fall of the previous government, students have been indifferent towards attendance and failure. That's why they neither attend classes nor prepare for exams."

He commented: "Teachers are not angels who do not have problems, or do not maintain personal contracts or meet all standards. Some teachers want the ability of students to improve."

Pajhwok shared the issue with the media office of the MoHE, but received no response.



PESHAWAR: JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman offering fateha for the departed soul of the nephew of KP Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan.

Election within 90 days for KP Assembly PHC orders ECP, Governor to submit reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), caretaker provincial government, federal government and Governor to submit reply for holding election within 90 days for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly till 19th April, on Thursday.

Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Mushtaq Ghani appeared personally before PHC while counsel Barrister Gohar Khan didn't appeared due to Lawyer's strike across Pakistan against composition of controversial Larger Bench by Supreme Court of Pakistan regarding SC Practice and Procedure Bill.

The writ stated that petitioners are aggrieved of and dissatisfied with actions and omissions as well as unlawful exercise of power by the Respondents including Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa wrote letter to ECP dated 24th March 2023 deciding election date for general election to KP Assembly 8th October 2023 while the election commission immediately consented and notified polls date on 27th March 2023.

The petition argued that aforesaid impugned letters and notification are not tenable in law and liable to be set aside by honorable court and fresh date not later than 90 days of dissolution of Assembly or the barest minimum of that timeframe to be announced for holding general election to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

The applicants stated that Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has not appointed the date as mandate by the Constitution and as inter alia directed by SCP vide its order dated; 1st March 2023 and added that impugned letter dated; 24 March 2023 is therefore without lawful authority and of no legal effect.

Likewise, ECP has no jurisdiction or power to amend the Constitution and decide to hold elections to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly or to any other assembly beyond the period of 90 days as mandated by the Constitution. ECP's impugned notification dated; 27th March 2023 notifying Election Date for KP Assembly as 08th October 2023 is unlawful, illegal and without lawful authority.

The reason given by ECP or Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa having conceded those reasons that the finances are not available or that law and order situation in the country is not conducive to hold the elections, with respect, legally flawed and a disingenuous excuse to delay the election because such reason is not recognized in the Constitution for delaying the elections.

The petition seeking to set aside the

impugned letter dated; 24 March 2023 and impugned notification of 27th March 2023 as illegal, unlawful and without lawful authority. It is requested to hold and declare the General Election to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly is to be held not later than 90 days of the dissolution of Assembly, subject to the barest minimum to that timeframe in circumstances of this case.

The petition further argued to direct Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or in the alternative the President of Pakistan to announce Election Date within framework. Direct ECP to hold general election for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly not later than 90 days subject, however, to the barest minimum in that timeframe and requested for any other appropriate relief in this regard.

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), Federation of Pakistan through secretaries, Finance, Interior, Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, President of Pakistan Governor and Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa made respondents while PHC has ordered respondents to submit reply till 19th April and adjourned further hearing.

Lawyer's observed strike against SCP's controversial larger bench: The legal fraternity observed strike from court proceedings nationwide on the call of Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) against composition of controversial larger bench by Chief Justice of Pakistan to hear Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Bill recently passed by joint session of parliament, on Thursday.

PBC has announced strike following consultation with vice chairmen Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh bar councils against constitution of controversial larger bench. PBC argued legal fraternity to observe strike for upholding free, fair and transparent proceeding at Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar council and Bar Association members including Arshad Iqbal Khattak, Haroon Inayat, Sadiq Afridi, Hammad Akbar Khan, Shams, Umair Khan and Khalid Khan advocates along with other argued that transparency of all court especially SCP is need of hour to establish Rule of Law. They argued that constitution of larger bench against SC practice and procedure bill is controversial because senior most judges have been ignored.

The applicants and petitioner returned hopeless due to lawyer's strike from court proceeding and blamed that their energies were exhausted without any veil and norm. They argued that strikes and protests not only impacting civilians but great impact lying on prisoners behind bars.

Pakistan Bar Council announces courts boycott

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Pakistan Bar Council has announced to boycott the courts across the country on Thursday in support of the Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Bill, 2023 and against the hearing against it in the Supreme Court.

The Pakistan Bar Council in a statement said that the decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan to set up a unilateral and controversial bench and set the case for urgent hearing before the law regarding the Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Bill, 2023 came into force was rejected as regrettable.

The Pakistan Bar Council termed the move tantamount to splitting the country's highest court, saying that never in the judicial history of Pakistan has a law made by Parliament been prevented from coming into force. The lawyers' body made it clear that the parliament has made this legislation in accordance with the resolution passed by the All Pakistan Lawyers Convention held in Lahore on October 12, 2019, and the lawyers community will strongly resist any attempt to prevent its implementation.

The Pakistan Bar Council announced that lawyers across the country will boycott the courts today (Thursday) as a protest against this unfair move. Moreover, the meeting of elected representative leaders of Pakistan Bar Council across the country will be held on 17 April 2023 in Islamabad.

AJK SC refuses relief to disqualified PM Ilyas

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): The Supreme Court of Azad Jammu and Kashmir has refused to grant interim relief to disqualified prime minister Sardar Tanveer Ilyas. Refusing to grant interim relief to Ilyas, the Supreme Court upheld its disqualification decision.

The request for interim relief by the legal team of Sardar Tanveer was declared inadmissible. The AJK chief justice reprimanded Ilyas's lawyer that for the first time, objections were raised thrice on a case. "Is this your qualification?" the CJ questioned. The former prime minister did not apologize, but said "if there has been consent, I apologize", the chief justice remarked.

The former prime minister also does not value the post of premier of this House, the CJ remarked. Ilyas's lawyer argued that the high court did not give his client an opportunity to explain.

The Constitution gave this right to every citizen to answer their questions, lawyer Tanveer Ilyas When his videos were played in the court, he admitted the insulting words, Chief Justice Muzaffarabad: After his admission, would the court apologize to him? Chief Justice he justifies what he said and says, "I'm sorry if it's an insult, Chief Justice."

We are not hearing the appeal at this time, we are hearing whether the appeal is admissible or not, Chief Justice The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Supreme Court had on Wednesday rejected Sardar Tanveer Ilyas's appeal challenging his disqualification in contempt of court case.

Govt believed in freedom of media, says Marriyum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Thursday said that during the past year, the incumbent government had strived hard for the redressal of the excesses committed by the past regime against the media persons.

She was speaking at the oathtaking ceremony of newly elected office bearers of the Jhang Press Club and Jhang Union of Journalists here. The minister reiterated that the incumbent government fully believed in freedom of media and freedom of expression and was taking all possible steps for that purpose. On the contrary, she said the previous government had instituted numerous baseless cases against journalists during its tenure.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said that the government had not taken any vindictive action against any journalist since coming to power in April last year, adding it was taking measures for the welfare of journalists and media workers. She said that the Ministry of Information had organized training programmes to enhance the professional skills of journalists.

Taking a jibe at the PTI regime, the minister said that the dark period of four years was over now when programmes, columns and channels were shut down. She expressed the hope that the newly elected office bearers of Jhang Press Club would work for the welfare of the journalist community of the area. The minister administered the oath to the 11-member body of Jhang Press Club, including its President Liaquat Ali Anjum and Secretary Khurram Saeed.

Economic situation improving gradually with decline in trade, current deficits: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said the economic situation had been improving in the country with a gradual reduction in "federal, trade and current deficits."

"When we assumed responsibility

of the government, Pakistan had been out of the IMF programme, our default risk had risen, the government was losing more than Rs 100 billion monthly on unaffordable fuel subsidy. Last year our imports were \$80 billion and exports were \$31 billion," said the minister in a series of tweets. She said the country had the "largest trade deficit of \$49 billion and current account deficit of \$17.5 billion." "We also had record budget deficits in all PTI years," she added.

Marriyum, however, said that the economy was being stabilized by reducing the current account deficits. The minister said the prices of commodities were increased due to the flood and repayment of the massive loans taken by the PTI government. "But we have increased BISP payments and given free Atta to the poor and things are finally looking up."

PTI regime's 'deliberate negligence' behind lapse in FIFA Cup's coverage by PTV: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb informed the National Assembly that "deliberate negligence" of the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) regime to benefit a private channel was behind the lapse in the FIFA World Cup's coverage by the Pakistan Television (PTV).

She apprised the National Assembly that a complete report on the FIFA World Cup's coverage lapse by the PTV would be tabled before the House after completion to reveal facts behind missing an important international event due to deliberate negligence of the previous regime to benefit a private channel.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) was probing the issue of telecasting rights to A-Sports was underway and its report on completion would be presented in the House, she added. The minister was responding to a question of Shagufta Jumani of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) pertaining to the failure of PTV to live telecast the Federation International Football Association (FIFA) World Cup 2022

hosted by Qatar that had incurred huge revenue loss and deprived the nation of a global event, besides supplementary questions from other assembly members.

Marriyum said getting the football world cup's rights was not done in months rather it was a year long process that started in 2021. The previous regime did not start the process timely that left the Pakistani screens deprived of an international event. However, her ministry under her leadership engaged Tensports to manage coverage of the world cup and got it telecast across country, but the exclusive rights were not available to the PTV, she added.

Earlier, Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhary Muhammad Shahbaz Babar told the House that the PTV had always broadcast the international football tournaments. He said the bidding for the FIFA World Cup's telecast rights was closed in 2021. He alleged that former information minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain deliberately gave the rights to the private sports channel A-Sports.

A departmental report, in that regard, was being compiled and would be sent to the Minister for Information who would brief the House soon whereas strict action would be taken against the responsible for the negligence, he added. Sheikh Rohale Asghar of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) said the FIFA World Cup issue was a previous matter but the Pakistan Super League-8 was also not broadcasted live on the PTV and asked the parliamentary secretary to apprise the House about any action if taken in that regard.

Shagufta Jumani, however, rejected the three-member departmental committee probing the issue and termed it a mere eye wash as all of the members were from the PTV, who themselves were responsible for the negligence. He stressed private members should be engaged for a transparent probe.

JCP proposes Mussarat Hilali's name as PHC CJ

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) Thursday unanimously recommended the name of Justice Mussarat Hilali for appointment as the regular Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court.

A meeting of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan was held under the chairmanship of Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial. Justice Hilali is the senior most judge and acting chief justice of the Peshawar High Court. The JCP unanimously recommended the appointment of Justice Hilali. After recommendation of her name for the top slot of PHC, the JCP sent its recommendation to the Parliamentary Committee for approval.

On April 1, the Peshawar High Court got its first woman chief justice in the history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as Justice

Hilali took the oath of office. Upon retirement of the PHC Chief Justice Qaiser Rashid Khan on March 30, the most senior judge of the court, Justice Noorul Amin Khan, was appointed as the acting CJ. But his stint lasted a day only. After Justice Khan's retirement on March 31, a day after he took over as the acting CJ, Justice Hilali was appointed as the first woman acting chief justice of the PHC.

The president appointed Justice Hilali as the acting CJ until the appointment of a regular incumbent. Justice Hilali was appointed as the additional judge of the Peshawar High Court in 2013 and became a regular judge in 2014. CJ Hilali's tenure will end in August. She will serve as the Chief Justice of the PHC for five months.

Born on August 8, 1961 in Batkhela village of

Malakand division, Justice Hilali received her primary education in her local area and then moved to Peshawar for higher education. After obtaining an LLB degree from the Peshawar University's Khyber Law College, she started practicing law as a profession.

She obtained her district court license in 1983, high court in 1988 and then the Supreme Court in 2006. Justice Hilali played a central role in the lawyers' freedom movement of 2007. One of her legs was also fractured while being arrested during the movement. She also has the honor of being the vice president of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association (BHCBA), as well as the first woman additional advocate general of KP. Women lawyers welcomed the appointment of Justice Hilali as the first woman chief justice of the PHC.

KP seeks Centre's help in resolution of financial issues

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker Chief Minister Azam Khan here Thursday said that Rs238 billion outstanding were pending against the federation and sought the Federal Government help for resolution of the province's economic and financial issues.

Addressing the 4th Provincial Cabinet meeting here, the Chief Minister said that he had held two meetings with the Prime Minister and letters were also dispatched for its release.

He said austerity measures were being strictly followed and directed finaliza-

tion of the proposed economic measures plan by placing it before the cabinet.

He directed the Ministers to make a cut on the unnecessary expenditures and proposed more measures for austerity for resolution of financial problems. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has also approved preparation of rules for general sales tax on goods and services by meeting the final condition of IMF.

Briefing media about the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet decisions, CM Adviser also said that IMF's last condition was fulfilled

today and its notification and videos to be sent to Washington today. They said Rs6 billion revenue to be generated from these rules. They said currently the province has a draft of Rs14billion while salaries amount is Rs48 billion and the province was not in position to pay it in advance due to poor economic position of the province.

He said Rs62 billion outstanding amount under net hydel power was pending against the centre and Rs21 billion pending under NFC award. Up till now, Rs1.4 billion under head of arrears were received in previous year by the province.

Toshakhana Gifts: IHC seeks reply on Imran, spouse pleas

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Thursday sought a reply from NAB within seven days in response to pleas of PTI Chairman Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi.

Former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife invoked the IHC jurisdiction against notices that the top anti-graft body has issued them in Toshakhana gifts matter. Seeking cancellation of such notices both the petitioners have urged the high court to declare the notice null and void.

A single-member bench of the Chief Justice Aamer Farooq adjudicated the matter. Addressing the NAB representative the CJ IHC said, "This would not have happened if you had issued the

notice in accordance with the rules. The NAB should have told them whether they are being called as an accused or as a witness- Follow the rules in your notices. If someone is being summoned as an accused, he has the right to defend himself."

During the proceedings, counsel for the petitioners Khawaja Harris submitted that he is ready to place arguments in the matter if the NAB counsel is ready to respond. To which Deputy Prosecutor General NAB Sardar Muzaffar Abbasi submitted, "We have sent a questionnaire along with the details of the gifts to Imran Khan." Responding to the court query whether it was not necessary to provide information at the inquiry

level whereas NAB received any complaint in Toshakhana case, the NAB prosecutor apprised the bench the NAB itself took notice of Toshakhana gifts.

"Does NAB have any evidence or has it made a case only on the news published in the press?" the Chief Justice inquired. Responding to the bench query, Abbasi submitted that the NAB has taken complete records from Toshakhana saying the Bureau also issued notices not only to Imran Khan but to all the cabinet members. Defending his client, Khawaja Harris urged the bench to ask from NAB what record it has taken into custody against Imran Khan and what illegality was on the part of his clients.

Alvi upholds dismissal from service penalty against harasser

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday upheld the penalty of dismissal from service on the Assistant Vice President of Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) after it was proven beyond doubt that he had sexually harassed a female employee of the bank.

The President also enhanced the fine of Rs5 lac, imposed by the Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace (FOSPAH), to Rs6 lac on the accused considering the serious mental trauma he must have caused to the victim.

The President gave this decision while rejecting a representation filed by an Assistant Vice President ZTBL (the accused) against the decision of FOSPAH. He also rejected the representation filed by ZTBL in this case on account of the bank having no locus standi. In his decision, the President stated that the accused had failed to point out any irregularity in the proceedings conducted by FOSPAH which were based on the true appraisal of evidence.

"In Pakistan, the message of the constitution, the law, and its implementation is loud and clear that we want to ensure a society where women are free to work and have a safe environment in all public places that allows them to become fully participating members of society", he added. The President also upheld the order that since the complainant had been terminated from service in utter violation of the law and rules i.e., conducting no regular inquiry against her and providing no opportunity of hearing to her, the termination order of the victim was quite illegal and unlawful and could not stand intact.

He further upheld FOSPAH's direction that it would be deemed as if no order of termination was made and the complainant was still a bank employee, and she would be entitled to all her benefits till today. The President rejected the representation by stating that the accused failed to cross-examine the complainant on vital aspects of the matter i.e., the allegation of sexual harassment and hence for that matter the said allegations were presumed to be admitted and proved on the record.

He noted that the evidence produced by the complainant seemed credible and confidence-inspiring, whereas the accused had been unable to shatter or discredit the evidence adduced by the complainant.