

Gandapur granted bail
BHAKKAR (INP): An additional sessions judge has granted bail to PTI senior leader Ali Amin Gandapur in case number 85. As per details, the case was heard by the Malik Muftaba and Tariq Khan Niazi on Ali Amin Gandapur's behalf. The additional session judge removed the section 324/395/440 from the case number 85. The judge also confirmed the bail in all other bailable sections against surety bonds worth 1 lac from the magistrate.

 @thefrontierpost

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Terrorism bid foiled
CHAGAI (PPI): Levies force, Chagai claimed to have recovered mortar, rocket and bomb in an operation conducted on tip off near Pak-Afghan border in district Chagai of Balochistan province province on Saturday. Two mortars, one rocket and one bomb, which had been hidden in a deserted place, were recovered in an operation conducted on a tip off along Pak-Afghan border in district Chagai.

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LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif receiving briefing regarding construction of Imamia Colony Railway Crossing Flyover, Shahdara.

Religious Minister Shakoor dies in road accident

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Abdul Shakoor on Saturday evening died in a road accident when a vehicle rammed into his car near Secretariat Chowk, police said.

The Police spokesperson said Maulana Abdul Shakoor was heading towards Secretariat Chowk from Marriott near Iftar timings when a Hilux Revo carrying five men hit his car. Maulana Abdul Shakoor was shifted to Polyclinic Hospital but he could not survive and succumbed to his injuries.

Senior police officers rushed to the scene while the vehicle and occupants have been taken into police custody. Further investigation is underway, police added. Political leaders have expressed their sorrow over the sad demise and consoled the family members of the deceased.

Senior police officers, according to the police, have arrived at the scene of the crime, and the people in the vehicle that smashed the federal minister's car have been arrested. Two of the five men are injured. Islamabad Inspector-General Dr Akbar Nasir Khan, Minister for Information Marriyum Aurangzeb, and other federal ministers have also reached the hospital, where Shakoor breathed his last.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah directed the capital's police to ensure that a "complete investigation" is conducted regarding the accident. "Initial information suggests that Mufti Shakoor passed away due to an injury to his head," Islamabad IG Khan told journalists outside the hos-



pital. Mufti Shakoor's funeral prayer will be offered tomorrow (Sunday) at 2 pm in Lakki Marwat, and he will be laid to rest in his native town, a JUI-F spokesperson said in a statement. The religious scholar was elected as a Member of the National Assembly (MNA) from NA-51 on the ticket of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) in the 2018 general elections.

In his condolence statement, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Shakoor was a "practical scholar, an ideological political activist, and a decent human being". PM Shehbaz said the deceased federal minister was among Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl's ideological leaders.

"Mufti Abdul Shakoor performed his duties with diligence, sincerity and honesty as Minister of Religious Affairs," the premier said, paying glaring tribute to him. Pakistan Peoples Party Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari expressed sorrow over the demise and prayed for the federal minister's forgive-

ness. Senator Sherry Rehman said she stands with his family in their time of sorrow.

Sanaullah also expressed grief over Shakoor's demise and said JUI-F has been deprived of a dedicated politician. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Fawad Chaudhry and Faisal Javed also extended their condolences and prayed for the deceased federal minister.

Federal Minister for Climate Change, Senator Sherry Rehman on Saturday expressed her condolences on the demise of Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Maulana Abdul Shakoor in traffic accident in the federal capital. In her condolence message, the federal minister expressed her deep sorrow and grief on the death of Maulana Abdul Shakoor with his family and party. Senator Rehman said she equally shared the grief of the bereaved family of the deceased Minister. She also prayed for the exaltation of the ranks of the deceased in the hereafter and patience for his bereaved family.

JI Amir calls on PM

LAHORE (APP): Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Siraj ul Haq along with a three-member delegation on Saturday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

During the meeting, the current political situation in the country and the judicial crisis were discussed, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The leaders agreed that issues should be resolved with collective wisdom.

Minister for Economic Affairs Division Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Minister for Railways and Aviation Khawaja Saad Rafique were also present during the meeting.

8 terrorists gunned down

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Eight terrorists were gunned down in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in South Waziristan, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said Saturday.

During the conduct of the operation in the Zarmilan area, an intense fire exchange took place between security forces and terrorists, which resulted in the death of the militants, the ISPR said in a statement. However, two soldiers — Lance Naik Shoaib Ali, 25, resident of Kurram, and Sepoy Rafi Ullah, 22, resident of Lakki Marwat — embraced martyrdom after fighting gallantly.

The ISPR added that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorists. "The killed terrorists remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and killing of innocent citizens," The military's media wing added that sanitisation of the area is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area. "Security forces of Pakistan remain determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," it added.

Imran announces protests after Eid

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan has announced to stage peaceful protests after Eidul Fitr.

While addressing PTI workers and supporters, Imran Khan said that PTI will stage a series of protests after Eidul Fitr. He alleged that the rulers planned to start crackdowns on PTI leaders and workers after April 27. He added that the caretaker government has not yet arrested a single person associated with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N). Khan said that 3,000 PTI workers were arrested by the government.

The PTI chief said that they will not remain silent on the atrocities. He appealed to the nation to start preparations for peaceful protests after Eid. He asked the rulers to take steps for protecting the nation.

The Frontier Post

All conditions fulfilled, IMF has no excuse now: PM

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that there existed economic challenges but the nation would have to decide whether they would live on foreign debts or to stand on its feet by carving a niche among the comity of nations with honesty, dedication and hard work.

The prime minister expressed the optimism that despite different challenges, Pakistan would be soon out of all difficulties. If the chronic issue of load shedding, the scourge of terrorism could end, free medicines could be provided to the poor, road infrastructure could be laid, then surely, the country could move on the path of progress and prosperity, he added.

The prime minister was addressing a ceremony after reviewing the construction work on six-lane overhead bridge of Imamia Colony railways crossing Shahdara N-5. He said that those nations always achieved milestones that took lead with definite decisions over their future. The country was not created to move on debts and act like beggar because their forefathers and different generations had given sacrifices for the motherland, he added.

The prime minister referred to the terms of International Monetary Fund (IMF) for seeking loan agreement and said that they did every effort to implement them. Even, they sought bilateral financial support from the friendly nations including China that realized their problems and provided a rollover of \$2 billion loan besides, returning back previous debt amount paid back by Pakistan. The prime minister also expressed his gratitude to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The UAE had committed a loan of \$3 billion.

He lauded the efforts of Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and the chief of army staff for making efforts in this regard. The ceremony was attended by Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin

Naqvi, parliamentarians, chief secretary, National Highway Authority chairman and relevant authorities. The prime minister said that inflation and price hike, no doubt, had made the lives of ordinary people difficult, but the coalition government was cognizant of these affects.

He urged the nation to work hard by day and night and transform the country into the visions of Quaid and Allama Iqbal. The prime minister cited the pace of development and uplift projects across Punjab province during Nawaz Sharif's tenure, regretting that during the last four years of PTI's tenure, brakes were applied, ending a number of public welfare-oriented projects, besides putting other vital projects into the cold storage. Recounting the public welfare projects initiated during Nawaz Sharif's tenure in the province, he said, some of them included the greater Iqbal park, metro bus service, cricket ground, power projects to overcome 20 hours load shedding which was ended in 2018 and that was a huge achievement.

But during 2018, he said through 'a fraud and fake election', polling results were rigged and the results were changed. With such move, the development pace was snatched which also saw a height of corruption in the province during PTI's government. Whereas, the PML-N government had strived to eliminate the curse during its terms, he added. He reminded the people that during his tenure as provincial chief minister, the Mall and Gulberg roads were washed but now, these roads had been left in dilapidated condition by the former rulers.

He said during his 12 years terms as the chief minister, he had provided flour to the people at subsidized rates, but for the first time in the country's history, about 80 to 100 million people were being benefited from the free flour scheme for which Rs65 billion rupees were spent in the month of Ramazan alone. About the construction of flyovers, he said that one

each flyover Imamia colony was being completed by the federal government and the other at Shahdara by the provincial government. He said the metro bus project from Shahdara would be expanded to Kala Shah Kaku, adding all these projects were meant for the public benefits.

The prime minister said that he had directed for completion of the work in three months. The prime minister also criticized former chief justice of Pakistan Justice Saqib Nisar for staying different projects in the province including the issue of 56 companies. He said in these proceedings, not a single penny of corruption was proved. The Orange line was a gift of China for the people of Lahore, he said, adding after a lengthy proceeding of 11-month over a case moved by PTI, the high court gave a clean chit.

But the PTI people then took the issue to the Supreme Court, where the former chief justice delayed the decision for months, with clear intentions to cause harm to PML-N and public uplift schemes. The prime minister also accused former justice Saqib Nisar of causing loss to PKLI and questioned what he was doing in the constituency of Shaikh Rashid. Speaking on the occasion, Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain said that the project was being completed which had been pending for construction for long.

During the last PTI government's tenure, such like development schemes were halted causing irreparable loss to the country. The construction of the project was approved and initiated by the PML-N government during 2017 and inaugurated by former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, he added. Earlier, the prime minister was briefed by the relevant authorities over the construction work. The prime minister directed the authorities to expedite the work and complete it in three months timeframe.

Turn tide against terrorism Army assures to pursue NSC goals

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The 257th Corps Commanders' Conference held here at GHQ, chaired by Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, on Saturday expressed its assurance to pursue the goals set by the National Security Committee (NSC) to turn the tide against terrorism through the coordinated application of all elements of national power.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release, the

forum reviewed domestic and regional environment, including external and internal security challenges confronted by Pakistan. The forum affirmed that military leadership is cognizant of the full spectrum of the challenges and it resolves to shoulder its constitutionally mandated responsibilities with support of the resilient people of Pakistan.

The forum reiterated the commitment of the armed forces to fully support national responses against internal and external threats. It highlighted that

while security forces are undertaking intelligence based operations in areas along the western border, there was a need to adopt a whole of the nation and whole of the government approach to eradicate the menace of terrorism on long term basis.

This focused Counter Terrorism campaign against terrorists as approved by the Government, through whole of the system approach will lead towards eradicating permissive factors of terrorism, extremism and instability in the country.

Imran project badly failed, says Muqam

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Adviser to the Prime Minister for Political and Public Affairs, National Heritage and Culture, Engr Amir Muqam here Saturday said that Parliament was the supreme institution and custodian of the rights of people of Pakistan and its supremacy would be ensured at all cost for progress and prosperity of the nation.

Addressing a function here at Barikot, Engr Amir Muqam said that all state institutions including parliament, executive and judiciary derived powers from the constitution of 1973 and the country could only achieve heights of success if it work under its constitutional domain. He said that supremacy of the parliament and constitution would be ensured and the rights of people would be protected.

Engr Amir Muqam said that development process in KP and Punjab provinces was halted during the government of Imran Khan and people of KP were deprived

of progress for 10 long years. He said Imran Khan's lies based politics, egoism and stubbornness has been badly exposed before the nation and PTI would face people wrath in general election due to its poor performance in centre, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

The Prime Minister's Adviser said that Imran Niazi had been fielded/promoted in last election in a bid to politically and economically destabilize Pakistan and stopped the development process of PML-N. He said the PTI government has installed its own signboards on the PML-N's gas, electricity, roads, communication and NADRA projects in Swat.

He said if Imran Niazi Government continued for few more weeks, the country would have faced bankruptcy and Sri Lanka like economic situation. CPEC was halted and the country's economy were ruined during Imran Govt, he said. He said a three times elected Prime Minister was disqualified on the ground of not taking salary from his

son in the so called Panama case and from that day Pakistan has been started moving downwards.

Due to wrong economic and financial policies of Imran Govt, he said the value of dollar, price hike and inflation were increased manifolds. The Prime Minister's Adviser said that conspiracies were again started against PML-N after the finance team of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reached close to sign an important agreement with IMF.

He highly appreciated the support of UAE, China and Saudi Arabia for their extended help and assistance to Pakistan. Amir Muqam said those elements, who made conspiracy against Nawaz Sharif government has disappeared by themselves as they could not face public due to their negative role.

During Nawaz Sharif Government, he said that IMF Program has been successful completed and the PML-N would also complete this program after winning the election.

S Arabia to deposit \$2b into SBP's account

KARACHI (Agencies): The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) will deposit \$2 billion into the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) account "within the next seven working days", it was learnt on Saturday.

It was reportedly confirmed by KSA Ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki during a meeting with Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) Muhammad Jawad Sohrah Malik in Islamabad. According to official media, the envoy said the Kingdom is committed to building long-term, sustainable investment transactions between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

The ambassador reiterated Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's pledge to increase Saudi Arabian investments to \$10 billion in Pakistan's energy and IT sectors within the next few years. During the meeting, Malik expressed his gratitude for Saudi Arabia's support to Pakistan.

The Saudi envoy expressed a keen interest on behalf of the Saudi government to recruit more manpower from Pakistan during the current and next year for various sectors of the kingdom. He stated that the Saudi labor market is continuing to expand, mainly due to the launch of several mega projects under the Saudi Vision 2030. Discussions were also held on further strengthening of bilateral business relations, recruitment of more workforce from Pakistan, and enhancing FDI in potential sectors of the economy.

Earlier this month, Minister of State for Finance Aisha Ghaus Pasha had said that Saudi Arabia has assured the International Monetary Fund (IMF) it will provide a \$2-billion loan to Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan announced financial support Friday from the United Arab Emirates and China totalling \$1.3 billion, giving the ailing economy a shot in the arm as it seeks to meet conditions for the resumption of an IMF bailout.

Ali Zaidi arrested in Karachi, claims PTI

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Saturday claimed that the Sindh police have apprehended its senior leader and former federal minister for maritime affairs Ali Haider Zaidi.

According to a First Information Report (FIR), Zaidi was arrested on charges of "fraud and issuing threats". A case had been lodged at the Ibrahim Hyderi Police Station in the metropolis by a citizen named Fazal Elahi. In a video statement, the PTI leader's daughter — Sacha Ali Zaidi — said her father had served the nation "with great integrity and honesty". "Pakistan has arrested him for standing up for sovereignty and respect of Pakistan. How can Pakistan prosper as a nation if those who stand up for it get arrested," she said. Taking to Twitter earlier, PTI Central Information Secretary Farruk Habib claimed that the police took Zaidi into custody from the party's Sindh office.

In a video shared by PTI Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry, plain clothes men



accompanied by police can be seen arresting the senior PTI leader from his office in Khayaban-e-Bukhari, DHA. Fawad said that Zaidi was arrested "without any arrest warrant". It is not known yet in which case he was taken into custody.

Strongly condemning the arrest of Zaidi, PTI Chairman Imran Khan said: "All part of the London Plan where Nawaz given assurances PTI would be crushed." Taking to Twitter, Khan maintained that over 3000 PTI workers

have been arrested, abducted or terrorized so far. "Ali Amin & now Ali Zaidi abducted. A new plan underway for more," he warned.

"They think this will weaken us in case elections are held. Let me state categorically this will not work. People's anger only increasing & they will see the blowback of this nefarious London Plan in elections." PTI Senior Vice President Shireen Mazari called the arrest "condemnable and illegal".



Punjab Cabinet expresses resolve to fight terrorism

LAHORE (APP): Monitoring cooperation in computerization of land records Punjab Cabinet also accorded approval to a new schemes of Children's Hospital in Annual Development Program 2022-23. The Cabinet approved to enter into an agreement with the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan regarding

about the ongoing operation against terrorists and criminals in Kutchha area.

During the meeting, the Cabinet expressed resolve to bring the ongoing operation to a logical end and approved the release of funds meeting expenses of the operation.

Addressing the meet-

ing, the chief minister said the provincial ministers, administrative and police officers and staff are working day and night to make the free flour package a success.

He also issued directives to take necessary administrative measures to stop sugar smuggling.

Steps being taken for policemen welfare: DIG

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police Welfare DIG Ghazi Muhammad Salahuddin on Saturday said that welfare committee of Punjab police has approved 251 cases of medical aid and released funds worth 67 million this year.

In the message issued to the force, he said that during the entire last year, only Rs 33 million were given to police employees under welfare aid, whereas now medical assistance was twice the amount in three months of this year than the previous year.

The DIG said that employees

suffering from transplant, cancer, bone marrow, heart surgery or other malignant diseases should make a referral case and get treatment from private specialists. With this initiative, the employees would be able to get all their paid bills dues and other medical claims from the welfare branch.

The DIG added that the data of all the district heads of police employees affected by thalassemia should be sent online to the central police office so that they could be given a monthly stipend of Rs 15,000.

He maintained that the assistance received in every category including educational scholarships, wedding gifts and funerals had been substantially increased for the police employees and the aim of these measures was to effectively address issues including health and education of the personnel and their families so that they could focus all their attention on duty.

He said that the best welfare of police force was the first priority of IG Punjab and priority measures would continue in this regard.



LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council and Special Representative of Prime Minister of Pakistan for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi is holding Address.

DTE OF MA & S - PAF

TENDER NOTICE

Dte of MA&S requires sealed bids /quotations for supply of Medicines, X-Ray & CT Scan Films, Lab Kits, Reagents, Chemicals, Surgical Disposables, Covid-19 - related PPEs & Medical Gases to All PAF Medical Setups for Fiscal Year 2023-24, on the basis of 'Closed Framework Agreement', as per PPRA Rules to meet day-to-day/Urgent/Emergent requirements.

Tender documents, List of items and IT conditions can be obtained from MSD Badaber on payment of Rs. 3000/- (Non-refundable). Last date of submission of bids is **04 May 2023**, till 1000 hrs. The Quotations will be opened on the same day, at 1200 hrs, in the presence of bidders or their representatives. Director MA&S has the right to accept or reject any/all bid(s), on technical grounds, as per PPRA Rules. This tender is also available at PPRA's website. Further details and more information can be obtained from the undersigned, during working hours.

DIRECTOR MA&S (AHQ PESHAWAR)
C/O MSD BADABER
PH: 091-9210888, 0323-9403707

نیشنل ڈیٹا بیس اینڈ رجسٹریشن

اتھارٹی (نادرا)

نوٹس بوجہ غیر حاضری

آپ سید اختر (سیدتی گورڈ) کی سب ٹی 64101/1 کا پانچ روزہ قانونی تعلیمی اہلیت حاصل کر چکے ہیں۔
دور: 16 - Jan - 23 سے بغیر درخواست (یعنی اجازت) تیار کردہ ہوئے۔

نور محمد (2) نوٹس بوجہ: RHO/NADRA/Disp/08/HR/64101/First Notice Dated: 21 - Feb - 2023
اور دو نوٹس بوجہ: RHO/NADRA/Disp/08/HR/64101/Second Notice Dated: 09-Mar-2023

آپ سید اختر (سیدتی گورڈ) کی سب ٹی 64101/1 کا پانچ روزہ قانونی تعلیمی اہلیت حاصل کر چکے ہیں۔
دور: 16 - Jan - 23 سے بغیر درخواست (یعنی اجازت) تیار کردہ ہوئے۔

پروویجیٹ ڈائریکٹر محاذ انتہائی

پیشواں ہارڈ ویسٹ لائیو ٹی 31 بیک 1-5 جیٹ آپارٹمنٹ
فون نمبر: 091-9217735

PAKISTAN NAVY

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

NOTICE OF TENDER

- APPLICATIONS ALONG WITH ALL CREDENTIALS ARE INVITED BY THE CMES (NAVY) ISLD/LHR for prequalification of firms / contractors and issue of tenders for following work under CMES (Navy) Isld/ Lhr at Islamabad in the light of Clause-13, 15 and 16 of PPRA Rules-2004:

S No	Description of Work
a.	Replacement of U/S Internal/ External electric wiring and water supply with fitting and fixture at E-8 Islamabad
b.	Repair/ Maintenance of Gypsum ceiling at E-8 Islamabad
c.	Repair/ Maintenance of Acoustic wall panelling at E-8 Islamabad

- Firms / contractors who are enlisted with MES in category 'D' or higher OR with other Govt departments, having experience of this type of work; may only apply.
- Applicants not providing the following information/ documents will not be considered for prequalification/ issue of tenders:

S No	Description of similar nature of works executed during last two years and in hand	Sponsoring agency/ client	Amount of work (Rupees in Million)	Completion Period (Months)	Date of Physical completion	Percentage progress of work in hand	Performance report on each work by the sponsoring agency/ client

- The contractors will also furnish List of Moveable & Immoveable assets, Personnel (skilled/ unskilled), Machinery/ equipments, Bank Statement, General Sales Tax (GST) Registration, NTN Certificate etc.
- Firms / contractors not registered with Pakistan Engineering Council (Renewal of Registration for the year 2023) will not be considered for issuance of tender documents.
- Pre-qualification documents can be obtained from CMES (N) Isld/ Lhr, Sector E-8, Islamabad.
- The Applications will be scrutinized and tenders will be issued to the prequalified firms / contractors. The tenders required to be received in CMES (N) Isld/ Lhr, Sector E-8, Islamabad by 1130 hours on 03 May 2023 and will be opened on the same date at 1200 hours.
- Contractors who desire; may witness the opening of tenders.
- The Accepting Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the applications in the light of para-33 of PPRA rules-2004. Incomplete application shall not be entertained.

PID(I) 6330/22



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Law Nazir Tarar, former President Supreme Court Bar Ahsan Bhoon participates in the certificate giving ceremony at the Punjab Bar Council. —APP Photo

Ashrafi urges world community to take notice of HR violations

LAHORE (APP): Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony and middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Saturday urged the world community to take notice of the human rights violations being committed in Palestine and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK).

Addressing the 'Tazeem-e-Harmain Al-Sharifain, Al-Aqsa Conference', here he said that people of Palestine and IIOJK were facing worst circumstances as they were even not allowed to offer prayers independently during the

holy month of Ramazan.

Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, said that the role being played by the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz and Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman was praiseworthy for regional peace and stability.

Whereas, he added that the Saudi leadership was doing best services for serving the Umrah pilgrims.

Hafiz Tahir said that a record number of pilgrims have visited Harmain in the holy month of Ramazan as state-of-the-art facilities were being provided to them by the Saudi govern-

ment. He expressed the hope that the Saudi leadership would play role for resolving longstanding issues of occupied Kashmir and Palestine for durable peace in the region.

He mentioned that the Pakistani nation would continue standing with the oppressed people of the Occupied Kashmir and Palestine. The world community including the United Nations should take notice of the plight of the people in these countries, he added.

Later, Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi also prayed for the solidarity and prosperity of the country.

Azam says legislation is prerogative of parliament

LAHORE (NNI): Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said on Saturday that the parliament would not give its right to any other institution.

Addressing at the Punjab Bar Council, he said efforts to create schism in the lawyer community would go in vain while mentioning the brilliant efforts of the PBC for the betterment of the legal society.

He said the passage of the Supreme Court (practice and procedure bill) was a long-awaited demand while adding only the parliament had the privilege to make and amend laws and no institution should intervene in its domain.

PAKISTAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (PCAA)

OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME A PART OF PCAA'S PROFESSIONAL TEAM

SITUATION VACANT NOTICE NO. 09/2023

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority requires services of qualified individuals to fill the following vacant posts on contract basis for **three (03) years (extendable)** where selection will be made purely on suitability and merit :-

Post	No. of Seat (s)	Prescribed Qualification & Experience	Quota & Pay Scale	Age Limit
Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (Chief Engineer) (EG-05)	One (01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PCAA ANO-066 AML holder in Category 'B1', Sub-category 'B1.1' with Beech 200 series (PWC PT6) aircraft type rating endorsement preferably with NIL limitations OR at most with limitations 1 & 9. Candidates having Engineering Degree or Diploma in Associate Engineering shall be given preference. Minimum five (05) years of maintenance experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merit Lump Sum of Rs.264,122/- per month with 05% annual increment 	Maximum 57 years (including all age relaxations)
Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (EG-03)	One (01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PCAA ANO-066 AML holder in Category 'B2' with Beech 200 series (PWC PT6) aircraft type rating endorsement preferably with NIL limitations. Candidates having Engineering Degree or Diploma in Associate Engineering shall be given preference. Minimum three (03) years of maintenance experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merit Lump Sum of Rs.192,245/- per month with 05% annual increment 	Maximum 57 years (including all age relaxations)

Application Procedure:

- Interested candidates are required to fill & submit Online Job Application Form available at www.caapakistan.com.pk within fifteen days from the date of this advertisement.
- Candidates will be required to upload scanned copies of certificate / degree of the required qualification only of the concerned post as mentioned above and CNIC while applying for the job.
- In case a candidate does not upload the above documents with the online application form, his/her application will be rejected.
- All the interested candidates must read the Terms of Reference (TOR) mentioned in the detailed notice available at www.caapakistan.com.pk before applying for the post.

ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR HR (TM)
HEADQUARTERS PAKISTAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY, TERMINAL-I, JINNAH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, KARACHI TEL: 021-99072068 - 67
PID(K)# 2978 www.caapakistan.com.pk

STATE BANK OF PAKISTAN

SBP Banking Services Corporation (Bank), Peshawar

DISPOSAL NOTICE FOR EDP EQUIPMENT

REF No. Auction/2023/19174

SBP Banking Services Corporation (Bank), Peshawar intends to dispose the following EDP items through sealed bids/offers on "as is where is basis".

S#	Equipment	Quantity
01	PC's	121
02	Printer	71
03	Racks	01
04	Server	01
05	Scanner	02
06	UPS	05
07	Accessories	06

- The aforementioned items can be inspected at SBP BSC Peshawar office on working days from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM till 3rd May 2023 at SBP Banking Services Corporation, Peshawar.
- Bid documents may be collected free of cost from 2nd floor, General Services Unit, SBP-BSC, Peshawar till closing date and time thereof.
- Sealed bids/offers along with earnest money of Rs.20,000/- (Rupees Twenty thousand only) in the shape of Pay Order/ Demand Draft in favor of State Bank of Pakistan shall be submitted till 10:30 AM 4th May 2023 at Chief Manager's Section, SBP-BSC, Peshawar.
- Sealed bids will be opened on the same day i.e. 4th May 2023 at 11:00AM in presence of participating bidders or their authorized representative.
- The successful bidder will have to provide/submit 25% of the total bid/offer price in the form of Pay Order/ Demand Draft on the spot/same day in favor of State Bank of Pakistan otherwise their bid will be considered as cancelled and the earnest money will be forfeited.
- Successful bidder will have to deposit the balance amount within 07 days after approval by the Bank's management, otherwise earnest money along with the already deposited amount of 25% will be forfeited.
- Participants will be required to bring along their original CNICs for collection and submission of Bid/ offer.

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PID(K) 2966/22

Role of religious scholars must for peaceful society, syas Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Saturday said that the role of religious scholars cannot be ignored for the establishment of a peaceful society.

He expressed these views during a meeting nine-member representative delegation including Mufti Shahabuddin Popalzai, Maulana Basir Khan, Dr. Ahmed Saeed, Dr. Ilyas Sharif and other religious scholars of Peshawar under the leadership of Special Assistant to the Caretaker Chief Minister Malik Mehr Elahi.

The delegation requested the Governor to play the

role of chancellor for the establishment of Seerat Khatam-ul-Nabi (PBUH) department in universities and colleges and said that a letter has also been issued by the Senate of Pakistan and the Higher Education Commission in this regard.

The delegation said that the Department of History in the University of Peshawar is completely inactive and the required faculty is not available.

They demanded the Governor to make the Seerat department fully functional and to ensure the appointment of PhD faculty with a separate curriculum so that our youth can have

the best opportunities and resources for researching the Seerat-e-Nabis.

The Governor said that in the present time, it is not only a necessity to enlighten the young generation with the Prophet's biography and Islamic teachings, but it is also our religious duty. It is so that in the era of modern technology the youth can be given the best moral and religious training along with scientific studies and education.

Apart from this, Chairman Islamic Ideological Council Dr. Qibla Ayaz also met with the Governor at the Governor's House and discussed important topics.

While Malakand Chamber President Muhammad Shoaib Khan and prominent industrialist Zubair Khan, a four-member delegation headed by Maulana Muhammad Shafiq Khattak and Syed Kabir and Haji Syeda Jan from Khyber district also met separately at the Governor House and informed the Governor about the various problems and difficulties faced by the people of their respective areas.

On this occasion, the Governor assured the delegations of his full cooperation to resolve the issues.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali meeting with nine-member representative delegation led by Special Assistant to Caretaker CM Malik Mehr Elahi.

Workers to be mobilized after Ramzan for elections

PESHAWAR (APP): Acting President of Pakistan Peoples' Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and State Minister Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha on Saturday said that the workers should start full preparations for the upcoming elections, the organizational leadership of the province should play their role to mobilize the workers.

In a statement issued here, he said that the provincial leadership would visit all districts after Ramadan to motivate workers for elections.

He asked the PPP workers to be in touch with the people. He said that PPP is ready of election whenever it was announced. He said that the Peoples Party will fight the election with its party's symbol which is live.

He said PPP will not hesitate to make the biggest sacrifice for the sake of the country and the nation.

He said that the provincial leadership is always ready for the voice of the workers. He said that self-respect of the workers will be restored and their sense of deprivation and problems will be resolved.

Steps taken for smooth traffic flow

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Traffic Officer Qamar Hayat Khan Saturday said that more than four hundred officials have been assigned duties to provide travel facilities to the citizens going to the markets for Eid shopping.

He said this while talking to media men in a briefing regarding the uninterrupted traffic during the Eid days. He said instruction has been passed to the traffic authorities to take legal action against the violators of the no parking zone including lifting the vehicles using forklifts.

He said 18 forklifts are doing operations against vehicles parked in nine parking areas, Chief Traffic Officer said. Two awareness camps have been set up in Peshawar to ensure the flow of traffic and implementation of traffic rules, Qamar Hayat Khan said.

Actions are underway

against those using black glasses, unregistered vehicles, non-specimen and fancy number plates, Chief Traffic Officer said. Motorcycle bargain owners have been obliged to give motorcycles in installments after registration, Qamar Hayat Khan said.

He said actions against one-wheelers are continuing across the city. He said, during operations, motorcycles are confiscated under 523/550 and locked in the terminal. One-wheeling youths are kept in custody until their parents give a written guarantee, Qamar Hayat Khan informed.

He said the services of the Traffic Volunteer Force have been procured for the flow of traffic.

The students of various colleges involved in the

volunteer force are ensuring the flow of traffic along with the traffic officials and officials in the various markets of the city, Qamar Hayat Khan said.

Peshawar City Traffic Police Peshawar volunteer force members are also giving awareness to citizens about traffic rules, he said, adding, "Action against those who park vehicles and motorcycles in nine parking zones across the city and encroachments."

Peshawar City Traffic Police Peshawar's FM Radio 88.6 also informs people about the traffic system of the city, Qamar Hayat Khan said. For any information related to Peshawar traffic dial our helpline 1915, Chief Traffic Officer Qamar Hayat Khan informed.

Rain expected in upper areas

PESHAWAR (APP): Rain is expected in the upper areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the next 24 hours, an official of the Meteorological Department said here Saturday.

He said there is a 45% chance of rain in the evening in Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda, Mardan, Swabi and other tribal areas across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Minimum temperature in Peshawar 29 degrees Celsius including 25 in Orakzai, 29 in Swabi, 28 in Mardan, 18 in Malam Jabba, 19 in Chitral recorded, the official said.

Thousands receive diagnosis after 60 new diseases found

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Thousands of children with severe developmental disorders have finally been given a diagnosis, in a study that found 60 new diseases.

Children, and their parents, had their genetic code - or DNA - analysed in the search for answers to their condition.

There are thousands of different genetic disorders.

Having a diagnosis can lead to better care, help parents to decide whether to have more children, or simply provide an explanation for what is happening.

Taken individually the disorders are rare, but collectively they affect one in every 17 people in the UK.

The Deciphering Developmental Disorders study, conducted over 10 years in the UK and Ireland, was a collaboration between the NHS, universities and the Sanger Institute, which specialises in analysing DNA.

Among the findings, researchers discovered Turnpenny-Fry syndrome. It is caused by errors in one genetic instruction within our DNA and leads to learning difficulties. It also affects growth, resulting in a large forehead and sparse

hair. Jessica Fisher's son, Mungo - who took part in the study - was diagnosed with the syndrome.

At the time, he was one of only two people in the world to be diagnosed with it. The other child was in Australia, but Jessica recalls that the Australian child's physical similarities to Mungo were so strong they "could have been his sibling". Jessica subsequently started an online support group, which is now made up of 36 families from around the world, including America, Brazil, Croatia and Indonesia.

"It's devastating to learn that your child has a rare genetic disorder, but getting the diagnosis has been key to bringing us together," said Jessica. The study analysed the genetic code of 13,500 families with unexplained disorders - and was able to give a diagnosis to 5,500 of them.

The results, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, revealed 60 of those disorders were new conditions. Most were errors that had occurred spontaneously at conception, rather than being inherited.

Prof Caroline Wright, from the University of Exeter, told the BBC: "We

were able to find new genetic conditions, which means that not only people in the study benefit, but there are huge benefits to future generations.

"Getting a genetic diagnosis is hugely important to families. It allows them to speak to other families who might be affected by the same condition, and hopefully target much more personalised management and ultimately treatment."

Around a quarter of children in the study had their treatment changed once a clear diagnosis was given.

This kind of genetic analysis is becoming more

routine within NHS care.

The discovery of Turnpenny-Fry syndrome meant Dasha Brogden's daughter, Sofia, was diagnosed when she was just one month old.

Her diagnosis made everyone aware heart conditions were a possibility, and a scan led to Sofia - now aged nearly three - having surgery when she was two months old.

Dasha, from Oxfordshire, said: "For us, getting a diagnosis really helped us to understand what to expect. Compared to families who came before the condition had an official diagnosis, we were lucky.

ANP to convene All Party Conference on May 3

PESHAWAR (APP): Awami National Party Saturday announced to convene an All-Party Conference (APC) on the ongoing situation in the country on May 3, Member National Assembly Amir Haider Khan Hoti said here.

It has been decided to call the APC on the direction and guidance of Central President Asfandiyar Wali Khan, said Amir Haider Khan added. He disclosed that All Parties Conference (APC) will be held on May 3, 2023 in Islamabad wherein before the APC, ANP Central Council meeting will be held in Islamabad on May 2, 2023.

He said, a committee has been established under the Chairmanship of Secretary General Mian Iftikhar Hussain for APC, adding, "All political parties and people of different schools of thought will be invited to participate in the APC."



PESHAWAR: Polio health worker administering drops to a child during polio vaccination campaign.

Transgenders become nostalgic in Ramazan

PESHAWAR (APP): Abandoned by families due to societal pressure and the stigma associated with their nontraditional gender identity, the transgender community become overwhelmed with the sentiments of nostalgia during the holy month of Ramazan, wishing to return to the time when they used to do sehari with parents, siblings and childhood friends.

A number of transgender arrange collective iftari (breaking fast) to overcome the memories haunting their mind, especially during Ramazan when they used to live with family and broke fast along with rela-

tives.

"I was only thirteen years old when I left my home while realizing rejection by family to my gender and after the passage of around twenty years has not returned back to home," shares Muskan, a transgender dwelling in Peshawar.

Belonging to the Parachinar area of Kurram District, Muskan said she only knows her parents died a few years earlier and was totally unaware of the well-being of her siblings.

"I have accepted this life of rejection by society and family, but still the bond of kinship haunts my mind, reminding me of good old times when I was a member

of my family," says Muskan with a gloomy face.

In Ramazan, especially at the time of Iftari, I break fast with tears in my eyes, recalling the time when my mother used to offer me different things to eat, adds Muskan while wiping off tears from her cheeks.

We are not happy with the life we are spending but are compelled to do so because of rejection by family, she complained.

It merits a mention here that transgenders are people who were considered male at the time of birth and later come to identify as women and are rejected by family and society due to the com-

plexity of their gender.

"I once tried to go back and reunite with family on the occasion of the marriage of my sister around four years earlier," informs Gul Goshai, a transgender living in Gul Bahar area.

On reaching home, my father expressed resentment and asked whether will he accommodate me with male guests or female.

"There are a lot of guests who come to attend marriage and your presence will be an insult for the whole family, especially for the bride in front of her in-laws," Gul Goshai recalls the sarcastic remarks she had to listen to on return home.

"This was a very diffi-

cult time of life and the instant feeling that came into my mind was that I would have not been born to face this sort of humiliation and rejection by family," shares Gul who lost her composition and start weeping while sharing memories.

"For the last 38 years, I am observing fasting without family and every year missed my relatives and friends," says Farzana Riaz, President TransAction, an organization representing thousands of transgender and intersex community.

We are living away from family to avoid their insult in society, but our hearts are always filled with memo-

ries of the time we spent with them.

In Ramazan this feeling of nostalgia becomes more strong and the longing of meeting with parents and siblings keeps us hurting, Farzana expressed her inner feelings.

"The month of Ramazan is very difficult for us to spend without family", comments Katrina while talking with APP.

"I missed a lot the loaf of bread prepared by my mother for me at Sheri and the different dishes she prepared for Iftari," says Katrina in a choked voice.

Katrina was worried about the observance of Eid-ul-Fitar, which is also a

very difficult day for the transgender community to spend in isolation.

People visit the houses of their relatives for the Eid celebration, while we the transgender community just embrace roommates for exchanging greetings on the religious festival with films of memories coming to mind about the enjoyment of religious festivals we cheered during our childhood.

On Eid day, I visit the graves of my parents in Mardan, but did not meet with siblings because of their rejection, Katrina told APP.

She said this is a plight of almost all of the mem-



In brief

Two cops martyred

KASHMORE (INP): In the ongoing operation of law personnel against dacoits in kuchha area of Kashmore, two policemen lost their lives and embraced martyrdom on Saturday. According to police, the operation against bandits is underway in the Ghelpur riverbed in Kashmore. Two police officials were martyred by the firing of dacoits and three other law personnel including SHO Gul Muhammad Mehr got hurt, they added. The martyred policemen were identified as Sabir Hussain and Hadi Khan Dhomki. Police reinforcement has also been sought following the fresh two casualties and injuries during the ongoing operation against criminals.

Actions against malpractices

F.P. Report

BUNER: Assistant Commissioner Gadezai Salazarzi Fazal Wahid on public complaints have fined two flour dealers and imposed Rs40 thousand fine on each for charging rupees 100 from every consumer for provision free flour at the native village of former Advisor to Chief Minister for Communication Riaz Khan in the union council Malakpur, on Saturday. The public were complained about illegal charges from them following the AC raided and the dealers pleaded guilty. Following, the AC cancelled dealership of the accused and directed new dealers for making sure provision of free flour distribution among deserving locals. The locals have expressed joy over timely action on their complaint and hoped no dealer would bother to charge any consumer in future. The public argued district administration to identify culprits involved in malpractices during provision of free flour at both public offices and private sector for exemplary punishment.

3 corrupt flour dealers booked

D I KHAN (APP): Three dealers of free flour were booked for 30 days with heavy fines over corruption charges by the district administration in Dera Ismail Khan. According to the details, Deputy Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan Mansoor Arshad imposed Rs 0.5 million fine on each of the three flour dealers and sent them to jail for 30 days after their corruption was proved in the provision of free flour to the deserving citizens. The deputy commissioner said strict action would be taken against those who create difficulties in the provision of facilities to the people. He said that the corrupt people who do corruption in the provision of public facilities do not deserve any kind of forgiveness.

Facilitation center opened

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Muhammad Sohail inaugurated the service center in Shujaabad City along with City Police Officer (CPO) Multan Mansoor-ul-Haq Rana while SSP Operations Mohammad Imran, SP Sadar Uzair Ahmed, DSP Mehr Murtaza Syail, DSP Headquarters Nimreen Munir, SHO Police Station Sadar Hamid Khan, SHO Police Station Raja Ram Abdul Saboor. SHO Police Station City Aoun Abbas and other police officers, civil society and businessmen were present during the ceremony. Talking to the media on this occasion, RPO Multan Captain (R) Muhammad Sohail Chaudhry said that Multan Division Police is actively working for the welfare of the public.

PHC CJ inspects Charsadda, Swabi jails, order to protect inmate rights

F.P. Report

SWABI: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, Justice Musarrat Hilali paid a surprise visit to the Judicial Complex Swabi and Sub-Jails of Swabi and Charsadda, while ordered prison's officials to pay attention to rights of inmates, on Saturday.

During the visit, her ladyship observed the court proceedings and merged among the female litigants to learn about their problems and expedite solutions thereto. Her ladyship directed the District and Session Judge Swabi to deal with the matters of litigants efficiently and expedite the long pending family court cases.

Her ladyship was pleased to notice female court staff including reader, computer operator and naib Qasid. Besides, she also met with bar representatives and visited Sub-Jail Swabi. She expressed her satisfaction about general area hygiene, standard of food and space in the barracks. Superintended Jail apprised



her about frequent electricity load shedding.

District and Session Judge was directed to take up the matter with PESCO for immediate resolution. During visit to Sub-jail

Swabi her ladyship met with prisoners and listened to their problems regarding trials.

It was learnt that some prisoners were being interned in small and petty

nature cases. Her ladyship ordered the District and Session Judge Swabi for immediate remedial actions. Her ladyship also instructed the Judicial Magistrate to conduct a Jail visit and decide petty nature cases at the earliest.

At Sub-Jail Charsadda, the Chief Justice visited all the barracks individually and found them over crowded. Superintendent Jail and District and Session Judge Charsadda highlighted the need for acquisition of additional land to address the space challenge. Her ladyship assured to raise this critical point at appropriate forums.

District and Session Judge Charsadda was ordered to enlist the problems brought out by the inmates, resolve petty nature cases on priority and arrange prosecutor for deserving cases. Chief Justice also visited the dispensary, expressed satisfaction over the arrangements of Jail Superintendent and instructed him to pay attention to the rights of the inmates.

Poultry shop sealed, 100 kg sub-standard meats disposed off

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Joint operation of District Administration Mardan and KP Food, raid on the chicken shops, suspicious meat and cut pieces of chickens that had been slaughtered earlier were recovered, more meat from 100 kilogram was destroyed on the spot, the warehouse was sealed, legal actions were taken against the chicken sellers.

The beginning of the sale of unhealthy food is not accepted under any circumstances, the determination of the district and food authorities. According to details, on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan Abdul Rehman, Additional Assistant Commissioner Headquarters Junaid Khalid, in the company of Food Safety Officer of KP Food Zubair Ali Khan Yousafzai, raided the secret warehouses of chicken sellers in Nehar Chowk, the main commercial center of Par Hoti, using closed freezers. A large quantity of meat

of pre-slaughtered chickens including suspicious cut parts of chickens was recovered and cut pieces of chickens sold in shops were also seized and after inspection more than 100 kg of meat and parts of slaughtered chickens were seized destroyed on the spot while the warehouse was sealed and heavy fines were imposed on the traders involved.

On this occasion, the authorities clarified that the sale of meat of pre-slaughtered chickens and questionable packaged organs, apart from the sale of live and healthy chickens, is a legal offense and strict legal measures will be taken against those involved in this heinous business.

MCCT, traders assured for security of lives& property: SDPO City Circle Inam Jan Khan met the business community in his office, the President of Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Central Organization of Traders Provincial General Sec-

retary Zahir Shah, Chairman Gulam Sarwar Saraf General Secretary Waqar Ali Bacha and the trade community of Mardan also participated in the meeting.

On this occasion, DSP Inam Jan Khan while addressing the participants said that the business community is the backbone of the country's economy the safety of their life and property is among the top priorities of the police, for which our police will take all possible steps by using all the resources. Zahir Shah said that the business community has always provided all kinds of cooperation to maintain peace, law and order in the society and Insha Allah we will continue to cooperate with our police in every case to maintain peace law and order. Rest assured, the business leaders and the business community expressed their gratitude to the district police and especially DPO Mardan for maintaining the best law and order situation for business.

Ulema to play role for elimination of social evils

F.P. Report

BANNU: Commissioner Bannu said Pervaiz Sabatkhel said that Ulama and Religious scholars can play an vital role in elimination of social evils like under-paly (private interest), aerial firing, one-wheeling on bikes the growing trend of drug addiction in the youth, especially the curse of ice addiction, on Saturday.

Commissioner claimed that the ongoing anti-polio campaign made possible by religious scholars to ensure maximum participation of public. This he said while addressing participant in an iftar party held in the honor of the religious scholars of the Bannu, in which a large number of Ulama of Bannu participated. Commander 116 Brigade, Brigadier Mohammad Tayyeb also participated in the Iftar party.

In the party divisional administration, Pakistan Army and ulama discussed in details the topics of identifying social evils and their eradication. On this occasion all of them agreed to eliminate social evils from the society together with cooperation. In which joint efforts of Divisional and Districts Administration, Pakistan Army, police, Ulama, and people will be utilized together. So that Social evils and problems can be dealt with affectively.

These Social evils

include aerial firing, one-wheeling on motorcycles, and the increasing scourge of drug addiction in the youth particularly ice addiction. Commissioner Bannu Division Parwaiz Sabat khel said that hundred percent success in the ongoing Anti-polio campaign can be possible by playing role of the religious scholars to educate the lay man for this purpose. After the Iftar, while discussing the topics of social problems, Commissioner Bannu Parwaiz Sabat Khel said that some measures have already been taken to prevent the aforementioned social evils.

Commissioner Bannu Division further said that Religious Scholars have a key role in eradicating social evils, which need to be made more active. So that the people can be aware of the influential role of the Scholars in the society. And get rid of the diseases of Social problems. Commander 116 Brigade Brigadier Muhammad Tayyeb highlighted the fundamental role of religious Scholars in the society and said that people of all schools of thought should unite to root out the evils in the society by promoting mutual relations. By which social evils can be eradicated and prevented as well from spreading further. He told the Scholars that they can contact him on any issue, for which his doors

will always be open.

In the discussion it was also decided that on the basis of mutual cooperation, the Administration, Pakistan Army, Police, Ulama will play a full role to uproot all the evils in the society. On this occasion, it was also agreed that the relations of the Religious Scholars with the divisional and district administrations and other institutions should be further promoted. Moreover, the Religious Scholars also felt very happy to sit on a table together with Commissioner Bannu Division Parwaiz Sabat Khel, Commander 116 Brigade, Brigadier Muhammad Tayyeb and other Administrative officials and discuss Social problems and their basic solutions. Religious Scholars also expressed that no effort will be spared from them in fulfilling this common national duty.

At the end of the Iftar program, the scholars invited Commissioner Bannu Division Parwaiz Sabat Khel and Commander 116 Brigade Brigadier Muhammad Tayyeb along with other officials to come to mosques and madrasas. Which they happily accepted. On this occasion, special prayers were also offered for the development and prosperity of Bannu Division and the security of the country and the Nation.

3 killed in Swabi incidents

F.P. Report

SWABI: Three persons were killed in separate incidents in different areas of the district, said police on Saturday.

Mahmoodul Hassan, resident of Zarobi lodged FIR in Topi police station that his father was asleep in the porch of their house at night. When they visited to awake him for the fast, he was not present and was been hanged by unknown persons in the field near our house.

Similarly, Fayaz Ali, resident of Menai lodged FIR in Swabi police station that his brother Usman (21) had been killed and his body was thrown into the mountains. Meanwhile, Abdul Bais resident of Kaddi, was killed in a traffic accident between motorcycle and raksha near Thandkoi Jabba. The police registered all the three cases and started investigation.

3 alleged dacoits killed

F.P. Report

KHUSHAB: As many as three dacoits were killed while following by public to face dacoity with failure by the hitting of vehicle in the premises Civil Hospital Quaidabad, last day.

According to details the dacoity incidents was took place near Mauza Amir Wala on Shumar Jurnal Road Quaidabad the other day after Ifitari and the Robbers took away the car driver Dost Muhammad alias Major took the mobile phone and Mony net cash and went out to Amir wala on Jamali road then the car rider chased and hit the Motorcycle near the house o Malik Aftab Gunjial from which 3 three motorcyclist robbers died after reaching 2 two Civil Hospital Quaidabad on one occasion.

All the three robbers were identified were residence of Mauza Paka Ghajara wan Bachran a village in Mianwali District among three who lost their lives are two real brothers Mohammad Naeem and Mohammad Adeel s/o Mohammad Khalil and his companion Mohammad Khan.

Meanwhile, on Saqib Shah died when a heavy iron block fell on him when he was on duty in the flying cement factory Mangwal khushab. Saqib shah Residence of Mianwali District was working in flying cement factory during his duty a heavy iron block suddenly fell on him and he was killed on the spot.

Eight arrested

SARGODHA (INP): Police on Saturday claimed to have arrested eight criminals in the district and recovered weapons and narcotics. Police Spokesman Qaiser Awan said different police stations raided and arrested Amir, Shahid, Rafaqat, Shafique, Rehman, Nouman, Suleman and Shah Atta besides recovering 600liters of liquor, 1.2-kg of hashish, three pistols, four guns, 367 rounds, 0.1 kg opium and valuables.

Two men shot at by robbers over resistance

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD (INP): Robbers allegedly killed two motorcyclists for resisting robbery on road in Jalalpur Bhattian city of Hafizabad district, police told media on Saturday.

According to the reports, unidentified robbers stopped two motorcyclists on Kaisay road in Jalalpur Bhattian at gunpoint and threatened to hand over all their possessions. On showing resistance, the robbers opened fire on both motorcyclists.

Both the motorcyclists got severe injuries. Both the victims succumbed to their injuries at the spot as police reached there. The Police shifted deceased dead bodies to hospital for autopsy. After collected possible evidence, police have arranged teams to hunt the killers.

The police vowed to arrest the culprits and bring them to justice according to the law. The police said. Senior authorities have ordered to take stern action against such street crimes. But on the other hand the victims of the deceased families blocked Lahore road to stage a protest and demanded the immediate arrest of the robbers involved in killing of their

love ones.

CEO reviews quality of education at public sector institutions: Chief Executive Officer Education Hafizabad Wazir Ahmad Agha visited different schools in Tehsil Pindi Bhattian to review quality of education being imparted to students in the schools. He also visited examination centres of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Gujranwala and inspected arrangement to provide peaceful atmosphere to students as well as maintain zero concept of cheating in the examination.

He directed the examination staff to perform their duties honestly and transparently without any fear and favour. He warned that no compromise would be made on transparency of examination and punitive action would be taken in case of received any complaint. While visiting the schools, he checked process of teaching, learning in the classrooms and said that teaching is a national cause which was played key role in nation building. CEO directed the school staff to achieve target of enrolment of out of school children and took feedback regarding

'Sarsabiz' Pakistan Campaign launched in the schools.

Public demands stern actions against dacoits: President Awami Mahaz Hafizabad Rana Khalid Mehmood said that District Police Hafizabad have arrested 27 accused involved in different crimes, recovered booted articles and cash worth three Koror rupees from accused and returned recovered articles to their owners is appreciable performance of police under the leadership of District Police Officer Dr. Fahad Ahmad who introduced result-oriented policies for restoring confidence of people on police force and to ensure protection of life, property and honour of the people.

While addressing the meeting, Rana Khalid Mehmood said that DPO was taking different measures to promote concept of community policing and make the district abode of peace despite acute shortage of uhman resources in the police department. He demanded the IG Police Punjab to conclude Punjab Constabulary Farooqabad and divided the Cops among divisions for meeting shortage of Cops in district police.

Eid shopping reaches at climax across AJK

MIRPUR (APP): As the countdown to Eid ul Fitr is close to its conclusion, markets throughout Azad Jammu Kashmir, including the thickly-populated Mirpur district, wore a festive look these days as people came out in large number at the last leg of their Eid shopping.

Residents use to throng the markets in major cities including the State's metropolis Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Kotli, Bhimbher, Rawalakot, Palandri, Bagh to buy groceries, clothes, shoes and edibles.

Eid-ul-Fitr which marks

the end of the Holy month of Ramadan is likely to be celebrated in AJK most probably on April 22, subject to the sighting of the Shawaal moon.

This scribe reports that the business hub Shaheed Chowk, F/1, Naangi and Allama Iqbal Road in the city on Friday in Mirpur city witnessed a heavy rush of shoppers, leading to traffic chaos on all major routes. Traffic wardens had a tough time managing the traffic, particularly since the past few days.

It emerged that the thumping majority of the

masses were found busy in Eid shopping in various AJK cities particularly since Sunday last as only a couple of week was left in the arrival of the festival of Eid ul Fitr scheduled to be celebrated on April 22 across the country and AJK subject to sighting of Shawal moon.

At the same time, the local law enforcement authorities are hectically engaged in getting the masses strictly observed discipline during Eid shopping, particularly in big gatherings of shoppers in bazaars.

AC checks stock of fertilizer, sugar in Dir Lower

F.P. Report

DIR LOWER: Assistant Commissioner Timargarah Shehzad Khan Saturday visited various stocks of fertilizers and sugar and met with the dealers regarding the availability of fertilizers and sugar.

AC Timargarah also inspected the fertilizer and sugar godown in the bazaar Timargarah. During the checking, Assistant Commissioner Shehzad Khan checked the stock, no hoarding or high selling was found. He said, in the light of the instructions given by Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower Ifthikhar Ahmad, Assistant Commissioner/Price Magistrate Tamergarh

Shehzad Khan checked the warehouses of various wholesale dealers of fertilizer and sugar in Tamergarh.

Assistant Commissioner Timergarh checked the stock and records on the spot, no hoarding was found.

Fertilizer and sugar wholesale dealers have stock as per market supply. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower has issued instructions to the Assistant Director Consumer Protection Council and all the Assistant Additional Assistant Commissioners to check and submit reports regarding fertilizer and sugar on a daily basis.

ADC visits Afghan

refugees camp: Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Abdul Wali Khan Saturday visited the Afghan Refugees Camp in Timargara and monitored the ongoing Anti-Polio campaign.

During his visit, Abdul Wali Khan gave instructions to the workers in the anti-polio campaign. On the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Dir Lower Ifthikhar Ahmed, Additional Deputy Commissioner General Abdul Wali Khan also checked the Maternal Child Center of Afghan Refugees Camp on the second day of the ongoing Anti-Polio campaign in Timargarah Afghan Refugees Camp.



US displays firepower in combat drills with Philippines

FORT MAGSAYSAY, Philippines (AP): US and Filipino forces blasted vehicles with anti-tank missiles in combat-readiness drills in the Philippines that are part of a show of American firepower that has alarmed China.

The long-time treaty allies are holding their largest joint military exercises called Balikatan — Tagalog for shoulder-to-shoulder — in decades. They involve about 17,600 military personnel and will feature live-fire maneuvers, including a ship-sinking rocket attack and beach assaults to simulate retaking an island near the disputed South China Sea. In a gunnery range at Fort Magsaysay, a northern Philippine training camp for Filipino special forces, American and Filipino troops fired Javelin guided missiles toward three target vehicles simulating a battle zone. The missiles streaked at a low altitude for more than half a kilometer (half a mile) toward their targets and exploded in a fireball that shook the ground.

"This is what it looks like when the US and Philippine militaries come together, train together," US Army Pacific commander Gen. Charles Flynn said. "What you're witnessing here today is really operationalizing everything that our political leaders are talking about from integrated deterrence to campaigning to building an enduring advantage," Flynn told journalists invited to witness the drills.

US troops also displayed other weapons including sniper rifles with night-vision scopes that could hit targets more than a kilometer (half a mile) away with high precision, and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, which are rocket and missile launchers that have been used by Ukrainian forces against Russia. Philippine army chief Lt. Gen. Romeo Brawner said the Philippine military wants to acquire Javelins and HIMARS from the



United States under a special foreign military sales arrangement that is part of efforts to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

It's uncertain when the Philippines can secure such weapons while Ukraine presses the US and other Western nations for more military assistance, he said. "These weapon systems are relatively more affordable for us as we shift to external defense," Brawner said.

Last month, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office last June, said the Philippine military's focus is shifting from decades of battling communist and Muslim insurgents to external defense to ensure the protection of the country's territory as disputes with China over the contested South China Sea persist. Marcos also approved a wider US military presence in the Philippines by allowing rotating batches of American forces to stay in four more Philippine military camps. That's a sharp turnaround from his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who feared that an American military footprint could antagonize Beijing.

Efforts under Marcos to boost the territorial defenses have dovetailed with the Biden administration's bid to strengthen alliances to better counter China, including in a possible confrontation over Taiwan, a self-governed island democracy that Beijing claims as its own. China has strongly opposed the expanded American military presence in the Philippines, which allows US forces to establish military staging grounds and surveillance outposts in the northern Philippines across the sea from Taiwan and in western Philippine provinces facing the disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety.

China warned that a deepening security alliance between Washington and Manila and their ongoing military drills in the Philippines should not harm its security and territorial interests or interfere in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said such military cooperation "should not target any third party and should be conducive to regional peace and stability."

Ukraine says it is finding more Chinese components in Russian weapons

LONDON/FRANKFURT (Reuters): Ukrainian forces are finding a growing number of components from China in Russian weapons used in Ukraine, a senior adviser in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office told Reuters, as Western supplies are squeezed by sanctions.

In "the weapons recovered from the battlefield we continue to find different electronics," said Vladyslav Vlasniuk, who advises the president's chief of staff on sanctions policy. "The trend is now that there is less Western-made components but more — not hard (to) guess which country — made components. Of course, China," he said via a video call.

China has repeatedly denied sending military equipment to Russia since Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The assault triggered Western sanctions, including on sending military and dual-use technology such as microchips that could be used in either ordinary appliances or weapons. Intelligence gathered by Ukrainian experts from the battlefield and shared with Reuters stated that Chinese-made components were found in a navigation system in Orlan aerial drones that had previously used a Swiss system.

The experts also reported finding Chinese parts in the fire control system in Russian tanks that had earlier used French-made parts. Reuters could not independently verify the intelligence, including whether the components mentioned may have been intended for non-military use or whether they were moved to Russia by a third party. "We're picking (up) a lot of different stuff, China made," Vlasniuk said.

Asked whether Chinese companies had provided parts for Russian military hardware, China's foreign ministry spokesperson's office told Reuters: "Throughout history, China has launched normal trade cooperation with all countries, including Russia, on the basis of equality and mutual benefit." "As for military item exports, China has throughout adopted a prudent and responsible attitude. China's position and actions have always been this way," Vlasniuk said that Ukraine was able to identify some manufacturers or suppliers and share that information with Western allies.

He named China North Industries Group (Norinco), a Chinese weapons maker, as one supplier and military supplier Xinxing Guangzhou Import & Export Co as another, without saying what they had supplied. A member of staff at Norinco, who declined to give their name, said the company was "not providing military equipment components to Russia".

Xinxing Guangzhou Import & Export Co did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Russia's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The top US diplomat Antony Blinken last month said China had not "crossed that line" yet of supplying Russia with lethal aid.

Italy probes how Russian, wanted by US, fled house arrest

ROME (AP): Italy is investigating how a Russian businessman escaped from house arrest near Milan to avoid extradition to the United States on sanctions-breaking charges.

Justice Minister Carlo Nordio has ordered a probe into the decision by court officials in Milan to transfer Artyom Uss from jail to house arrest in a nearby town while Italy's justice system decided on the US extradition request, Italian news reports said. Uss, 40, was detained on a US warrant in October 2022 at Milan Malpensa airport, where he was about to travel to Turkey for a connecting flight to Russia.

In November, he was moved to house arrest from jail. He apparently removed an electronic monitoring bracelet and escaped from Italy on March 22, a day after a Milan court recognized as legitimate the US extradition request. He resurfaced in Russia in early April.

Investigators believe he was driven away shortly after breaking the monitor-

ing device, crossed into neighboring Slovenia thanks to false identity documents and then traveled on to Serbia, where he purportedly caught a flight to Moscow, Italian daily Corriere della Sera said. Uss' father, a regional governor in Russia, thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin in a video for his son's return to his homeland, Italian media reported. Italian Prime Minister Giorgio Meloni, flanked by officials from the intelligence service and the Cabinet, appeared before a closed-door hearing of a standing parliamentary committee on intelligence, whose members asked about the dynamics of the escape.

For security reasons, committee members aren't supposed to reveal details of the hearings to reporters. News reports said lawmakers declined to comment publicly as they left. Italian media said Meloni ruled out any responsibility by her government for the escape. The United States is seeking Uss' extradition on

charges of smuggling Western technology in violation of Western sanctions and of money laundering. Corriere della Sera claimed Uss was suspected of involvement in contraband operations to ship millions of barrels of oil from Venezuela to Russia and China.

Turin daily La Stampa, citing unidentified Milan justice officials, said that investigators contend that perhaps at least half-dozen individuals, all from eastern Europe, were involved in aiding the escape. Citing Milan court documents, Italian news agency ANSA said that Italy's justice ministry had sought to assuage US justice officials' concerns in a letter in early December over the transfer to house arrest by saying Uss was outfitted with an electronic monitoring device. According to Corriere della Sera, US authorities in late November had alerted Italian justice ministry officials to the risk that Uss could flee.

US, Vietnam say they hope to boost ties

HANOI (Reuters): Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed a willingness on Saturday to upgrade bilateral ties as the US seeks to balance an increasingly assertive China.

In his first visit to the key southeast Asian country as the top US diplomat, Blinken met Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, saying during that the past decade there has been "extraordinary progress" in the bilateral relationship. Noting that the two nations mark the 10th anniversary of their formal partnership this year, Blinken told reporters Washington had "hope to be able to take it to an even higher, higher level."

Chinh said both sides were "looking to further strengthening, further elevating our bilateral ties to a new height," after a phone call last month between President Joe Biden and the

head of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong. Vietnam is a crucial Southeast Asian trading partner that Washington is looking to bolster ties with as it works to balance China's growing assertiveness in the region and beyond.

The diplomatic anniversary call could lead to a meeting between the two in July or other high-level meetings, analysts say. It is still unclear, though, when an upgrade of formal ties could be agreed. Blinken, who is to meet with top Vietnamese officials, including Trong, broke ground on a new US embassy compound in Hanoi after meeting the prime minister.

The US diplomat heads to Japan for a meeting of foreign ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations. The United States faces challenges in Southeast Asia in building a coalition to counter China and deter any potential

action by Beijing against Taiwan. Many countries in the region are reluctant to antagonise their giant neighbour, which is not just a military power but also a key trading partner and source of investment.

For Hanoi, it has been a difficult balancing act, being open to more cooperation with Washington without upsetting Beijing, even though Vietnam has been alarmed by China's growing military claims in the South China Sea. The diplomatic calculus is further complicated by increasingly close relations between Beijing and Moscow, which last year declared a "no limits" partnership shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But while the United States has been keen to push for stronger ties with Vietnam, Hanoi has been cautious, fearing the impact an upgrade of relations with Washington could have on its relations with Beijing.

Ukraine forces pull back, UK says

LONDON (Reuters): Ukrainian troops have been forced to withdraw from some territory in the battlefield city of Bakhmut as Russia mounts a renewed assault there with intense artillery fire over the past two days, Britain said in an intelligence update.

"Russia has re-energised its assault on the Donetsk Oblast town of Bakhmut as forces of the Russian MoD and Wagner Group have improved co-operation," it said, referring to Russia's defence ministry and its main mercenary force. "Ukrainian forces face significant resupply issues but have made orderly withdrawals from the positions they have been forced to concede," Britain's military

said in a daily intelligence update.

Wagner has taken the lead on the Russian side in the months-long battle, deadliest of the war for troops on both sides, but the mercenary group's leader had complained of poor support for his forces from the regular military. "The Ukrainian defence still holds the western districts of the town but has been subjected to particularly intense Russian artillery fire over the previous 48 hours," the British update said.

It said Wagner units were now focusing on advancing in the centre of Bakhmut, while Russian paratroopers were relieving them in attacks on the city's flanks. Bakhmut, which

held around 70,000 people before the war, has been Russia's main target in a massive winter offensive that has so far yielded scant gains despite infantry ground combat of an intensity unseen in Europe since World War Two.

Capturing the city would be Russia's first substantial victory in eight months. Moscow says it would open a route to capturing more territory in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, a major war aim. Ukraine, which is preparing for its own counteroffensive, had appeared likely to abandon Bakhmut at the end of February, but announced in March it would fight on there, saying Russia was taking higher casualties trying to storm it.

Cuba expects to resume US deportation flights this month

BETHESDA, Md. (AP): Cuba plans to resume accepting deportation flights from the United States this month, a Cuban official said, echoing US concerns about the highest levels of Cuban migration in six decades.

Carlos Fernandez de Cossio, Cuba's deputy foreign minister, said flights are expected before the US ends coronavirus pandemic-related restrictions on asylum on May 11, which is widely projected to increase the number of people seeking entry to the US at the US-Mexico border. The diplomat spoke in an interview with The Associated Press at the Cuban ambassador's residence outside Washington after what he called "a pro-

ductive meeting" with US Department of Homeland Security officials to discuss migration.

"We have a lot of common understanding, both parties, the United States and Cuba, about the nature of the problem," he said. Fernandez de Cossio said there was no agreement on the frequency of flights, which will depend on US and Cuban capacity. But he said there was no reason they can't return to pre-pandemic levels of about twice a month. The last flight was in December 2020.

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Cubans were stopped nearly 43,000 times at the US

border with Mexico in December, becoming one of the largest nationalities entering the United States. Numbers plummeted in January after President Joe Biden's administration announced that Cubans could fly to the US if they applied online and had a financial sponsor and that they would be expelled back to Mexico if they crossed the border illegally.

"We're going to see if we can get one in the coming weeks and then to make that regular so that people can be easily removed, not to Mexico but directly to Cuba," Fernandez de Cossio said. He said that numbers of Cubans fleeing on boats, particularly high-powered

vessels associated with smugglers, have been rising after a fall earlier this year and that more Cubans were leaving the country to fly to Nicaragua as tourists, typically the first step for Cubans to travel by land to the US-Mexico border.

Fernandez de Cossio said the changes announced in January under which people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela can apply for humanitarian parole to come to the US have been successful in reducing the numbers of Cubans trying to cross the US-Mexico border. But he cautioned that it wasn't a long-term fix. "It would be irresponsible for us or naive to think that this

Finland starts fence on Russian border amid migration, security concerns

IMATRA, Finland (Reuters): Finland is building the first stretch of a fence on its border with Russia, less than two weeks after it joined the NATO military alliance to complete a security U-turn taken in response to the war in Ukraine.

Fearing retaliation from the east following its NATO application, the government decided last year to construct the barrier, primarily in case Russia moved to flood the border with migrants. Finland aims to guard against a repeat of events on the European Union's eastern frontier in Poland in winter 2021, when the bloc accused neighbouring Belarus - a staunch Russian

ally - of engineering a crisis by flying in migrants from the Middle East, giving them visas and pushing them across the border.

Made of steel mesh, the Finnish fence is scheduled to cover some 200 kilometres (125 miles) of the most critical parts of its border by the end of 2026. Project manager Ismo Kurki said that, while it is not intended to stop any invasion attempt, the fence will have surveillance equipment. Meanwhile, there has so far been little human activity along the border, which stretches to 1,300 km in all.

Last year, Finland detected only 30 illegal crossings there, while Russian border guards stopped some 800 attempts

to enter Finland, the Finnish Border Guard said. "The situation at the Finnish-Russian border has been stable and is stable at the moment," said Border Guard Brigadier General Jari Tolppanen, as one of his teams worked on the first 3-kilometre (1.9-mile) stage of the fence at Imatra, some 250km (155 miles) northeast of Helsinki. "But in this totally changed (security) situation, Finland must have more credible and more independent border control. And Finland needs to be less dependent on the Russian border control," he added.

Poland and the Baltic States have already begun erecting fences on their

borders with Russia and Belarus following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Until now, the Finnish-Russian border has been a mere line in the vast forests covering the area, marked only by a low wire fence intended to stop cattle and other domestic animals but not people. The new fence will be 3 metres (10ft) high, topped with razor-wire and tracked by a road, and cost an estimated 380 million euros (\$417 million). "Most of (the border area) is very remote and very difficult to access. We construct the target areas which are accessible by vehicle and where large-scale illegal immigration is likely," Tolppanen said.

He named China North Industries Group (Norinco), a Chinese weapons maker, as one supplier and military supplier Xinxing Guangzhou Import & Export Co as another, without saying what they had supplied. A member of staff at Norinco, who declined to give their name, said the company was "not providing military equipment components to Russia".

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G7 diplomats to grapple with Ukraine, China, North Korea crises

KARUIZAWA (AP): Russian threats to nuke Ukraine. China's belligerent military moves around rival Taiwan. North Korea's unprecedented run of missile testing. The top diplomats from some of the world's most powerful democracies will have plenty to discuss when they gather in the hot spring resort town of Karuizawa for the so-called Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting.

Some believe that with the weakening of the United Nations, amid Russian and Chinese intransigence on the Security Council, global forums like the G7 are even more important. But there's also considerable doubt that diplomats from mostly Western democracies can find ways to influence, let alone stop, authoritarian nations that are more and more willing to use violence, or its threat, to pursue their interests.

Besides the global hotspots, foreign ministers from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and the European Union are expected to discuss ways to improve human rights and democracy, and also issues impor-

tant to poorer nations that may feel underrepresented by the focus on wealthy countries with stable governments. The agenda will be dominated, however, by worries over Russia, China and North Korea, and an awareness of the unmistakable interconnectedness of these and other foreign policy headaches.

This year's G7 meetings are the most important in the gathering's history, given the pressing need to end Russia's war in Ukraine and to stop a potential invasion of Taiwan by China, according to Yuichi Hosoya, an international politics professor at Keio University in Japan. A broad concentration on nuclear issues was always going to be important at this year's G7 talks, which culminate with the main leaders' summit next month in Hiroshima, the target of the first nuclear bomb used in war.

The issue is more urgent amid fears that Russian President Vladimir Putin, as he becomes desperate over failures in Ukraine, might use a tactical nuclear weapon to win the war. China is seen as one of the few nations that might influ-

ence Russia's moves in Ukraine, and the foreign policy alignment between the world's two largest autocracies will be a major focus in Karuizawa.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who appears increasingly emboldened to pursue his authoritarian impulses, recently traveled to Moscow and committed to deepen bilateral relations. That has "cast a shadow over hopes that Beijing would pressure Putin to draw down (his) conflict," according to Stephen Nagy, an Asia expert at International Christian University in Tokyo. During his visit to Beijing this month, French President Emmanuel Macron appealed to Xi to "bring Russia to its senses," but received only a tepid response and additional calls for a political resolution.

Japan might use the G7 to announce a boost to its already substantial support of Ukraine, said Jeffrey Hall, a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies. "Japan's leadership sees cooperation on security issues related to Ukraine as a possible avenue towards greater security cooperation in the Pacific," Hall said.

China's increasingly bold attempts to intimidate self-governing Taiwan were on full display when Beijing recently sent planes and ships to conduct a simulated encirclement of the island, which China claims as its territory. China's broad military expansion, including a rapid jump in its nuclear warheads, a tougher line on its claim to the South China Sea and recent statements from Xi painting a scenario of impending confrontation have galvanized fears among G7 nations.

Beijing and Pyongyang are especially worried about Japanese military expansion, which they see as an attempt to "weaken both capitals' efforts to rewrite the regional security architecture in their favor," Nagy said. Under Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Tokyo has made a major break from its self-defense-only post-World War II principles, looking to acquire preemptive strike capabilities and cruise missiles to counter growing threats from North Korea, China and Russia.

While the G7 examines ways to manage China's rise, Beijing is bolstering relations with countries from

Pakistan to Argentina eager for trade and investment. This will massively expand China's global footprint and challenge North American and European attempts to link investment to good governance and respect for human rights. Kishida's decision to invite Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the leaders' summit next month "signals Japan's desire to strengthen security cooperation with one of China's rivals. When Japan calls for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific,' it is calling for nations to stand against the way China and Russia conduct themselves internationally," Hall said.

This year's G7 talks are crucial in revitalizing diplomacy aimed at pressuring a hostile North Korea to return to disarmament negotiations, especially with a dysfunctional UN Security Council that's divided between permanent members, according to Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University. Since last year North Korea has test-fired around 100 missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles that showed the potential of reaching the US mainland

and a variety of other shorter-range weapons that threaten South Korea and Japan. Leader Kim Jong Un may be looking to use the global distraction of Russia's war on Ukraine to expand a nuclear arsenal he sees as the strongest guarantee of his family's dynastic rule. Beijing and Moscow last year blocked a US-led drive to tighten Security Council sanctions on North Korea over its major missile tests.

It's unlikely that the Security Council will tighten sanctions even if North Korea conducts what would be its first nuclear test since 2017. But a meaningful punitive response could be generated by a network of unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, its allies and "like-minded" European partners gathered at the G7, a tact similar to the way Washington pressures Moscow over its aggression in Ukraine, Park said. "The importance of the G7 has been greatly strengthened as it's obvious that the role and function of the UN Security Council is being unraveled by Russia and China and there is a need to find something new to replace it," Park said.

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Menace of terrorism and national prerequisite

CHIEF of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir addressed the in-camera session of the Lower of the Parliament (the National Assembly) on Friday, while senior Commanders of the Pakistan Army gave a detailed overview of the current situation to the parliamentarians. According to the Army Chief, the negotiations with militants in the past helped terrorists regroup in the country. The Security Forces are carrying out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) on a daily basis while the terrorists have no other option but to accept the writ of the state. The Army Chief categorically declared that elected representatives of the people should decide the fate of the nation, and the Army will fully back the country's journey of growth and success.

The recent upsurge in terrorism and loss of precious lives has not only rocked the entire nation but also dispelled an unbeatable national resolve to eliminate the menace of terrorism from society. The gravity of the situation and volume of the threat was of such a serious nature that the banned terrorist outfits not only established their stronghold in the far-flung areas but also enjoy open support from across the Durand line, which caused serious concerns among the masses and raised questions about the dealing and strategy of the previous government regarding the banned terrorist outfits. An ever-widening political polarization and persistent economic meltdown further caused anxiety in the public regarding the writ of law and governance in the country. Although the incumbent government could not convene an All Parties Conference (APC) of all political stakeholders because of no cooperation from the opposition yet it effectively used the National Security Council (NSC) forum to mobilize the anti-terrorism infrastructure including the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), CTD and Police, while Pakistan Army has also intensified its Intelligence Based Operations (IBOs) to effectively eradicate this menace from the terrorism, hit areas in the country.

Realistically, the state and people of Pakistan had always paid a heavy price for the wrong and irrational decisions of its civilian and military leaders throughout the past that led the nation to the current economic default and meek security situation in the country. The decision of joining the Western military bloc and Ayub Khan's invasion against democracy was the beginning of this peril while Zia-ul-Haq's involvement in Afghan jihad and Musharraf's alliance in the US-led war on terrorism were crucial steps in making up for this catastrophe in the country. Surprisingly, our valiant security forces and the people of Pakistan had defeated the menace of terrorism a few years back but purblind Pakistani leaders and so-called jihadi strategists reenvisioned this monster after the Taliban take over in Afghanistan.

Pakistani rulers and national institutions mostly betrayed the nation and lied to the public after trading national interests and striking secret deals with foreign powers, whereas all that had been done in the garb of national interest and security of the country. However, neither the national interest nor the sovereignty of the country could be safeguarded by the end of the day. Over the years, Pakistan's national policy remained vague and frenzy regarding sensitive issues relating to national security. The state always preferred dialogue with religious fanatics who waged open war against the nation but remained determined on the military solution to the Balochistan issue. Once considered to be a security risk, PTM is a partner in the ruling coalition government while banned MQM London and Altaf Hussain might play any role in future setup in the country.

There have been talks regarding Pakistan's hot pursuit of terrorists inside Afghan territory that resembles India's policy of surgical strikes and is likely to be counterproductive strategically and at the diplomatic level. Hence, Pakistan first needs to bring its house in order, by introducing pivotal changes in the national policy-making process of the country. Civil and Military bureaucracy lacks vision and always chooses the tactical nature of transactional reciprocity relationships instead of defending the long-term strategic interests of the country. Therefore, political leadership must take lead and define the long-term domestic and foreign policy goal while using institutional and scholarly inputs from relevant quarters, so the nation comes out of recurrent aftershocks of wrong choices of the past leaders and moves toward peace and stability in the future.

Ukraine, Saudi Arabia closer than ever after 30 years of ties

APRIL 14 is a special date for Ukrainian-Saudi relations. On this date 30 years ago, then-Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma, acting as the head of a Ukrainian governmental delegation, arrived in Saudi Arabia to officially establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Time flies. Today we are already celebrating three decades of friendship and partnership. During this time, the countries have laid down rock-solid foundations for their bilateral relations and achieved positive results in numerous spheres. Ukraine and Saudi Arabia have gained a high level of experience, mutual respect and understanding. We are mature enough to see the horizons of emerging opportunities.

We can observe how the pace of political dialogue between our countries has confidently grown since 1993. In 2003, Kuchma, by then the second president of Ukraine, paid an official visit to the Kingdom. It was the first visit by a Ukrainian leader to the Arabian Peninsula and was aimed primarily at emphasizing Ukraine's strong will to become closer to its Gulf friends, while setting up mutually beneficial partnerships.

We had a chance to witness the initial point of interparliamentary dialogue in 2011, when Kyiv hosted Shoura Council Speaker Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Asheikh. He met with the leadership of the Verkhovna Rada and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

In 2017, the fifth president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, was warmly

received by King Salman. This official visit to Saudi Arabia not only confirmed the consistency of Ukraine's policy on the expansion of its bilateral relations with Riyadh, but it also acknowledged the existence of favorable prerequisites for improving bilateral cooperation in promising directions in the energy, agrarian, military-technical, scientific-educational and humanitarian spheres.

Anotolii Petrenko

ated our expectations. It was an obvious sign of solidarity with Ukraine, which on Friday will be on the 415th day of its fight, effectively neutralizing every tactical move of the Russian war machine and methodically paving the way to victory.

Indeed, the February visit of Prince Faisal bin Farhan stands out and signifies the event as being of

The visit of the Saudi minister of foreign affairs to Ukraine this year reiterated our expectations. It was an obvious sign of solidarity with Ukraine, which on Friday will be on the 415th day of its fight, effectively neutralizing every tactical move of the Russian war machine and methodically paving the way to victory. Indeed, the February visit of Prince Faisal bin Farhan stands out and signifies the event as being of high importance, since it was the first visit by a Saudi foreign minister to Ukraine since the establishment of diplomatic relations 30 years ago. It was particularly important that the partners concluded two agreements aimed at providing Ukraine with the necessary humanitarian and energy support.

The series of phone calls held between President Volodymyr Zelensky and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2022 testify to the further significant enhancement of political communications, thus multifacetedly enriching Ukrainian-Saudi dialogue amid the current circumstances. This period of political intensification will continue and, hopefully, the moment is coming when we will welcome the crown prince in Kyiv and arrange a visit to Riyadh by Zelensky.

The visit of the Saudi minister of foreign affairs to Ukraine this year reiterated

high importance, since it was the first visit by a Saudi foreign minister to Ukraine since the establishment of diplomatic relations 30 years ago. It was particularly important that the partners concluded two agreements aimed at providing Ukraine with the necessary humanitarian and energy support. The Ukrainian people are grateful to the Kingdom for its precious help and the sympathy of Saudi Arabia's leadership.

The potential for growth in Ukraine-Saudi relations is, without exaggeration, tremendous. Trade and economic cooperation, culture,

more are to come.

High-level bilateral engagements, such as the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, are important tools for developing bilateral relations. Ukraine and Saudi Arabia have already convened six sessions of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation and we are currently working on arranging the seventh round.

The dynamics of our trade relations meet our expectations but still have the potential to grow. According to official data,

bilateral trade turnover in 2022 reached about \$750 million, with Ukraine's exports estimated at \$440 million and Saudi Arabia's at \$310 million. Tirelessly and dedicatedly, we are working on shortening the distance between the Ukrainian and Saudi people, both mentally and culturally. One could not help but notice the huge influx of tourists from Gulf countries to Ukrainian cities during 2021, against the

menu, forging promising bonds of economic partnership that will definitely be beneficial for both nations.

Our country is one of the recognized world leaders in the IT field. We have highly qualified IT specialists and can offer our experience in the areas of the digital transformation, cybersecurity, blockchain technologies and cloud solutions. Food security remains our priority track. The main focus now is on the production of agricultural goods with maximum added value. And this is the prosperous way to move in the future. We hope that Saudi Arabia will become both a credible foreign market for Ukrainian goods and a gateway for their distribution across the region.

Energy diversification, which is crucial for our people's lives and Ukrainian independence, is one more way that we would like to move along hand in hand with Saudi Arabia and, even more broadly, with all GCC members. Both countries successfully cooperate within the framework of international and regional organizations. We are grateful for Saudi Arabia's consistent support of UN General Assembly resolutions aimed at restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine and preserving its national sovereignty. Thus, the Ukrainian Peace Formula, endorsed by a majority of the international community through the adoption of a relevant UNGA resolution on Feb. 23, has the potential to bring about long-term peace in Ukraine, Europe and the globe. We welcome the Kingdom joining us in making it a reality.

In the post-Brexit wreckage, just one Tory strategy remains: The theatre of cruelty

John Harris

FIVE years ago, I went to Coventry to meet a married couple from Sri Lanka who were stuck in the UK's asylum system. Under the auspices of a deal between the Home Office and one of its favoured private contractors, they and their two children lived in a house just outside the city centre. Two of the rooms were riddled with damp. A faulty central heating system meant the house was either impossibly cold, or so hot that it inflamed their baby daughter's eczema.

Then, as now, the law dictated that neither parent could work, so the family were living on an allowance of just over £20 a day. "We worry about the kids' health," they told me: everything they said was full of dread and anxiety, thanks to a day-to-day existence that was seemingly going to grind on indefinitely. I was introduced to that family by the pressure group Migrant Voice, which had just published a report about standards of accommodation for people seeking asylum. The testimony it included painted the same awful picture: "One room is always wet when it rains, so no one sleeps there"; "Currently I am experiencing a horde of flies because of dead rats in the kitchen." To make things even grimmer, there was an abiding sense of a system whose

dysfunction and sclerosis were most of the way to being completely intentional, in keeping with the government's "hostile environment" doctrine.

At that point, there were about 40,000 such people, housed by the Home Office and awaiting decisions on asylum claims. Now that number has ballooned to more than 160,000, and the conversation about this area of policy has shifted to all that noise and controversy about hotels. Amid accounts of people - including children - staying in such facilities for well over a year, another report from Migrant Voice is due in about a fortnight. Though it will acknowledge that some just about meet the required standards, it will also describe people living and sleeping alongside complete strangers, with overburdened toilets and bathrooms, a complete lack of privacy and dignity, and security guards arbitrarily demanding to know the details of their hour-to-hour movements. Meanwhile, the descent of Suella Braverman's ministry speeds on. On Sunday, the home secretary - who says she wants to be "a doer, someone of action" - did a characteristically inflammatory round of interviews, defending her intention to send people to Rwanda as she was reminded that only five years ago, 12 refugees were killed by police there

in the midst of protests about their treatment ("I'm not familiar with that particular case," she said, which is quite an answer).

She was also asked about plans to house asylum seekers in requisitioned "barges" and disused military facilities. "We are looking at all sorts of lands [sic], sites and vessels," she insisted. It all reflected a plain political fact - that as the illegal migration bill goes through parliament and asylum gives way to a policy of summary deportation, even the patina of basic decency has evaporated. "Accommodation for migrants should meet their essential living needs and nothing more," said Braverman's ministerial colleague Robert Jenrick last week. And this is the polite version. Jonathan Gullis, the increasingly infamous Conservative MP for Stoke-on-Trent North, recently made a speech in the Commons that, in its own very small way, may well mark post-Brexit politics' moral nadir. When it came to the future accommodation of asylum seekers, he said, "there are disused army bases, and I have no issue with the use of Portakabins or tents. They are perfectly acceptable short-term accommodation [sic], so long as we deliver on the policy of ensuring that people are removed

after 28 days to a safe third country. Rwanda is perfectly safe."

By way of constant mood music, there are the outpourings of Lee Anderson, a deputy chair of the Conservative party, the MP for a seat in the old Nottinghamshire coalfield, and a newly appointed presenter on GB News, which will be paying him an annual £100,000 - in return, presumably, for continuing to insist that asylum seekers ought to be "sent back the same day", and that recent far-right protests outside some of the aforementioned hotels have been made up of "normal family people". Which brings us to an integral element of modern politics: the idea that all this cruelty is simply what the public demand, not least in the fabled "red wall". Clearly, some people have pungent opinions about refugees and the asylum system, and this is true in many of the post-industrial places that switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019. As ever, it is not hard to work out part of the reason why: if you have always had the sense of being neglected, and everyday life is often insecure and precarious, then hyped-up accounts of massed new arrivals (who are also said to be "illegal") and clear evidence of a system in disarray will sound not just

like the stuff of administrative chaos, but an indirect warning of even less housing, even lower wages and even more fragile public services.

That is not to claim that the nastiness of some people's views is merely an expression of poverty and inequality, and thereby absolve them of responsibility. But it is also worth looking at all this from the other end of the moral telescope: if there were more homes and secure jobs, and we had seen even the beginnings of the rebalancing that was promised after the Brexit referendum, does anyone think that these people and places would be nearly as irate as the Tories claim? I don't. To understand the tensions within red-wall Conservatism, you have to keep an eye on two sets of headlines. One is all about the cynical blurring of issues relating to refugees and immigration, the government's appalling running down of its own asylum system, and legislation that has more to do with posturing than anything halfway practical, let alone ethical. The other is about a very different set of promises and pledges, and how few of them have been delivered.

The government has spent less than 10% of its £4.8bn levelling up fund since it was launched in 2020; even some of the most ambitious projects have

barely been started. And however much money has been awarded for local regeneration bids, austerity goes on. In Gullis's home patch, the Tory council may have recently announced big regeneration plans, but it is implementing a cuts programme that takes in mental health care, street lighting, libraries, transport for children with special needs, and more. On Anderson's home turf, the key grant the district council receives from Whitehall has gone from £15m to £100,000 over the past 10 years. As an election looms, a panicked government has a new strategy that is actually very old: kicking around some of the weakest and most vulnerable people, in the hope that organised nastiness might restore the air of effectiveness that its failures have fatally undermined. The Labour party is too nervous about the red wall to point out much of this. But it is there, as clear as day: politics as a constant theatre of cruelty. Some people, it seems, must suffer trauma, intolerable living conditions, sleepless nights and what amounts to internment, so the voters who seem to have gone back to Labour might somehow change their minds. The morals that calculation reveals are obviously bankrupt: if there are any halfway decent Tories left, it might be time to finally speak up.

The Guardian

WTO remains vital despite criticisms

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

WHAT came to be known as the "greatest trade agreement in history" was signed in Marrakesh, Morocco, 29 years ago on Saturday during a gathering of representatives from more than 120 countries. The Marrakesh Agreement led to the creation of the World Trade Organization, whose membership has now grown to 164 states and organizations. For 2023-2024, the World Trade Organization General Council has selected Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the WTO Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel to chair its Trade Policy Review Body.

It took a significant amount of political capital to establish the WTO, which is considered to be the largest international economic body in the world. It is the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which was founded after the Second World War by a

multilateral treaty signed by 23 countries in order to enhance economic cooperation between nations.

Several rounds of negotiations, including the Kennedy and Tokyo Rounds, led to agreements on reducing tariffs and removing non-tariff barriers. Due to globalization, the Uruguay Round of negotiations between 1986 and 1994 expanded the trading system to include other areas, such as intellectual property rights and trade in services. This led to the Marrakesh Agreement and the establishment of the WTO.

"The agreements you will sign here this week mean opportunities to expand trade, economic growth and employment," said Peter Sutherland, the last GATT director-general and the first WTO director-general, at the opening of the Marrakesh meeting. "They mean opportunities to promote sustainable development. And they also mean an opportunity — the

most significant one we have had for 50 years — to build a new basis for global economic cooperation."

Nearly 20 years after its establishment, the first multilateral agreement was reached in 2013 — the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which aimed to lower the cost of international trade. The WTO estimated that this would add more than half a percentage point to annual global gross domestic product. It stated: "Computable general equilibrium simulations predict export gains from the TFA of between \$750 billion and well over \$1 trillion dollars per annum, depending on the implementation time frame and coverage. Over the 2015-30 horizon, implementation of the TFA will add around 2.7 percent per year to world export growth and more than half a per cent per year to world GDP growth."

One of the criticisms of the WTO is linked to the

length of time that is often required to reach a major multilateral agreement. But this is partially due to the fact there are 164 members and it is natural that reaching a consensus — with each member having different economic goals and objectives — would be inherently difficult. Unlike the UN Security Council, whose five permanent members (the US, Russia, China, the UK and France) can vote to pass a resolution, the agreement of two-thirds of WTO members is required to ratify a multilateral agreement. On the other hand, when a multilateral agreement is reached at the WTO, it is more likely to be effective in its enforcement and implementation, and it is more likely to be a firm and durable agreement because it was accepted by all of its members, rather than being imposed by a few powerful states.

One solution that could enhance the functionality of the WTO would be to

encourage plurilateral agreements, which are reached by fewer members. These are agreements that do not require ratification from non-signatory members. They are also more specific in nature. What usually happens after such agreements are reached is that other member states subsequently begin to join.

For example, the Information Technology Agreement, which aims to reduce taxes and tariffs on information technology products, was first concluded by only 29 participants at the 1996 Singapore Ministerial Conference. But the number of participants has since grown to 82, accounting for more than 95 percent of global trade in IT products. According to a 2017 study in the World Trade Review, the Information Technology Agreement and its expansion was "the most successful attempt at trade liberalization under the auspices of the WTO since its inception in 1995."

Finally, the role that the WTO plays in resolving disputes should not be disregarded or underestimated. If not resolved properly, trade disputes can lead to political conflicts or to countries increasing tariffs or adopting protectionist policies that only harm their own economic growth. This was witnessed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The WTO states that it has "one of the most active interest dispute settlement mechanisms in the world. Since 1995, 616 disputes have been brought to the WTO and over 350 rulings have been issued."

In a nutshell, international trade stimulates economic growth and increases GDP. In spite of their criticisms, international organizations such as the WTO are needed to facilitate global trade and to prevent trade disputes between nations from spiraling out of control and turning into political conflicts or even military confrontations.

Europe should cherish US alliance

FRENCH President Emmanuel Macron's declaration this week on the need for "European sovereignty," which indicated a desire for independence from the US, created a large debate on both sides of the Atlantic. The main point was the timing of the declaration. Is it a coincidence that Macron made this statement right after his visit to Beijing? The timing made it look more like anti-US posturing rather than pro-European.

Moreover, the declaration of the French president sounded more like a grievance and a clear resentment toward the current war in Ukraine. Although he stated the need for independence on future geopolitical crises, it could easily be interpreted as meaning that the US is at fault for the situation in Ukraine. Added to this was a clear message of a neutral European position vis-a-vis the US' future relations with China.

One may ask to what extent Macron's views are reflected among other European leaders and within their countries? Is it a general feeling within Europe? If we focus on the core of the statement and not the timing, then all these plans of Europe being a third global power can and will only work if there is unity and a single policy. This is not the case today.

The EU has been defined by the Franco-German couple. Even more so since the UK left the bloc.

Khaled Abou Zahr

However, relations have been tense. At the beginning of this year, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Macron met in order to mend relations, especially over defense, energy and finances. It is quite a heavy list. Just before his visit to Washington last month, Scholz had chided China for not condemning Russia and warned it to refrain from delivering weapons to Moscow. One can understand why some analysts were quick to qualify Macron's declaration as nationalistically mercantile.

Macron had previously stated the need for a European army and he has been systematically calling for greater European planning. He has also repeatedly tried to find a modus vivendi with Vladimir Putin and Russia. This obviously failed. Europe was unable to show enough deterrence toward Moscow and was incapable of putting forward and securing a strategic vision that even Kyiv would respect. For these reasons, we should not be mistaken that there is definitely a need for a stronger European voice and political decision-making. Also, in order to achieve this, there needs to be a unique and exclusive European foreign policy. There cannot be a European agenda and 27 others adjacent to it. That is ridiculous.

In practice, this means that the EU needs to move toward the next step. This next step should be to

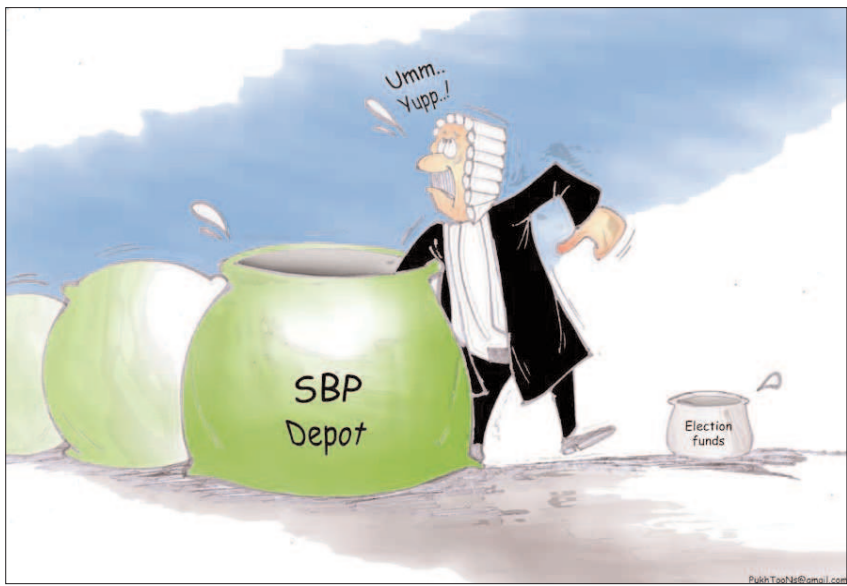
mutualize resources, whether on foreign policy or defense. This would mean the birth of a European confederation — a confederation with a unique foreign office and unique army. I once stated this necessity to a now-retired French diplomat friend and his answer was swift: "Thank you, Khaled, so you mean we need to send Leclerc tanks all over Europe? Well, no thank you." I disagreed on the method, as a common vision can achieve the impossible. Today, the conflict in Ukraine is urging Europe to take this bold step. And it is important for this to be anchored within the transatlantic alliance.

European sovereignty should not be a simple declaration that fizzles away with the news cycle, especially as it not only applies to geopolitics but also to the economy and data. Data sovereignty is non-existent in Europe and the answer to new tech has been to legislate overwhelmingly instead of bolstering innovation. However, things are improving. Lately, a European fund for digital sovereignty has been created and this is an extremely encouraging point. If we look at successful models, such as the European Investment Bank or the European Investment Fund, we notice a true and unique European focus. The same needs to happen in foreign politics and defense. It is time for the European Defense

Agency to become an army.

The conflict in Ukraine is a wake-up call. It has also revealed that Russia is now a subpar military threat. It still holds a massive nuclear arsenal and is a master in asymmetric policies, but there are ways to protect Europe from this threat. This means there is a possibility to find a solution, as well as to recalibrate NATO resources to more dangerous issues while strengthening European defenses. More importantly, this can only be achieved if Europe moves urgently toward a unified political voice. If this does not happen, it will only be an economic bloc without any way to protect its interests.

It is impossible in my mind to dissociate Europe from the US and a strong transatlantic alliance. There is an eternal debt to the US and its army. There are 13 American cemeteries in Europe that remind us of the sacrifices the US as a nation made to save the continent. Moreover, despite the criticism, the world — and not only Europe — has been much safer and in a better place as a result of US leadership. Hence, the US needs to regain the hearts and minds of its partners. So, if there are grievances, they should be addressed within a closed dialogue and not through media declarations. But Europe first needs to find its own voice and be aware that any weakening of the transatlantic alliance would have disastrous consequences.



Respect and tolerance in short supply in Jerusalem

Daoud Kuttab

THE two nuns were standing outside the Church of the Flagellation in Jerusalem when six men dressed in traditional Jewish Orthodox clothes and black hats passed by. The first man spat as he passed the nuns, and others followed with the same act of disrespect. The scene was captured on video that has been widely shared.

In another video from the old city of Jerusalem, Christians carrying a wooden cross pass by a Jewish man who also cursed the Christian faithful. These were not isolated acts. A month earlier the same church that the nuns were standing outside was vandalized by a religious Jew, whose attempt to torch the building was stopped by a vigilant guard. A nearby Anglican cemetery was also vandalized and two people carrying out the destruction of the crosses on the Protestant church were captured on security cameras.

At least 80 such acts of physical and verbal abuse were recorded in the first three months of 2023. Much of the hate, such as spitting at nuns and clergy, goes unreported. A large number of attacks take place in the Armenian quarter, which is next to the Jewish quarter. For the most part, even when these incidents are reported there is rarely any accountability.

Church clergy and lay Palestinian Christians have been sounding the alarm about this for years. This year the violence and hate speech have significantly increased, largely because of the Jewish supremacy rhetoric that has filled the airwaves since the

most far-right extremist government in Israel's history was formed in December. The Knesset is considering a law that would criminalize the Christian ministry in Israel. Its language, directed at Christians, would make soliciting an adult to change their faith punishable by one year in jail, increasing to two years if the person being solicited was a child.

While much of the anti-Christian activity is blamed on rogue individuals or groups, the Israeli government itself has also acted against Christians this year. Previously Israel has allowed some of the small Christian community in Gaza to participate in Christmas and Easter celebrations in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. This year, despite having initially issued Easter travel permits to 739 Palestinian Christians from Gaza, the government then canceled the permits without explanation.

There is a much bigger problem with the number of Christians permitted to attend the annual Holy Fire celebrations. Sabt Al-Nour is a parade of lights that emerges from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the Saturday before Orthodox Easter, with the light symbolically passed to churches around the world. For centuries, up to 10,000 worshippers have attended this event, but Israeli police have cut attendance this Saturday to 1,800 for what they describe as safety reasons. These restrictions are yet another clear violation of the long-standing agreement that regulates sensitive religious issues in Jerusalem and

Bethlehem. Church leaders and the government of Jordan, which is the custodian of Christian and Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, have publicly criticized the Israeli action.

The government of Israel, which claims to represent world Jewry and accuses its opponents of antisemitism, is failing to stop the rhetoric and actions of some of its senior ministers that encourage anti-Islamic and anti-Christian behavior. In light of events in Palestine, a UN Security Council presidential statement in February read: "The Security Council notes with deep concern instances of discrimination, intolerance and hate speech motivated by racism or directed against persons belonging to religious communities, in particular cases motivated by Islamophobia, antisemitism or Christianophobia." The statement was read by Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's permanent representative at the UN. Her family, Muslims from Jerusalem, were given the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the consent of Christians. Thus a Palestinian Muslim family has had the duty of opening and closing Christianity's most important church for over 800 years, the kind of mutual respect and tolerance that is so desperately needed in Jerusalem. The city is the cradle of the three main Abrahamic religions. In the past, conquerors who have tried to monopolize Jerusalem for the benefit of a single religion or ethnicity have invariably failed. The lesson of history is the need for respect and tolerance both in act and in deed.

Arab News

How many elections would it take to end the crisis in Bulgaria?

Dimitar Bechev

IT was not that long ago that Bulgarian politics appeared a rather dull affair. All an outsider needed to know was a single name: Boyko Borisov. The leader of the centre-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) ran the country for the better part of the 2009-2021 period.

He was popular at home and quite well-received abroad. In Brussels, he rubbed shoulders with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron; in Moscow, he talked gas deliveries with Russian President Vladimir Putin; and in Ankara, he negotiated border security and infrastructure projects with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Every four years Bulgarians would head to the polls to give GERB and Borisov yet another term in office... until his luck ran out in 2021. In April of that year, Bulgarian voters punished GERB and Borisov's coalition partners for years of corruption scandals and abuse of power, leaving them unable to form a government. Since then, Bulgaria has been on an electoral roller coaster, holding five elections in two years. Neither GERB nor any other political power has been able to secure enough votes to put together a stable government.

GERB is weaker than in the past, but still resilient and well-entrenched, not least at the local level. Its surest path to power is co-opting pro-Western reformers. However, parties representing the latter see Borisov's party as toxic and are reluctant to form a coalition with him. This has resulted in a power vacuum. The outcome of the latest vote held on April 2, in which once again no political party

gained a clear majority, confirms that political instability will plague Bulgaria over the long haul.

According to preliminary results released by the Central Election Commission, GERB has emerged first with 26.5 percent of votes, a two-point lead over the coalition between the reformist We Continue the Change (PP) and Democratic Bulgaria (DB) parties, Borisov's main challengers. GERB will have the first shot at forming a government, for which it has two options: one, a grand coalition with the PP-DB union; and two, a coalition with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), which is traditionally backed by ethnic Turks. BSP received 8.9 percent of the vote and DPS got 13.7 percent.

Borisov prefers the first option, as it could burnish his reputation as a standard-bearer of Western-friendly policies and curry favour with key governments on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet sharing power with Borisov could prove a poisoned chalice for PP-DB, whose electorate largely sees GERB as part of the problem in Bulgaria, not the solution. Under the short-lived government led by PP and DB in 2022, Borisov was handcuffed and detained briefly as part of a corruption investigation. If PP-DB are serious about fighting for the rule of law, they will not compromise easily.

DPS and BSP are keener to be in the next government. Yet Borisov may have second thoughts about officialising his long-standing affair with DPS, which is widely seen as a propagator of corruption schemes; in 2021, the United States sanctioned one of its prominent members, Delyan Peevski,

under the Magnitsky Act for his alleged involvement in corruption schemes. BSP, on the other hand, openly brandishes a pro-Russia stance, which could prove problematic for GERB's pro-West credentials. With neither GERB nor PP-DB being able to garner a critical mass of votes to end the political crisis, Bulgaria has drifted in the direction of presidential rule. President Rumen Radev is effectively wielding executive power through the caretaker cabinets he has been appointing since May 2021.

Re-elected for a second term in 2022, Radev is in a strong position politically. With no regular government in power, he has a final say through the provisional cabinet on critical decisions - whether or not Bulgaria will be sending weapons to Ukraine or how to adjust the country's energy sector to a rapidly changing regional and global marketplace. To make matters even worse, the head of state is not accountable to the legislature, which has to dissolve itself every time it fails to vote in a new government. Another concern is the gains made by the far-right and Russia-loving Revival party. With a populist campaign attacking the US for allegedly turning Bulgaria into its "colony" and the European Union for "destroying" the country's economy, it managed to win a record 14.2 percent of votes.

Some observers see the rise of the pro-Russian party as giving a boost to a potential grand coalition between GERB and PP-DB. The two previously aligned together in parliament in order to pass a motion allowing arms to be sent to Ukraine. The threat of Bulgaria

drifting towards a presidential regime is also seen as additional motivation for both sides to come together. In any event, we are looking at lengthy coalition talks, which may well prove inconclusive and leave Radev in charge. Even if a coalition with GERB materialises, it is unlikely to survive the upcoming local elections scheduled for October.

Large municipalities, which have so far been dominated by GERB, are a desired asset in that they operate substantial financial resources, especially from EU funds. PP-DB will be looking to dethrone GERB by capturing Sofia, Plovdiv, Ruse and other big cities, as a springboard for claiming power at the national level. Without the big cities and the patronage opportunities they provide, Borisov's influence will decline even further. The balance of power nationally could tilt in favour of the reformist bloc, whatever its future shape. Whether this will change anything on the political chessboard in Bulgaria remains to be seen.

Until then, the country will remain stuck in a Groundhog Day situation that does not bode well for its political and economic future. Amid a devastating war in neighbouring Ukraine, high inflation and persistent energy insecurity, Bulgaria is trapped in a spiral of elections, fragmentation and inability to forge political compromises. Neither GERB and its fellow allies nor those who want to modernise and transform Bulgaria seem to be able to gain the upper hand for now. This is allowing political entrepreneurs such as Revival's Kostadin Kostadinov and the ambitious President Radev to benefit. All that means that more instability lies ahead.

The SNP might be in trouble, but Unionism is still at risk of dying out

Tim Stanley

THE SNP leadership race ends today and many think Unionism is the real winner: Labour is catching up in the polls. But don't count your chickens. Nicola Sturgeon has won eight out of eight elections by shifting Scotland's imagination in her favour. Her clever package of party discipline, nationalism and progressivism only unravelled in the past few months. First, the UK Supreme Court effectively blocked another referendum, closing the clearest path to independence. Second, her Gender Recognition Reform Bill came a cropper, undercutting the idea that Scottishness is inherently more woke than Englishness. It's quite remarkable that two out of the three leadership candidates have criticised Sturgeon's pro-trans agenda.

Humza Yousaf, the doe-eyed continuity candidate, initially embraced the Reform, but even he has wavered - and shot himself magnificently in the foot by declaring that prisoner Isla Bryson is not trans at all but merely "at it". A concerned citizen telephoned the police. It seems that by misgendering Isla, Humza contradicted the Hate Crime and Public Order Act 2021, a piece of legislation that was introduced by a naive young justice minister called?... Humza Yousaf. The SNP looks like several parties in one. Humza wants to make independence compelling by promising social justice. Kate Forbes, a pro-business Calvinist, wants to make it credible. And Ash Regan emphasises achieving independence through any democratic means possible. Some of her supporters dismiss Yousaf and

Forbes as "home rule" nationalists, no longer trying to break away from the UK but to monopolise devolved government instead.

Of course, if that were the goal then the one snag is that the SNP is absolutely rotten at governing. In the interests of fairness, I'll let the leadership candidates speak for themselves. During one debate, Forbes said to Humza: "You were a transport minister and the trains were never on time, when you were justice secretary the police were stretched to breaking point, and now as health minister, we've got record high waiting times." "Apart from that," as Mrs Lincoln once said, "the play was quite good."

It is bizarre, considering they can't get the basics right, that the SNP has splashed money on gimmicks such as the "baby box", which every new family can receive regardless of income. The box not only includes clothes, mittens, a blanket - oh, and a packet of condoms - but is designed so that it can be used as a literal cot, apparently on the assumption that all Scots live in 15th-century levels of ignorance and poverty. The SNP likes to stress that the idea comes from Finland (as do Scotland's disastrous education reforms) hinting that the nation is closer in spirit to Scandinavia, where everyone is equal, than England, where we rock our babies to sleep in old tyres. Sturgeon has also tried to tweak taxes to make them Swedishly redistributive. Just.

Under her new code, 52 per cent of Scots pay less in rates than they would in England, to the tune of a whopping £22. But if you earn

£50,000 a year, you pay an extra £1,552. It's unclear what the money is being spent on. Funding to local government has been squeezed. The result: Glasgow has just announced it is slashing nearly £227million from health and social care, including the loss of 197 jobs. North Lanarkshire council had to axe all its secondary school librarians. One might argue that this is a by-product of the nationalist mission. To build loyalty to the national one has to weaken loyalty to the local. That way people will identify not with regional traditions or sources of authority but with new state institutions that seem to make independence viable, perhaps inevitable - or even give the impression that it is already happening. Hence, Scotland's eight police forces have been merged into one, as have its fire brigades, and the SNP has agitated to take control of the transport police. The Nats want to create a new social care service.

The baby box is only an eccentric example of an effort to establish a direct relationship between the individual and emerging state, to nudge people into thinking as part of a distinct polity. The new Scotland is communitarian: hence Sturgeon took stricter anti-Covid measures faster than England. The new Scotland is Remainer: hence the EU flag is flown at Holyrood even though the UK is no longer in it. The official "guidance for flag flying on Scottish Government buildings" states that "the Saltire, European and Ukrainian flag should be flown every day from St Andrew's House". There is only one "event" day each

year when the Union flag must be flown on government buildings. The pride flag has four.

If devolved government has been transformed into a theatre of nationalism, much of the audience appears to have nodded off. In 2014, 45 per cent of Scots voted for independence; according to YouGov, the figure today would be around 46 per cent. But among 16-24-year-olds, it's 61 per cent, and a majority for the Union only emerges within cohorts over 50. Britishness, like Conservatism south of the border, appears to be dying out. The SNP dominates the imagination not just because it has a positive sense of identity but because it has a sense of identity at all. Post-God and post-socialism, there are few major contenders for the soul of Britain (the SNP has absorbed wokery and the ecology), and Britain itself is attacked constantly as a racist project cooked up by Tory elites. The SNP's anti-Unionism is validated by Left-wing British culture.

If pro-Unionism hinges entirely on being anti-SNP - well, that's a game that Remain played in 2016 and lost horribly. So, nationalism might be going through a bad patch, but no one is selling a Romantic Unionist alternative, a fault that lies in part with the low quality of leadership. There are precious few Donald Dewers, Teddy Taylors or even Gordon Browns anymore. By contrast, one has to admire the abilities of Nicola Sturgeon, who over the past decade has always exhibited composure, self-discipline and authority. I've lost count of the number of times I wished she was on my side.

The Telegraph

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Dar holds virtual meeting with President AIIB

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Saturday held a virtual meeting with Jin Ligu, President Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB).

The meeting was part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank Spring meetings 2023, a press release issued by the Ministry of Finance said.

Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Dr. Aisha Ghous Pasha,

Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Finance Tariq Bajwa, SAPM on Revenue Tariq Mehmood Pasha, Special Secretary Finance attended the meeting virtually from Islamabad.

Whereas Ambassador of Pakistan to the USA Masood Ahmad Khan, Governor State Bank of Pakistan Jamil Ahmad, Secretary Finance and Secretary Economic Affairs Division attended the meeting in person in

Washington.

The Finance Minister shared the current economic outlook of the country and apprised him of the economic policies and reforms of the government for sustainable economic development. The Finance Minister thanked the President AIIB for his generous support in rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the flood-affected areas in Pakistan.

The President AIIB lauded the relationship between

Pakistan and the AIIB and appreciated the economic policies and reforms of the present government for social uplift of the masses. He highlighted the role of AIIB in infrastructure development projects and investment and extended AIIB's complete support and cooperation to Pakistan.

The Finance Minister thanked the President AIIB for his continuous support to Pakistan for the sustainable economic development of the country.



ISLAMABAD: People purchasing food stuff for iftari at sasta bazaar.

SCCI team meets minister for industries

SIALKOT (APP): A delegation of the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, led by SCCI President Abdul Ghafoor Malik, met caretaker Provincial Minister for Industries, Commerce, Investment, Energy and Skills Development SM Tanveer in his office on Saturday.

The delegation informed the minister about the problems being faced by the industry in Sialkot. Various issues related to Sialkot Industrial Zone, Export Processing Zone, road infrastructure, exemption to export sector from levy of 5pc Excise Tax on Highways and Withholding Sales Tax on consumption of services were discussed in the meeting. The minister assured the SCCI president of full cooperation and resolution of their issues on priority. "I am representative of industrialists and I will protect industries in the province," the minister said adding that if factories would be built, new employment opportunities would be created.

SM Tanveer said every necessary step would be taken to keep the wheel of industries moving. He also announced his visit to Sialkot after Eid holidays. Earlier, SCCI President Abdul Ghafoor Malik, along with his delegation, also held a meeting with Caretaker Minister for Communication & Works Punjab Bilal Afzal. The delegation highlighted the road infrastructure issues and requested for release of funds for completion of Sialkot-Pasrur Road, Sialkot-Wazirabad Road, Sambrial-Airport Road. The minister promised full support and shared that funds for the said schemes would be released soon.

ICCI Eid Shopping Festival kicks off

ISLAMABAD (APP): ICCI Eid Shopping Festival has kicked off in F-7 and F-10 Marakaz, which will continue till Chand Raat.

The festival in both markets has been organized by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in collaboration with ICT Administration, MCI, concerned Market Associations and J7 Group to provide Eid shopping opportunities to the citizens at affordable prices.

Irfan Nawaz Memon, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad along with President ICCI inaugurated the Eid Shopping Festival.

The people took great interest in the festival as they got the opportunity of such activity after many years.

Speaking at the occasion, Irfan Nawaz Memon, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad lauded ICCI and other partners for organizing the Eid shopping festival as it would provide

good shopping opportunities to the citizens.

He said that traders are playing an important role in the economy and ICT Administration would cooperate in organizing such activities to promote trade activities.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, ICCI said that the purpose of the shopping festival is to facilitate the inflation-stricken people to do Eid shopping at discounted prices.

He said that the festival would also provide good entertainment to the shoppers as it will include traditional food area, art and crafts corner, mehndi stalls, live music stage, lucky draws, quizzes, laser lights, lighting displays.

He hoped that the shopping festival would increase footfall of customers and provide a good chance to the traders to generate more business. He said that ICCI would organ-

ize a full-fledged Summer Festival in Islamabad, which would be held in all markets to facilitate the traders in promoting trade activities.

Engineer Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that said that the trend of shopping festivals is on the rise in the world and hoped that the Eid shopping festival in Islamabad would provide good relief to the customers in Eid shopping in a festive environment.

Tahir Abbasi Chairman, Ahmed Khan President F-10 Market Association and Asad Aziz President F-7 Market Association said that the shopping festival would offer attractive prizes including Umra ticket to the winners besides offering good discounts on shopping.

They thanked ICCI, ICT Administration, MCI and J7 Group for their cooperation and support to organize the Eid Shopping Festival in a successful manner.

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Services Limited (PSL), owners of Pearl-Continental Hotels, the leading hotel chain in Pakistan, announced today that they have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Global Business Bridge (GBB) to open Sakura Restaurant and Front Page Café in Lahore.

The franchise and management agreement signing ceremony was held on April 13, 2023, at the Pearl-Continental Hotel Lahore, followed by a lavish Iftar Dinner. The event was attended by the manage-

ment of Hashoo Group, Pearl-Continental Hotel Lahore and Global Business Bridge.

"We are delighted to announce the signing of this MoU, which marks our commitment to expanding the dining options for our customers. Both Sakura Restaurant and Front Page Café at Pearl-Continental Hotels, are renowned for their quality food and exceptional service, and we are excited to bring these two restaurants to the residents of Lahore," said Mr. Haseeb Gardezi, COO of Hashoo Group.

The new Sakura Restaurant will feature a

diverse Japanese cuisine menu, including sushi, sashimi, tempura, and other popular dishes. In addition, Front Page Café will offer a range of coffee, tea, and other beverages, along with a selection of sandwiches, pastries and desserts.

GBB is known for their iconic projects, including Emporium Mall, Bahria Icon Tower, HBL Mega Corporate Tower and MCB Towers in Pakistan.

"As we venture into the hospitality business for the first time, we are committed to carrying on our legacy of providing our customers with an unparalleled

service, and we are confident that upcoming Sakura and Front Page Café in Lahore will meet the expectations of our guests and customers," said Mr. Shahid Riaz Gondal, CEO of Global Business Bridge.

Located in Phase 6 of DHA (ground and first floor of Fairways Commercial/Defence Raya), the restaurant and café are expected to open their doors to the public in the coming months.

PSL is excited to expand its hotel's signature dining options in other areas of Lahore and looks forward to serving the people of this beautiful city.

Pakistani entrepreneur showcases dazzling products at Hainan Expo

BEIJING (APP): At the Hainan International Convention and Exhibition Center, Aqeel Ahmed Chaudhry, a jeweller from Pakistan, was busy showing his dazzling products to visitors attending the third China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE).

Scheduled from April 10 to April 15, the 3rd CICPE, or Hainan Expo, is being held in Haikou, Hainan, China, drawing over 3,300 brands from 65 countries and regions to share the dividends of the world's second-largest consumer market.

Foreign business leaders and exhibitors, including those who come from Pakistan, have voiced hope for expanding their presence in the Chinese market.

It was Chaudhry's first time attending the consumer products expo. Living in China for more than a decade, he launched WINZA Jewelry in Shanghai's glitzy business

district. How can people seek a foothold in China's increasingly competitive jewellery market? Chaudhry knows it back to front.

China's consumer market has seen notable progress in scale and quality over the past decade. Retail sales of consumer goods in China exceeded 40 trillion (about \$ 5.81 trillion) in 2019 and hit 44 trillion in 2022, more than double the 2012 figure, said Xu Xingfeng, director of the Ministry of Commerce (MOC)'s consumption promotion department, at a global consumer innovation, duty-free and travel retail conference being held as part of the ongoing expo.

To ride this wave, Chaudhry signed agreements with Zhuhai Duty-Free Enterprises Group Co., Ltd. (Zhuhai Duty Free) and Hainan Tourism Investment Duty-Free Co., Ltd. (HTDF), to brighten the brand with new opportunity of offshore duty-free

shopping in Hainan.

"We plan to open a retail store in Zhuhai Duty Free complex, which is expected to be completed by 2025," Chaudhry told China Economic Net, adding that a 3-year agreement was also signed with HTDF at the 3rd CICPE to boost the brand's offshore duty-free sales.

Back in April 2018, China announced a decision to support Hainan in developing the whole island into a pilot free trade zone and gradually exploring and steadily promoting the establishment of a free trade port with Chinese characteristics.

According to a master plan on the Hainan free trade port (Hainan FTP) released in 2020 by the Chinese government, the Hainan FTP is scheduled to initiate independent customs operations throughout the whole island by the end of 2025.

"I have already registered a company in Sanya

to prepare for the coming 2025," the Pakistani entrepreneur mentioned, "I am paying close attention to the latest policies."

Over the past five years, Hainan has made solid strides in building itself a high-level free trade port. As one of the country's major opening-up measures in the new era, China aims to build its largest tropical island into a globally influential and high-level FTP by the middle of the century.

Chaudhry was no exception among those foreign entrepreneurs who will never miss the chance to tap a market full of potential.

He told the reporter that in the future, he plans to process imported raw stones in Hainan and train local technicians. "In this way, the price of products will be more advantageous whether they are sold duty-free on the island or duty-paid outside Hainan," he noted.

UAE airlines announce flight cancellations to Sudan

DUBAI (Agencies): UAE-based airlines, Emirates, flydubai and Air Arabia, have cancelled their flights to Sudan from April 15 to 17 "due to the current situation in the country," spokespersons of the respective carriers confirmed to Khaleej Times on Saturday.

Dubai-based airlines, Emirates and flydubai, have cancelled their flights to Sudan from April 15 to 17; while Air Arabia said that all flights to Sudan "have been suspended until further notice."

"Due to the growing situation of civil unrest in the Sudanese capital, Emirates can confirm that all its flights to and from Khartoum are cancelled from April 15 to 17 inclusive. Passengers connecting to Khartoum on these flights will not be accepted for travel at their point of origin. Affected passengers should contact their respective travel agent or Emirates call centre for rebooking options," said the airline spokesperson, adding: "Emirates apologises for any inconvenience caused."

Flights between Dubai and Khartoum International Airport by flydubai have also been cancelled from April 15 to 17.

Flights between Dubai and Khartoum International Airport (KRT) by flydubai have also been cancelled from April 15 to 17.

"We will continue to closely monitor the situation. We apologise for the inconvenience caused to our passengers' travel schedules," flydubai spokesperson added.

According to reports, Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces had taken control of the presidential palace, the residence of the army chief, and KRT on Saturday as clashes erupted with the army in an escalating power struggle.

In a statement, the RSF also said they had taken over the airports in the northern city of Merowe and El-Obeid in the west. Gunfire could be heard in several parts of Khartoum and eyewitnesses reported shooting in adjoining cities.

its partners on April 2 risk aggravating an expected oil supply deficit in the second half of 2023 and boosting oil prices at a time of heightened economic uncertainty, even as industrial activity slows in the world's largest economies and production growth outside the alliance appears robust, warned the IEA report.

US dollar rebounds with rising US Treasury yields: The US dollar bounced back in late trading on Friday as US Treasury yields went up after the release of US economic data and hawkish comments from a Fed official.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against six major peers, rose 0.59 percent at 101.6179 in late trading.

In late New York trading, the euro decreased to 1.0999 dollars from 1.1046 dollars in the previous session, and the British pound decreased to 1.2414 dollars from 1.2523 US dollars in the previous session.

The US dollar bought 133.7870 Japanese yen, higher than 132.7800 Japanese yen of the previous session.

The US dollar increased to 0.8939 Swiss francs from 0.8882 Swiss francs, and it rose to 1.3360 Canadian dollars from 1.3339 Canadian dollars.



ISLAMABAD: People purchasing melon at fruit and vegetable market.

Ferrari fever? Classic cars roar into investment funds

MILAN (Reuters): In 1977, a Ferrari owner offloaded his 1962 250 GTO because his wife complained it was too noisy, recounts Andrea Modena, head of Ferrari's classic car division. It was either her or the car.

"Nowadays, I'm not sure the wife would have won out."

Times have indeed changed. In 2018, the same Ferrari model became the most expensive car ever sold when it fetched \$48 million at auction. Last year, that record was flattened by a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupé that raced to 135 million euros (\$149 million).

These kind of megadeals are at the vanguard of billions of dollars of annual spending on classic cars globally in a wave of investment in this alterna-

tive asset.

Vintage cars have risen 185% in value over the past decade, outstripping the growth of luxury rivals wine, watches and art, and ranking second only to rare whiskies, according to Knight Frank's 2023 wealth report.

The market has expanded beyond a comparatively small community of collectors to include investors drawn by the prospect of high returns plus a lack of correlation with mainstream portfolio assets such as stocks and bonds.

"We've been monitoring the market for a long time," said Giorgio Medda, CEO and global head of asset management at Italy's Azimut (AZMT.MI). "The track record of the past 30 years tells us classic cars have become a financial asset class we want our

clients to have in their portfolios."

This year, the asset manager is launching what it describes as the world's first "evergreen" fund to invest in vintage vehicles, and says it'll only bet on cars worth more than 1 million euros each.

Advised by Alberto Schon, head of Ferrari and Maserati dealer Rosscorsa, the fund says it will pick vehicles with a unique history.

While Azimut's fund will have no end date and can receive new money indefinitely, small Swiss asset manager Hetica Capital launched a 50 million euro "closed-end" fund in 2021, which it also said was the first of its kind.

The Hetica fund, which is targeting returns of 9%-15% after seven years, has bought a dozen cars so far

and aims to get to 30-35 cars by the fifth year, leaving the last two years to sell the vehicles and pay investors.

The plans are bold.

"We've seen more than 100 attempts at setting up funds in the past. Nobody managed to build both a diversified investor base and a diversified car portfolio," said Dietrich Hatlapa, founder of classic car research house HAGI, which supplies the sector data used by Knight Frank.

It's also not a sector for the financially faint-hearted. Registered in Luxembourg, both the Azimut and Hetica funds have a minimum entry investment bar of 125,000 euros.

"We get loads of calls from people who're looking to invest 1,000-2,000 euros and we have to turn them down," said Walter

Panzeri who runs Hetica's Klassik Fund.

Moreover, a small scratch or dent, or a replacement part, can deal a heavy financial blow. For example, replacing just the bumper of a rare vintage car can cost \$15,000, said Modena.

Running costs for car collections, including hefty storage and insurance fees, could easily amount annually to 5-6% of the portfolio's value, according to Florian Zimmermann, who started buying vintage cars when he worked at Mercedes-Benz and has since built a collection of 300 vehicles with a partner.

"It's getting harder and harder to find the proper mechanics to keep these cars alive. And you have to spend quite an amount of money to keep all these cars in running condition,"

he said.

Indeed investment funds managing car portfolios can be a money-spinner for the classic car divisions of automakers, which not only provide repairs and parts, but also certify the authenticity of vehicles to take part in shows and competitions.

The certification process alone can cost around 20,000 euros, according to Peter Becker of Mercedes-Benz Classic who said only the carmaker's experts, with access to its archives, could confirm the originality of a classic model.

Nonetheless, the classic car market is expanding as the number of wealthy people also rises; the value of vintage cars grew 25% in 2022, their strongest performance in nine years and second only to art's 29% increase, according to

Knight Frank.

Classic vehicle insurer Hagerty estimates there are about \$80 billion collector vehicle transactions a year globally, including all auctions and private sales.

While North America remains the largest market for auctions, with Hagerty recording \$3.4 billion in auction sales in 2022 versus \$774 million in 2007, Zimmermann said a growing number of buyers had emerged in recent years in the Middle East, India and China.

The global race to renounce combustion engine cars will only serve to heighten interest in these relics of a vanishing era, say some market players.

"Electrification will favour classic cars," said Cristiano Bolzoni, head of Maserati's vintage car unit Maserati Classiche. "Over

time they will become cult objects."

Ferraris are the most prized vintage autos, according to Adolfo Orsi, founder of the Classic Car Auction Yearbook which has been tracking auction sales data since 1990, who described them as "absolutely the blue-chips of this sector."

Ferraris commanded an average value at auction of \$589,000 in 2021-22, followed by Mercedes-Benz cars on \$378,000 and Porsches with \$348,000.

"The classic car community has changed tremendously over the past five to 10 years," Zimmermann said. "Once it was only people who knew the cars inside out. But over time others simply thought: I like these cars, I can afford one and I don't lose money by buying it."



In brief

Khairabad XI wins Trophy

PESHAWAR (APP): Khairabad XI clinched the trophy of the Ramazan Night Cricket Tournament played at Nowshera District Cricket Ground. The final was played between Sher XI and Khairabad XI in which the Khairabad XI team won. Saqib was declared as Man of the tournament by the Organizing Secretary Ali Raza and his organizing team, whose efforts were appreciated. In the final, the team of Sher XI scored 66 runs for the loss of five wickets in the scheduled six overs. In response, the team of Khairabad XI achieved the target in the fourth over with the loss of five wickets. Saqib batted aggressively on behalf of Khairabad XI. Even before this, he had shown excellent performance in many matches, leading the team to easy success, so he was also named Man of the Tournament and Man of the Series.

Bumrah begins rehab after surgery

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has started rehabilitation after successful back surgery, India's cricket board said Saturday, with the focus now on the one-day World Cup. The lower back injury kept Bumrah, 29, out of action since September but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said his operation last month "was successful and he remains pain-free". "The fast bowler was advised by the specialist to start his rehab six weeks after the surgery and accordingly, Mr Bumrah has commenced his rehab management at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru from Friday," it said in a statement. Bumrah has reportedly been ruled out of the World Test Championship final against Australia in June but is expected to make the team for the one-day showpiece in India later this year. Known for his ability to bowl toe-crushing full-length deliveries, Bumrah has claimed 319 wickets across all three international formats. Indian batsman Shreyas Iyer is scheduled to undergo surgery next week, also for a lower back injury that forced him to miss the Indian Premier League with his team the Kolkata Knight Riders. "He will remain under the surgeon's care for two weeks and will return to the NCA after that for rehabilitation," the BCCI said.

Lisandro Martinez out for season

MANCHESTER (AP): Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez has been ruled out for the rest of the season after fracturing a metatarsal bone in his foot, the Premier League club said Friday. Fellow center back Raphael Varane is also set to be out for "a few weeks," United added, leaving the team without two of its top defenders for a crucial stretch of the campaign. Martinez and Varane were both injured during Thursday's 2-2 draw against Sevilla in the first leg of the Europa League quarter-finals. Varane was substituted at halftime and Martinez looked in distress as he was carried off the field by Sevilla players Marcos Acuna and Gonzalo Montiel, his Argentina teammates, late in the game. Martinez has been a key part of United's improved defense this season after signing from Ajax to join up with manager Erik ten Hag, and also helped Argentina win the World Cup in Qatar. United said the defender should be fit for the start of next season.

Arthur to decide Babar's future as captain: Sethi

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Management Committee Chairman Najam Sethi said Saturday the future of Babar Azam's captaincy will be decided by the selections committee and Mickey Arthur, who is set to become the national team director.

Sethi, in his latest interview, has yet again deemed Babar a wonderful player; however, the team management will decide his future as the Green Shirts' captain.

"For now, we have retained Babar as a captain because he is our main player. His captaincy is often discussed in media, we have nothing to do with it," the PCB head said.

Sethi also spoke about listening to some thoughts on media.

"Some said there should be two different captains and some said different captains in each format. Selection

committee also discussed this thing but it is premature to talk about this."

He mentioned consulting Arthur on the matter who suggested letting Babar continue.

"For the New Zealand series, he is our captain and we should back him. Later on, Mickey and the selection committee will decide on captaincy," Sethi explained.

It must be noted here that the PCB head has the final authority to bring a change in captaincy. Recently, Sethi tweeted that he met Babar and gave him confidence for the home New Zealand tour where he resumed his regular captaincy role after resting during the Afghanistan T20I series that concluded in late March.

The two-time PCB chairman also emphasised on taking Babar in the loop before making any decision. "He is our star player.

We need to talk to him first and let him make his decision in case of any change," he shared. "Obviously, his performance matters here. If he wins as captain, nobody can remove him. He is our performer and at this moment, we just need to support him," he stated.

To a query about player power in the team, Sethi said he has no idea about it. "After I took charge, I haven't seen any player power sort of thing here. I don't know about the previous set-up," he said.

"Players are united, they play like a group which is a very good sign," he concluded.

After the conclusion of the Afghanistan T20I series, in which Pakistan lost by 2-1, stand-in skipper Shadab Khan gave comments about the importance of senior players in the team and it sparked controversy on social media.



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saves Newcastle United's Callum Wilson's, left, shot during the English Premier League soccer match.

Kardar inducted into PCB Hall of Fame

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board has formally inducted late Abdul Hafeez Kardar, the first-ever captain of Pakistan's Test cricket team, into the PCB Hall of Fame.

A prestigious ceremony was held at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore to acknowledge the contributions of Kardar to the national cricket. It was organised moments before the Pakistan took on New Zealand in the first T20I match.

"Late Abdul Hafeez Kardar, Pakistan's first Test captain, was formally inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame in front of his Enclosure at Gaddafi Stadium before the start of the first #PAKvNZ T20I," PCB said in a tweet.

An official video shows PCB Chairman Najam Sethi present a memorial cap and a shield to Kardar's son, Shahid Hafeez Kardar, during the ceremony. Abdul Hafeez Kardar was captaining the Team Green in the inaugural Test victory when it had defeated India.

Tunisia footballer dies

HAFFOUZ (INP): A professional footballer in Tunisia has died after setting himself alight earlier this week in what he called a protest against the "police state" ruling the country, his brother said.

Nizar Issaoui, 35, suffered third-degree burns from his action in the village of Haffouz in the central region of Kairouan, his brother Ryad. He was taken from hospital in Kairouan to the specialist burns hospital in the capital Tunis, but doctors were unable to save his life, the brother said. "He died yesterday (Thursday) and will be buried today."

Issaoui's protest recalled that of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who burned himself to death on December 17, 2010, sparking the Tunisian revolution that was the trigger for the Arab Spring uprisings which toppled authoritarian regimes across the Middle East.

Aston Villa trounce Newcastle to close on Premier League top four

BIRMINGHAM (Agencies): Aston Villa blew the race for a top-four finish in the Premier League wide open as Ollie Watkins scored twice in a convincing 3-0 win over Newcastle on Saturday.

Jacob Ramsey was also on target as sixth-placed Villa closed to within six points of Newcastle in third thanks to a seventh win in eight games.

The Magpies first defeat in six games means Tottenham can move level on points should they beat Bournemouth later on Saturday, ahead of a clash between the sides next weekend. But Unai Emery's men are the form side in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League after taking 22 points from the last possible 24.

"It was a really, really fantastic day," said Emery. "Our progress is clear, trying to be comfortable here (at home), trying to be consistent here. We did our game plan for 90 minutes, focusing and keeping our good individual performances like we need."

Just staying in the Premier League was Emery's first task when he was appointed in October with Villa just one point above the relegation zone.

The former Arsenal and Paris Saint-Germain boss has inspired an incredible turnaround and Newcastle never recovered from an explosive start by the home side at Villa Park. Villa have scored in all 20 games under Emery and could have been three up inside 15 minutes. Just 28 seconds were on the clock when the in-form Watkins sprinted behind the Newcastle defence and hit the inside of the post.

- 'Great run' -

Watkins was the creator when Villa's start did get the goal it deserved on 11 minutes. The England international headed John McGinn's cross back into the path of Ramsey to drill into the bottom corner.

"We're on a great run," said Watkins. "Newcastle are a great side and didn't have many chances today, which showed the level we are at. We are really enjoying it at the moment. Everyone knows what they are doing."

Newcastle had won their last five games to close in on a return to Champions League football after 20 years. Eddie Howe's men briefly threatened a revival once Callum Wilson was paired alongside Alexander Isak in attack.

Wilson forced Emi Martinez into a save with his first touch, albeit from an offside position, before Isak stung the palms of the Argentina number one.

However, the visitors greater attacking intent was also leaving Villa gaps to exploit on the counter-attack. Watkins was denied his goal as a VAR check ruled him offside after finally getting the better of Nick Pope. But he had his 10th goal in 12 games 25 minutes from time as he spun onto Alex Moreno's cross and left Pope with no chance.

No player has scored more than Watkins 12 Premier League goals since the World Cup. He pounced once more seven minutes from time after Ramsey turned Emi Buendia's cross into his path.

Gala, the 3rd one overall.

On this occasion, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker provincial minister for industries, crafts and technical education Muhammad Adnan Jalil was the chief guest. CCPO Peshawar Ejaz Khan was also present with him.

Peshawar Press Club President Arshad Aziz Malik and General Secretary Irfan Moszai were present in the ceremony. Former President Peshawar Press Club M Riaz, CEO of Hope Zubair Elahi were also present. Speaking at the Ramadan Sports Gala event in cooperation, he said that in the

Peshawar Press Club Ramadan Sports Festival entered into semi-finals stages with more than 150 journalists, including women, from print and electronic media are taking part in five different Games including Badminton, Table Tennis, Ludo, Snooker and Carrom Board.

Ramazan Sports Gala for Journalists organized by Peshawar Press Club and Hope, an NGO working for the welfare and rehabilitation of drug addicts. The members of the Peshawar Press Club are enthusiastically part of the Sports

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Rehan Zaman, Ali Naz secure wins in Ramazan Squash League

PESHAWAR (APP): Rehan Zaman and Ali Naz clinched the titles of the U9 and U11 categories part of the Ramazan Squash Training Camp and League organized by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association at Hashim Khan Squash Complex on Saturday.

Deputy Director Sports Authority PAF Squadron Leader Amjad Khattak was the chief guest on this occasion. Former World Champion Legend Qamar Zaman, Finance Secretary KP Squash Association and Director Blue Tones Squash Academy Wazir Mohammad, Senior Squash Coach Directorate of Sports Munawar Zaman, Hockey International Player Haji Rauf Khan, PAF Coaches, officials were also present at the closing ceremony.

On this occasion, Rehan

Zaman won the U-9 final and Ali Naz won the U-11 final. Prizes were distributed by the chief guest Deputy Director Squadron Leader Amjad Khattak. He also appreciated KP Squash Association and management of the Hashim Khan Squash Complex for ensuring all facilities to the players who eagerly participated in the month-long camp during Ramadan.

It is an annual feature of the KP Squash Association annual calendar of tournaments to hold camp during the Holy month of Ramadan for the kids wherein more than 100 kids aged between 9-12, participated, Wazir Gul told media men.

He said more focus has been given to the age groups so that talent at the grassroots level could be polished and included in

the main pool through competitions. He also thanked the PAF coaches and trainers for extending all our support to the association for holding a successful camp during Ramadan.

He said some tough competitions were also witnessed during the league matches. Vice President Pakistan Squash Federation Qamar Zaman on this occasion thanked Director Sports PAF Control Board for their support.

He assured that such types of activities would be organized in future with the collaboration of Directorate PAF, Pakistan Squash Federation and KP Squash Association. He said during the camp the players were taught how to grip, length strokes, drop, serve, other shots and physical training.

Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula put U.S. up 2-0 in BJK Cup qualifier



DELRAY BEACH, FLA (Agencies): Coco Gauff enjoyed playing in front of family and friends in a Billie Jean King Cup qualifier in her hometown of Daytona Beach, Florida, on Friday, teaming with Jessica Pegula -- who also lives nearby -- to give the United States a 2-0 lead over Austria.

The No. 6-ranked Gauff, the runner-up at last year's French Open, beat Julia Grabher 6-1, 6-3, before No. 3 Pegula defeated Sinja Kraus 6-0, 7-5. At No. 78, Grabher is the only member of Austria's roster ranked inside the WTA's top 150.

The best-of-five-match contest continues Saturday with up to two matches in singles and one in doubles. If the Americans win any one of those, they'll clinch a spot in the 12-nation BJK Cup finals from Nov. 7-12.

There are nine qualifiers being held around the world on Friday and Saturday, including Canada hosting Belgium. Leylah Fernandez, the 2021 US Open runner-up, gave Canada a 1-0 edge with a 6-0, 6-3 victory over Yanina Wickmayer.

Ysaline Bonaventure tied it by outlasting Rebecca Marino 4-6,

6-4, 6-4.

Earlier on Day 1, Barbora Krejickova earned her first career BJK Cup singles victory, 6-4, 6-3 over Katarina Zavatska, to put the Czech Republic ahead of Ukraine 2-0 at Antalya, Turkey, after 2019 French Open runner-up Marketa Vondrousova defeated Marta Kostyuk 6-2, 6-1.

In other results: Reigning Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina got past Weronika Falkowska 6-3, 6-4, before Yulia Putintseva topped Australian Open semifinalist Magda Linette 7-5, 6-3, to give host Kazakhstan a 2-0 edge against Poland; Caroline Garcia won in three sets and Alizé Cornet won in two -- every set in each match went to a tiebreaker -- to put France ahead 2-0 at Britain; Sara Sorribes Tormo's 6-0, 6-0 blanking of Fernanda Contreras Gomez helped Spain grab a 2-0 lead against visiting Mexico; Italy leads host Slovakia 2-0; Romania is up 2-0 against host Slovenia; and Germany and visiting Brazil are tied at 1-all.

The nine countries that win Saturday will join reigning champion Switzerland, 2022 runner-up Australia and one wildcard recipient at the finals.

Snooker-World Tour returns to China after four-year gap

LONDON (Reuters): Top-level snooker tournaments will return to China for the first time in four years with three events to be staged this year, the World Snooker Tour (WST) said on Saturday.

The last ranking tournament held in China was in 2019, after which the COVID-19 pandemic took the nation off the WST calendar.

"This is a momentous announcement for our sport as we ramp up our return to staging events in Asia," WST Chairman Steve Dawson said in a statement on Saturday. "Throughout the pandemic we maintained dialogue and relationships with the Chinese Billiards and Snooker Association as well as our key partners and promoters across China."

"This has allowed us to make a fast return to staging key events now that travel restrictions have lifted."

The three tournaments, with a combined prize fund in excess of two million pounds (\$2.48 million), will be the Shanghai Masters invitational on Sept. 11-17, the Wuhan Open on Oct. 9-15 and the International Championship in a city still to be confirmed from Nov. 5-12.

"We promised our players that this was top of our agenda and we have delivered on that promise, adding more than two million pounds in prize money to the tour," Dawson said.

"We will continue to explore opportunities to stage further events in China and beyond."



LONDON: Mohammad Abbas of Hampshire celebrates with team mates after taking the wicket of Ollie Pope of Surrey during the LV= Insurance County Championship Division 1 match between Surrey and Hampshire.



In brief

CPO reviews security arrangements

RAWALPINDI (PPI) City Police Officer CPO Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani on Saturday visited various free flour distribution centres and reviewed the security arrangements to make sure that the distribution of flour was being organized in a dignified manner. According to a police spokesman, CPO visited the flour points including Naseerabad, Liaquat Bagh, Moti Mahal and Taxila and checked the security duty and other arrangements. He also instructed the officers on duty to help out the citizens in getting free flour from the designated points. Hamdani met the relevant officers of the district administration and gave them the necessary instructions. He urged the citizens to wait for their turn and cooperate with the police and administration to avoid any inconvenience.

Four members gang busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted four members robber a gang involved in snatching cameras at gunpoint from a shop worth Rs 6 million from their possession during a crackdown here on Saturday, informed a police spokesman. Police have also recovered stolen motorcycles and weapons used in crime. Cantt police arrested the gang identified as Aqeel, Zohaib, Imran and Shakir Zaib. Police have registered separate cases against all of them and further investigation was in progress. According to the initial investigation, Zohaib and Imran were already wanted in the robbery cases. SP Potohar appreciated the performance of police teams adding that the accused who were involved in such crimes would be arrested and said that it is the prime duty of the police to protect the lives and properties of people.

Wanted Bike lifter held

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad capital police Phulgran police team apprehended a wanted member of a bike lifter gang involved in bike lifting incidents and recovered stolen motorbike from his possession, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police had started a crackdown against criminal elements involved in car and bike lifting incidents in order to save the precious lives and property of citizens. Following these directives, the Phulgran police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending a wanted member of a bike lifter gang involved in numerous bike lifting incidents. Police team also recovered a stolen motorbike from his possession. The accused was identified as Qasid. Case has already been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. During the preliminary investigation the accused confessed to being involved in numerous bike lifting incidents. CPO/ DIG Operations Islamabad Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari appreciated the police team's efforts and directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in car and bike lifting incidents. The performance of police officials in this regard would be reviewed on a continuous basis, he maintained.

Judiciary will win constitutional, legal battle with people's support: Rashid

ISLAMABAD (PPI) Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said on Saturday Asif Ali Zardari wanted Shehbaz Sharif to be disqualified.

He said Pakistan was fighting constitutional and legal battle and hopefully the judiciary would emerge victorious.

Talking to the media at the District and Sessions Court of Islamabad, Sheikh Rashid said that Asif Ali Zardari claimed Imran Khan was not a popular leader.

He said Pakistan was fighting a war of constitution and law and judiciary will win this war because nation was standing by the judiciary. The judiciary had upheld the constitution with foresight, he added.

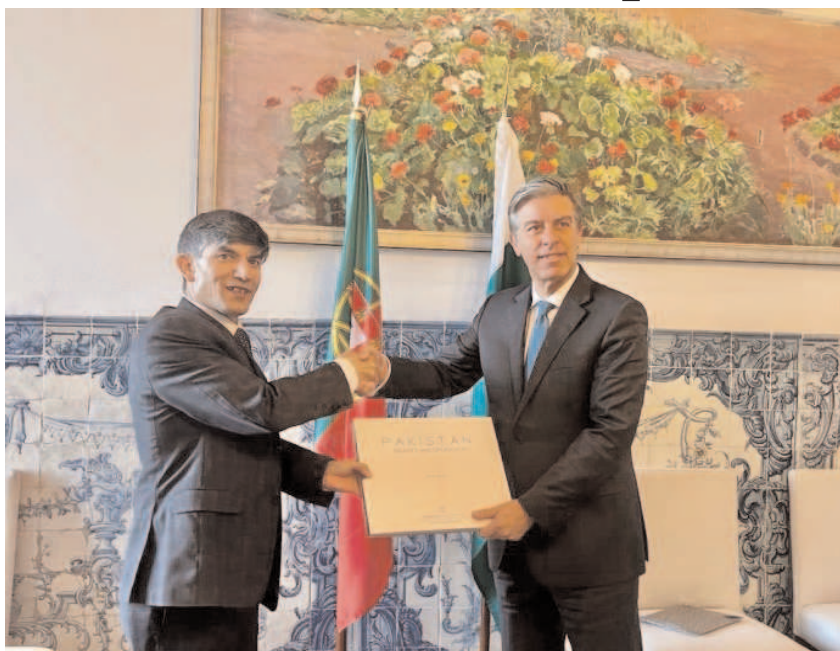
Sheikh Rashid said the sword of NAB law was hanging on the rulers. "We are not going to be afraid of the cases," Mr Rashid maintained. "They say that the politicians are going to a closed street. Hopefully the judiciary will win."

The rulers have assumed power to close their cases

but NAB will not spare them. This nation will take decisions on the streets. You will not be able to run away from the country," added the AML chief.

He further said puppets had made the country of 240 million people a laughing stock in the world. Sheikh Rashid said people were worried about inflation and they were dying due to sky high prices of the daily use items. The rulers were asking for charity like beggars for the last one year, he said.

Pakistan, Portugal reaffirm to further expand mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation



ISLAMABAD (APP): During a third round of 'Bilateral Political Consultations' between Pakistan and Portugal held in Lisbon, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to further expand and diversify mutually beneficial cooperation.

The Pakistan delegation was headed by Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe), Ambassador Muhammad Saleem while Director General for Foreign Policy, Ministry

of Foreign Affairs Rui Vinhas led the Portuguese side, Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release on Saturday.

Agenda included discussion on a broad range of bilateral, regional and global issues of common interest including regional security, climate change and cooperation at the multilateral fora.

Expressing satisfaction at the current state of bilateral relations, the two sides agreed to

enhance bilateral trade and investment, and collaboration in agriculture, water management, ICT, blue economy, green technologies and employment opportunities for Pakistani workforce.

It was agreed to hold regular sessions of the political consultations with the next session to be held in Islamabad for which the Portuguese delegation would visit Pakistan on mutually agreed dates.

World Creativity, Innovation Day to be marked on April 21

ISLAMABAD (INP): World Creativity and Innovation Day will be marked on Friday, April 21 across the globe including Pakistan. The concept is open to interpretation from artistic expression to problem-solving in the context of economic, social and sustainable development. Therefore, the United Nations designated 21 April as World Creativity and Innovation Day to raise the awareness of the role of creativity and innovation in all aspects of human development.

The creative economy too has no single definition. It is an evolving concept building the interplay between human creativity and ideas and intellectual property, knowledge and technology. Essentially, it

is the knowledge-based economic activities upon which the 'creative industries' are based.

Creative industries, which include audiovisual products, design, new media, performing arts, publishing and visual arts—are highly transforming sectors of the world economy in terms of income generation, job creation and export earnings. Culture is an essential component of sustainable development and represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and community.

At the same time, creativity and culture have a significant non-monetary value that contributes to inclusive social development, to dialogue and

understanding between peoples. Today, the creative industries are among the most dynamic areas in the world economy providing new opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog into emerging high-growth areas of the world economy.

Creativity drives our ideas and emotions, as well as our ability to connect, to question and to be understood. But culture and creativity are a lot more than an expression of our identities, they are livelihoods, careers, and economic opportunities for millions of people around the world, especially women, youth, and vulnerable groups. The creative economy has the power to drive sustainable development.

Sadpara achieves another feat by scaling Annapurna peak

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Achieving yet another milestone on Saturday, Sajid Sadpara became the first Pakistani to go on top of the Annapurna peak without the supplemental oxygen.

After the Sadpara's latest feat, Kathmandu-based commercial adventure operator Seven Summit Treks congratulated him in an Instagram post.

"Confirmed by Chhang Dawa Sherpa (the enterprise's director), Sajid Ali Sadpara, a son of legend

Ali Sadpara, successfully reached the top of mountain Annapurna this afternoon, unsupported and without using supplementary oxygen, as a part of Seven Summit Treks' Annapurna Expedition 2023.

"Congratulations Sajid Ali Sadpara," the post read. Also, Alpine Club of Pakistan secretary Karar Haidri also congratulated Sadpara.

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khursheed Khan also congratulated the mountaineer on Twitter,

saying: "Heartiest congratulations to Sajid Ali Sadpara for summiting Annapurna peak in Nepal without oxygen and sherpa. Indeed, a great, great achievement and a proud moment for Pakistan, especially Gilgit-Baltistan. Best wishes and prayers for his future endeavours."

Earlier, a tweet posted on Sadpara's account on Friday said he was at Annapurna's camp four at the time along with the rope fixing team of Seven Trek's summit.



ISLAMABAD: Woman buying jewelry from stall at Karachi Company Market during the upcoming Eid preparation. —INP Photo

Govt extends digital census for third time

ISLAMABAD (PPI) The federal government has extended the fieldwork of the digital census for another 15 days for the third time, reported 24NewsHD TV channel on Saturday.

Now, the census will continue till April 30. Earlier, on Monday, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) extended the census date till April 15 on the recommendation of the provincial governments.

On April 5, the bureau said that more than 90 per cent of work was completed in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, according to official data released, Islamabad and Balochistan lagged significantly behind, with 72% and 62% of work completed so far, respectively.

The fieldwork of the census in Karachi will also be extended for the third time. A meeting in this connection has been convened under the chair of the chief census commissioner. According to a third-party audit, the census is yet to be held in 30% area of the city. Sources said that the PBS officials agree that the fieldwork must be continued in areas where the census has not been completed yet.

IRSA releases 98,200 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 98,200 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 74,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1435.28 feet and was 37.28 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 23,400 cusecs while outflow as 30,000 cusecs.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1109.30 feet, which was 59.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 21,200 cusecs and 38,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 42,500, 27,800, 29,100 and 6,100 cusecs respectively.

Mushaal deplores world's silence over Indian govt rising fascism in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Mushaal Hussein Mullick Chairperson Peace & Culture Organisation deplored the world powers and UN bodies silence over the unabated and continued fascism and brutalities unleashed by the notorious Narendra Modi-led Indian government Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Mushaal, a wife of jailed hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, in a statement on Saturday said that the world showed unity and joined hands against Russia for its invasion against Ukraine but observed criminal silence over Indian fascist government inhuman policies in the occupied valley.

She said that notorious regime usurped all basic rights including right to life of the people in the scenic valley but ironically the

international community and so-called human right organisations were watching the situation as a silent spectator.

The chairperson condemned the lethargic and unconcerned attitude towards Kashmir region which was turned into a largest open prison in the world and biggest tortured cell in the world.

She recalled the senior hurriyat leaders including her husband incarcerated in fake and fabricated and politically motivated cases to defuse intensity of the freedom movement; however, all such brutal tactics proved otherwise.

The Chairperson stated that India was violating and trampling international laws and agreements by depriving the Kashmiris of their fundamental rights, as the occupied forces turned

the valley into a living hell for its inhabitants.

She went on to say that the Indian troops were committing the killings, arrests, torture, destruction of properties, molestation of women and other heinous crimes in the garb of so-called cordon and search operations with impunity.

She said that Modi regime's August 5, 2019 illegal and unilateral actions can't change the internationally recognized status of Kashmir and the Kashmiri people would not rest until liberate the occupied valley from the illegal and unlawful occupation of the Indian forces.

Mushaal urged world to wake up of the sweep slumber and resolve the issue of Kashmir as per with wishes and aspirations of the people of the valley.

15 outlaws arrested, drugs and weapons recovered

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Islamabad capital police apprehended 15 outlaws from different areas of the city and recovered drugs and weapons with ammunition from their possession, a police public relations officer said.

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

Following these directives, the Bhara Kahu police team arrested two accused namely Amir Shahzad and Shoaib and recovered one 30 bore pistol with ammunition and 520 gram heroin from their possession. Likewise, the Phulgran Police team arrested an accused namely Adil and recovered one

Kalashnikov with ammunition from his possession, while the police team also arrested two accused namely Adnan and Waqar involved in illegally selling petrol.

Similarly, the Bani Gala police team arrested two accused namely Khurram and Misher Baz and recovered one 30 bore pistol with ammunition and 1230 gram heroin from their possession. The Golra police team arrested an accused namely Ghulam Ali and recovered one 30 bore pistol with ammunition from his possession.

Moreover, the Nilore police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Sadiq and recovered 550 gram hashish from his possession. The Koral police team arrested four accused namely Mukhmood Hameed, Muhammad Amjad, Babar Ali and

Waseem Zada and recovered two 30 bore pistols with ammunition from their possession.

Furthermore, the Shams Colony police team arrested two drug peddlers namely Danish Mehmood and Faisal Nazeer and recovered 1070 gram hashish from their possession. Cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

CPO/ DIG Operations Islamabad Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in drug peddling and possessing illegal weapons and said that the safety of the lives and property of the citizens is our prime responsibility. The performance of police officials in this regard would be reviewed on a continuous basis, he maintained.



ISLAMABAD: Youngers bathing in Rawal Lake to cool them during high temperatures in the month of holy Ramadan. —INP Photo

Group of abductors arrested

KABUL (Agencies): The Intelligence forces of the IEA, arrested a group of six people on charges of abducting and murder. During an operation, the intelligence officers arrested a group of kidnappers, who abducted a resident of in the 9th police district of Kabul, Sayed Akarem, and demanded money in exchange for his release, the General Intelligence Directorate, in a statement. The abductors despite receiving the money from the family of the victims, they killed him.

Wheat to be supplied

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Program signed a Memorandum of Understanding for humanitarian food assistance of 10,000 tons of wheat for the people of Afghanistan. The MoU represents the fifth shipment of humanitarian aid from India to Afghanistan sent through the Chabahar port. Following the donation of 40,000 tons of wheat the previous year, the WFP organized assistance for 23 million food-insecure people throughout Afghanistan.

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

Afghan participants at forum in Doha voiced support for dialogue: US Special Envoy



DOHA (Khaama Press): US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, said, "Every Afghan participant at Afghan Future Thought Forum in Doha voiced support for dialogue and opposition to armed conflict as a solution to the country's challenges."

US special envoy Thomas West tweeted that he attended the Afghan Future Thought Forum's gathering in Doha with heads of mission of key allies and partners. The participants spoke out in favour of dialogue and against using violence to resolve the country's challenges.

"I heard both condemnation and support for Taliban conduct and different recommendations for how the international community should address challenges," West said, adding, "Every Afghan participant spoke out in favour of dialogue and against using violence to resolve the country's problems."

Thought Forum (AFTF), which describes itself as an independent, non-partisan initiative with "Taliban participants," said in a statement that it has looked at the main opportunities and challenges that the Afghan people face and has presented its solution to both the de facto government and the international community.

On January 23-25, 2023, the Fifth Session of the Forum on the Situation in Afghanistan was held in Doha. The Taliban authorities were urged to lift their restrictions on women's employment and education.

The AFTF has thirty members, which include former government employees, Taliban officials, representatives of civil society and academicians.

Meanwhile, Thomas West admired Fatima Gailani's leadership of this initiative and hoped its participants would carry their messages to the Taliban, other Afghan leaders, and key international stakeholders.

Mine blast kills child, hurt another in Kandahar

KANDAHAR (Khaama Press): One child was killed and another injured when the unexploded device from past wars went off in the southern province of Afghanistan, Kandahar sources said on Saturday.

On Saturday, the provincial government spokesperson Haji Zaid said that one child was killed and another was injured due to a mine blast in the Mianshin district of Kandahar province.

The incident occurred on Friday evening when the children found the unexploded device and began playing with it. In contrast, as per the report, the device went off, killing a child on the spot and injuring another in critical condition.

Last Sunday, a similar incident occurred in the province, killing one child and injuring another.

On the other hand, another incident occurred in the eastern province of Afghanistan, Ghazni, Nahoor district, killing two children.

Unexploded devices blasted last week in the Sayedabad district of Afghanistan's Wardak province, killing two children.

Unexploded bombs from prior conflicts have recently become more common in various parts of the country, killing and hurting men, women, and even children.

International organizations like Australia, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) have all made contributions to support demining in the country since last November.

Afghanistan is still supposedly one of the most mine-contaminated nations in the world, killing dozens of people per month, including children, due to the detonation of unexploded bombs left over from the forty years of civil war.

Journalists criticize lack of access to information

KABUL (TOLOnews): A number of journalists on Saturday criticized the lack of access to information and said that spokesmen of government institutions are not cooperating with them in this respect.

The journalists said they are also concerned about the lack of access to on-time information that ends in losing the chance to have timely coverage of incidents and news content.

"Unfortunately, there are many problems when it comes to access to information and we cannot pass on information to the people on time," said Mustafa

Sharyar, a journalist.

"On contrary of their remarks, access to information has not yet been shared with the media and journalists," said Mohammad Rameez Fayaz, a journalist.

Media-supporting organizations said that access to information is the fundamental right of Afghan citizens and that all government institutions need to cooperate with the people in this respect.

"Access to information is the fundamental right of the people. We call on the Islamic Emirate to provide accurate information to journalists based on exist-

ing laws in Afghanistan," said Masroor Lutfi, head of Afghanistan's National Journalists Union.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Information and Culture said that efforts are underway to address issues in access to information.

"The spokesmen are appointed to share information. If the media organizations face such issues, they should inform us on time," said Hayatullah Muhajar, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture. Lack of access to information has been one of the main challenges for journalists over the past 19 months.

Muttaqi meets Deputy PM of Kazakhstan



KABUL (Agencies): The Country's Acting of Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi met with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Trade and Integration, Serik Zhumangarin of Kazakhstan in Kabul.

Receiving Mr. Zhumangarin Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi thanked their assistance in the sector of trade and humanitarian assistance, called Kazakhstan is a trade partner of Afghanistan.

FM Muttaqi said that better investment opportunities have been provided

in Afghanistan, in many sectors that Kazakh businessmen can invest.

In this meeting, Muttaqi mentioned reaching the volume of trade between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan about to \$900 million, he called further cooperation to increase this measure of trade.

Meanwhile, Muttaqi asked the Kazakh side to facilitate the process of issuing visas to Afghan businessmen. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Trade of Kazakhstan, Mr. Zhumangarin said that a group of Kazakhstan businessmen lately traveled to

Kabul to expand business ties with Kabul.

He vowed that his country will continue delivering humanitarian aid to needy families in the future.

Zhumangarin said that Kazakhstan is willing to boost trade ties, mainly in the sector of transit with Afghanistan which is a common need of both sides.

In the end, Foreign Minister Muttaqi, reminded saying that the Afghan government is balanced and economy-oriented, and regional transit and connectivity through Afghanistan are among the priorities of Afghanistan's foreign policy.

Chinese company offers \$10b investment in lithium deposits

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Afghanistan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum said on Thursday that a Chinese Company, Gochin expressed its interest in investing \$10 billion in Afghanistan's lithium deposits.

According to the statement, the acting minister for mine and Petroleum, Shahabuddin Delawar, met with the Chinese company representatives in Kabul.

The statement said the investment would create 120,000 direct and a million indirect jobs in the country.

Meanwhile, the statement added that the company would repair the Salang Pass within seven months and carve another tunnel.

The company also stressed that the process of the lithium deposits will get done inside the country, and to process it, a hydro-

electric dam will be built, and Kumar and Laghman Road will be asphalted.

In January, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum signed the extraction contract of the Amu oil field with the Chinese company China Petroleum Economics and Information Research Center (CPEIC).

According to the contract, Afghanistan's share is 20 per cent, which will

reach 75% in the future.

Since the Taliban takeover of the country, China has increased its influence via economic ties with the current regime.

According to several media reports, Chinese companies have long aspired to access Afghanistan's extensive and rich lithium deposits, estimated to be worth more than \$1 trillion, Bloomberg said.

Ghazni's Begum Minaret on the verge of collapse



GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): A number of residents and culturists in southern Ghazni province are concerned about the looming collapse of the historical Begum Minaret.

Located in the Khosh Abdal area of Qiyaq valley in Jaghato district, the minaret has a history of 1,000 years.

Mohammad Yasin, a resident of Saraab area, told Pajhwok Afghan News the minaret dated to the Islamic era.

Constructed 1,000 years ago during the Ghaznavid Empire, the spire was considered one of the important and rare pieces of architecture, he added.

The structure, however, has been badly affected by natural disasters and previous wars. In case of continued neglect, it could be destroyed, the resident warned.

Every historic monument is a glorious chapter of history, according to Yasin, who underlined the

imperative of preserving such rich sites.

Culturists hail Ghazni as an important province that is home to many holy and historical sites, some of which have been on the brink of destruction over the past several years. They view negligence from the government as unacceptable.

Zia Rawan, a poet and writer, told Pajhwok hundreds of other ancient monuments in the province also needed urgent restoration.

He is worried if the authorities did not pay attention to their protection, the sites would either disappear or get damaged beyond repair.

Ghazni was announced as the Capital of Islamic civilisation during the previous government. Huge funds were subsequently allocated for the repairs of ancient sites.

Unfortunately, he alleged, the budget was embezzled or spent on

unnecessary things.

Ghazni Museum Director Agha Mohammad Khusha Zada recalled that funds had been earmarked for the restoration of the Begum steeple in 2020, but the project was delayed due to the 2021 political change in the country.

He said: "In addition to the Begum Minaret, there are 10 more historical and cultural monuments that risk destruction. We have already shared the issue with the Ministry of Information and Culture."

Two more monuments — the Mohammad Sharif Khan memorial and the Khwaja Malikyar Parinda shrine — were harmed by a recent earthquake and need be repaired as soon as possible.

In 2013, Ghazni City was declared the capital of Islamic civilisation and some of notable monuments were repaired. Several others, however, remain in a state of decay.

Over 3,000 Afghan migrants deported

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Turkish interior ministry in a statement said that in the first three months of 2023, more than ten thousand migrants including Afghans were deported from the country.

According to Turkish authorities, 3,277 Afghan refugees were deported to Afghanistan since the beginning of the year. The statement said that the individuals had come to Turkey illegally.

The statement said that nearly 1,000 Afghan refugees have been deported within last four days.

"Those who earlier worked in the former government, or they are journalists or worked as civil employees, their cases are being processed by the Turkish refugees agency," said Ezatullah Sadaat, head of the Afghanistan association in Turkey.

"The deportation of Afghan refugees has increased on a daily basis. Hundreds of Afghan refugees are being deported from this country," said Mazlulsh Sultan Oghlo, a journalist in Turkey. The Islamic Emirate meanwhile criticized the countries that host Afghans and deport them with improper manners.

"There should be cooperation in their deportation, it should be in a way that they don't face suffering. Still if they (refugees) want to come back to the country, the Islamic

Emirate considers it better that they come back to their country" said Zabiullah Mujahid, Islamic Emirate's spokesman.

Governor ask for more aid

HERAT (Agencies): The Governor of Herat, Sheikh Noor Ahmad Islam Jar, met with the delegation of the United Nations in that province, and called for the increase of humanitarian aid to needy families.

Lately, a delegation of UN traveled to Herat to exchange views on humanitarian aid, and to discuss better cooperation with local authorities of the province, according to a statement.

Meanwhile, the Herat Governor Sheikh Noor Ahmad Islam Jar meeting with UN delegation vowed for any kind of cooperation, in compliance with the country's laws he said, and asked the humanitarian organizations not to link



their mission to political issues.

The governor of Herat called the support of street children and the treatment of drug addicts one of their work priorities, said: Herat's local administration has taken positive steps in this regard.

Kabul clinics offering free health services for the needy

KABUL (Pajhwok): Several private health centres in Kabul are providing free services to help the needy — a move welcomed by experts, who want all clinics to follow the humanitarian gesture.

The private centres and hospitals offering free health services include Rahman Clinic in Kart-i Parwan, Ansar, Al Mansour in Khoshal Khan area, Al Rahman in Khairkhana, Watan, Sara Pa Cheshm Zarif, Shafaq mental disease treatment centre, Dr. Ahmad Fahim Mehrzad, a digestive system and endoscopy specialist.

Pajhwok Afghan News has compiled a report on these health centres. Rahman Clinic in Kart-i Parwan has announced offering free health services three days a week.

It provides ultrasound, general internal medicine and gynecology services. It treats for free people who economic constraints three days a week.

Pashtun, in charge of the facility, told Pajhwok: "Since the establishment of this clinic, we have been treating patients for free on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

According to him, they are also conducting free diabetes, urology, gynecological and jaundice examinations. He said on other days of the week, they charge 100 afghanis for a urine test, 300 afghanis for ultrasound and 200 afghanis for a jaundice test.

Regarding free health services, Dr Pashtun said: "We are doing this for the good and of the people...we can help poor patients and those with financial problems."

Ansar Hospital also informed of offering free of charge health services two days a week for those who are economically unstable.



He added in these two days no money was charged for blood, sugar, and liver test.

According to him, no normal days, the doctors' fee is 200 afghanis and other examinations are done at cost of 400 afghanis.

In addition to two days free service, discount for surgery is also available in the hospital, the source added.

He said most of the widows, families of martyrs, most of them are female, visit the hospital on the specified days.



Dr. Abdul Mukhtar Ahmadi, administrative head of the hospital, said this hospital offers free services on Mondays and Thursdays for poor people, widows and people who are facing severe economic problems.

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She appreciated the hospital and hoped it would emerge as a template for other private medical facilities. Many people were facing economic hardships and could not afford medical treatment, she believed.

Experts also praised the provision of free health services by some private hospitals as a philanthropic act.

Abdullah Kakar Nisari, an expert on political and social issues, told Pajhwok: "Some clinics and hospitals providing free services are doing a commendable job. They have set is an example of humanitarian activity. People of our country are economically unstable."

Dr. Sharafuddin Azimi, professor of the Psychology Department at the Kabul University of Education and Training, hailed these services of private hospitals.

He commented: "Free health services can be in two directions — positive and negative. Some families cannot afford to get treatment, but patients have

to take medicine or borrow or beg. Such patients should be introduced to clinics and hospitals for free treatment."

He also noted a negative aspect to free health services, saying it created problems. The priority of sound health was undermined, as the result of free services was often dissatisfactory, he argued.

Dr Fardin Gharman, a surgeon and head of Afghanistan's Private Hospitals Association, said: "Private hospitals are always committed to the people and offer them effective services. Seventy percent of health services are related to the private sector."

He acknowledged many private hospitals in Kabul offered free health services one or two days a week, considering people's weak economic situation.

He commended the gesture of private medical facilities, hoping other hospitals and clinics across the country would treat the needy people in a similar way.



TOKYO: A man, believed to be a suspect who threw a pipe-like object near Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during his outdoor speech, is held by police officers at Saikazaki fishing port in Wakayama, Wakayama Prefecture, south-western Japan.

Three civilians killed as violence escalates in Sudan

KHARTOUM (Agencies): Sudan woke up to heavy clashes between the army and a powerful paramilitary force known as the Rapid Support Forces on Saturday. The two rivals have long competed for relevance and power, but an internationally backed political process launched last year exacerbated tensions between them, analysts and activists say.

Civilians in the capital of Khartoum reported seeing armoured vehicles from both forces roaming the streets, while hearing heavy gunfire in multiple urban quarters. The RSF said it has taken control of the presidential palace and Khartoum International Airport, which could not be confirmed. The group also said it has seized Merowe Airport, which houses Sudanese and Egyptian fighter planes. Sudan's army chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan denied the RSF's claims.

Al Jazeera was not able to verify the claims and the situation on the ground remained unclear. Witnesses sighted fighter planes in the air, presumably from the army since the RSF does not have an aerial arsenal. Planes are literally flying over our house. We can hear shooting everywhere," Dania Atabani, a Sudanese activist, told Al Jazeera from Khartoum. A doctors' group said at least three civilians were killed as the fighting escalated, including two at the Khartoum airport and one in North Kordofan state. Not long ago, the RSF and the military cooperated to derail Sudan's transition to democracy by spearheading a coup on October 25, 2021. The move triggered a year of anti-coup protests and international pressure, prompting both forces to sign the Framework Agreement on December 5.

That settlement ushered in a new political process that promised to address key issues before a final deal that would restore a civilian administration tasked with steering the country to elections in two years. Security sector reform was the most vital and challenging issue to sort out in order to rein in the security forces. But the process was rushed and ad hoc, with the international community hoping to wrap it up in merely days or weeks in order to celebrate the signing of a new agreement, according to four

diplomats that were not authorised to comment. As a result, the political process accelerated a confrontation between the RSF and army.

"The Framework Agreement ... brought to the fore key existential issues for both forces and their leaderships, such as [RSF] integration into a single army, military divestment from lucrative sectors of the economy and the prospect of [soldiers] facing justice for past abuses," Jonas Horner, an independent consultant. "Most of all ... the two forces feared being left weaker than the other." The RSF evolved from Arab armed groups that have been accused of carrying out massacres in Darfur in the early 2000s, according to global rights groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

It was created in 2013 by former President Omar al-Bashir, who placed the group directly under his command and tasked it with protecting his rule from top army generals and his feared intelligence service. The plan did not work. In April 2019, both the army and RSF turned against al-Bashir following months of pro-democracy protests. The RSF continued to operate independently from the army, while the two forces competed for state assets, foreign patrons, legitimacy and recruits. Even after the two forces overthrew Sudan's civilian administration in October 2021, experts and activists warned that the interests of both forces would diverge in the medium to long term.

"Both the army and RSF had a marriage of convenience, but they continued to ignore the issue of RSF integration into the army," Hamid Murtada, a Sudanese analyst and advocate of the street pro-democracy movement, told Al Jazeera a day before clashes broke out. "Despite my reservations of the political process and Framework Agreement, it showed us that the question [of security sector reform] had to be asked and it brought all these tensions to the surface," he added. There are also indications that Bashir-era loyalists in the army – tied to the Islamic movement in Sudan – feared that a new political agreement would significantly harm their economic and

political power. Many of these loyalists blame Hemeti for turning on al-Bashir in 2019.

To thwart them, the RSF repositioned itself as a cooperative partner for pro-democracy politicians in exchange for maintaining its relevance and power. As a result, the RSF pushed top army commander Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to sign a new deal in hopes of acquiring more legitimacy and support. But many suspect that al-Burhan was under pressure from his top brass not to sign. Violence appeared imminent when the RSF deployed to the northern city of Merowe two days ago, prompting a warning from the army that the RSF must retreat or else security could collapse in Sudan. Diplomatic sources said that the Quad – the US, UK, UAE and Saudi Arabia – were most active in trying to mediate the dispute between the RSF and army in recent days.

The UN political mission in Sudan, known as UNITAMS, also made separate efforts, according to informed sources that were not authorised to speak on record due to the sensitive nature of the talks. "The international community should have read the situation much better and acted with more seriousness and urgency in the last days. The writing has been on the wall for so long," said Nada Wanni, an independent researcher speaking to Al Jazeera from Khartoum. "Efforts should've been more synergised and much more serious from everyone in order ... to warn the two leaders of very serious consequences impacting them personally if they took this step." Now that fighting has erupted, many civilians fear that the two forces will embark on a protracted struggle at the expense of everyone else.

RSF leader, Mohamad Hamdan "Hemeti" Dagalo, recently told Al Jazeera Arabic that al-Burhan will either be brought to justice or die like a dog. "Civilian protection should be the priority of every member of the international community right now," Wanni stressed. "They need to exert every leverage and pressure they have over the leaders of these two camps to ensure they stop risking the lives of Sudanese civilians."

Shehbaz's mass transit projects providing relief to commuters

ISLAMABAD (APP): The mass transit system of Pakistan has witnessed a significant transformation during the one year of the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif with launch of several projects aimed to facilitate the general public.

The Metro Bus Service and the Green Line train services, launched during his tenure, are accommodating the commuters who are already facing the brunt of inflation and high fuel prices. With the inauguration of Islamabad Metro Bus Service by prime minister Shehbaz Sharif in April last year as his first development project, the country's journey of progress resumed after the four-year rule by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

The Islamabad Metro Bus Service project, which was due to become operational by 2018, faced a massive delay by the PTI government and was launched within five days after PM Shehbaz Sharif assumed his office. Shehbaz Sharif during his tenure in Punjab as chief minister had also successfully initiated the mass transit projects in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan.

For this reason, he is regarded by the general public as the 'pioneer of the mass transit system' in Pakistan. This public bus system is providing a comfortable travel to commuters with regard to cost-efficiency and reduced time.

The Rawalpindi-Islamabad Metro Bus is 83.6 km-long bus system operating between the twin cities. It consists of four routes, namely the Red, Orange, Blue, and Green Lines. The Red and Orange Lines have dedicated lanes with proper stations built along them, while the Blue and Green Lines currently run along the Islamabad

Expressway and Srinagar Highway respectively, with regular traffic. The Metro Bus network's Red Line stretches 22.5 kilometers between Pak Secretariat, in Islamabad, and Saddar in Rawalpindi. The second route, the Orange Line, stretches 25.6 kilometers between the Peshawar Morr Interchange and the Islamabad International Airport. In July 2022, the Green Line and Blue Lines were added to this Metro Bus network.

This mass transit system uses e-ticketing and an Intelligent Transportation System, where the Red Line is managed by the Punjab Mass Transit Authority while the rest are being managed by the Capital Development Authority. The commuters are getting facilities with an easy access to the buses coming after every five minutes and the shuttle by every 25 minutes.

On the directives of PM Sharif, the establishment of a metro bus station on the motorway for better connectivity is also in progress to enhance the benefit of service to a maximum number of people. As per his vision, Shehbaz Sharif describes the mass transit systems a "way forward" to provide citizens with dignified, inexpensive, and environment-friendly transport service.

He has termed the capital's first four-line interconnected bus service 'a big relief for commuters' of the twin cities dealing with high fuel prices. "A decent and on-time transportation service on regular basis is a service to common man," he said, at the launch of the metro bus service in Islamabad last year.

The Metro Bus service is largely accommodating the common man, particularly students and workers plying on the routes. The launch of the

Green Line train service between Islamabad and Karachi in January this year is another feather in the cap of Shehbaz Sharif which adds to his list of development projects for the ease of the general public.

The train, comprising modern coaches imported from China, stops at the stations of Rawalpindi, Chaklala, Lahore, Khanewal, Bahawalpur, Rohri, Hyderabad and Drigh Road, Karachi. The turnaround time of the Green Line is 22 hours, which saves a plenty of time for the travelers.

The ticket covers breakfast, lunch, hi-tea, and dinner besides Wifi. Apart from this, a high-quality bedding and utility kits are also provided to the passengers. According to estimates, the train benefits around 2,200 passengers on daily basis from Islamabad to Karachi. The Green Line project, which was initiated in 2016 during the tenure of the then prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was delayed by the PTI government.

Overall, the mass transit system launched by PM Shehbaz Sharif is providing services to the people in congested areas, ensuring frequent and fast routes. Under his vision, his government plans to expand the network of mass transit system in other parts of the country with the sole aim to serve the masses.

In near future, the people of Islamabad will be able to avail the facility of electric buses for an intra-city commute. Initially, the electric buses will be run on six different public transport routes. The extended mass transit system in the country is expected to build thriving communities, create jobs, ease traffic congestion and promote a cleaner environment.

'Imran assured he is not anti-American'

ISLAMABAD (INP): United States (US) Congressman Brad Sherman has asserted that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has assured him that he was not an anti-American and believes in supremacy of rule of law.

Speaking to international media, US Congressman said that he held a telephonic conversation with former prime minister of Pakistan – Imran Khan, wherein the latter assured that he was not an anti-American and believes in supremacy of rule of law. Brad Sherman pointed out a letter written to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken – about concerns over "democracy, human rights, and rule of law" violations in Pakistan, clarifying that the letter was not precisely to support PTI chief.

He further said that he was the one who criticised Imran Khan for accusing the United States of overthrowing the government. It is pertinent to mention here that US Congressman Brad Sherman wrote to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, voicing concerns over "democracy, human rights, and rule of law" violations in Pakistan.

PM to be in jeopardy: Aitzaz Ahsan

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Aitzaz Ahsan on Saturday said if Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif did not allow election in Punjab on May 14, he would stand disqualified.

Addressing a round table conference of lawyers and jurists, he said election in Punjab would be held on May 14 at every cost adding that anyone violating the Supreme Court's (SC) order, directing the elections in Punjab on May 14, would be disqualified. He went on to say that the country was witnessing a historic conflict between the parliament and the judiciary adding that political parties were at daggers drawn to each other right now. "We need to think whether the constitution reigns supreme or not," he added.

"The constitution binds elections within 90 days [of the dissolution of assemblies]," he said. He added that our country was reeling under debt. Mr Ahsan said that the verdict issued by the apex court was final adding that PM Shehbaz and his brother Nawaz Sharif said they rejected the bench hearing elections' case. "I have been saying since day one that the court's order needs to be followed," he added.

Govt extends digital census for third time

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The federal government has extended the fieldwork of the digital census for another 15 days for the third time, reported 24NewsHD TV channel on Saturday.

Now, the census will continue till April 30. Earlier, on Monday, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) extended the census date till April 15 on the recommendation of the provincial governments. On April 5, the bureau said that more than 90 per cent of work was completed in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, according to official data released, Islamabad and Balochistan lagged significantly behind, with 72% and 62% of work completed so far, respectively.

CTD arrests four TTP men

RAWALPINDI (PPI): The Counter-Terrorism Department on Saturday arrested four most wanted terrorists belonging to proscribed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Al Qaeda organizations from different cities in Punjab.

The CTD arrested the militants in secret operations conducted in Multan, Rawalpindi and Sargodha. According to the CTD spokesperson, the arrests were made following the interrogation of 26 suspected persons by the sleuths.

The arrested TTP and Al Qaeda operatives were identified as Ayaz Khan, Yaseen, Saleem and Asad. The spokesperson said that police were interrogating the terrorists after registering cases against them.

Japanese PM unhurt after blast shakes port he was visiting

TOKYO (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was evacuated unharmed after an explosion at a western port on Saturday, NHK television reported, and a suspect was apprehended for allegedly throwing the explosive.

Kishida was visiting the Saikazaki port in Wakayama prefecture to cheer his ruling party's candidature in a local election. The explosion occurred just before he was to begin his speech, NHK said. No injuries were reported in the incident and Kishida was taken to Wakayama prefectural police headquarters, it added.

The incident comes only nine months after former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated while delivering a campaign speech in the western city of Nara. The assassination shocked the nation and a subsequent investigation found holes in Abe's security and led to reinforcement of Japan's police security measures. The latest attack also comes as a series of

Group of Seven ministerial meetings begins this week-end ahead of the May 19-21 summit that Kishida will host in Hiroshima.

A man believed to be a suspect was arrested at the scene on Saturday. NHK footage showed several uniformed and plainclothes police officers gathered around the man, pressing him to the ground and dragging him to the side. The suspect, identified only as a young male, allegedly threw the explosive, NHK said. One witness told NHK she was among the crowd and saw something come flying from behind and that there was a sudden loud noise and she fled with her children. Another witness said people were screaming and that he saw someone being apprehended right before the explosion occurred.

Saturday's attack comes ahead of nationwide local elections, including a by-election for a vacated seat in the lower house of the Parliament, with voting scheduled for April 23. In

Abe's assassination, the attacker allegedly shot Abe with a homemade gun as the former leader was making a campaign speech. The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, has been charged with murder and several other crimes including violation of a gun control law.

Abe's alleged assassin told investigators that he killed Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians, because of Abe's apparent links to a religious group that he hated. In his statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said he developed a grudge because his mother had made massive donations to the Unification Church that bankrupted his family and ruined his life. In a country known for public safety and tight gun controls, the assassination led to the resignation of top local and national police chiefs and a tightening of security guidelines for political leaders and other prominent people.

IMF appreciates friendly nations for aiding Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a recent development, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expressed its appreciation for the commitments made by Pakistan's friendly nations to assist the cash-strapped country in reviving its loan program, which has been struggling due to dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Nathan Porter, the IMF Mission Chief for Pakistan, stated that Islamabad and the global lender had reached an agreement to continue the current economic policies, and both parties were working to secure sufficient funds to implement these policies. The IMF also supported Pakistan's efforts to obtain financial guarantees from friendly nations, as they would aid in completing the

ninth review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), he added.

Earlier on Friday, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has given assurance to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it will offer \$1 billion as bilateral support to Pakistan. Finance czar took to Twitter and penned that "UAE authorities have confirmed to IMF for their bilateral support of US \$ One billion to Pakistan."

He added that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) was now engaged for needful documentation for taking the said deposit from UAE authorities. Meanwhile, the international money lender has assured Pakistan that a staff

level agreement will be reached soon.

The two parties recently held a virtual meeting, led by Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and the IMF Deputy Managing Director Antoinette M. Sayeh. The talks focused on Pakistan's economic status and reforms, with a review of the country's implementation of previous IMF program goals.

The IMF's deputy managing director expressed optimism about working with Pakistan and signing the Staff Level Agreement soon. Officials from the Pakistani Finance Ministry, Economic Affairs Secretaries, and State Bank Governor, who participated virtually from Washington, all attended the conference.

Pakistan calls for boosting United Nations

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has called for strengthening the United Nations in every way possible as the organization remains the best hope for an equal and peaceful world in the future. Speaking as panelist at an event in the UN headquarters, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Nations, Munir Akram, regretted that the world body lacked the power to make the much-needed changes.

He pointed out that the Security Council was an unequal body; the General Assembly has no binding powers, while the powers of finance lie in Washington and trade in

Geneva. Akram said that the progress towards achieving world peace over the past 78 years was partial. He said therefore we need to strengthen the United Nations and the General Assembly if we are going to change the world.

The Ambassador said "We have resolved conflicts and made progress but this progress has been partial and has been incomplete and unequal," He encouraged the youth to work in the fields of progress which were overlooked and to work for a better future. "We are faced with a world today whose hallmark is inequality. Inequality between the

powerful and the weak, between the rich and the poor, between the privileged and the destitute," He added "we will strive to do everything possible to strengthen the United Nations in every way possible." He also described issues relating to climate change, security, and peace development. "We need to address the peace agenda. We need to address the threat of nuclear annihilation. We face it today, as much as we did in the Cold War. We need to control the arms race where expenditures are at the highest level in the history of the United Nations," said the Ambassador.

Biden says he will announce run for re-election 'soon'

BALLINA, Ireland (Agencies): US President Joe Biden said on Friday he has decided to run for a second term and would formally announce his re-election campaign "relatively soon."

"We'll announce it relatively soon. But the trip here just reinforced my sense of optimism about what can be done," Biden told reporters at the tail-end of an emotional trip to Ireland. "I told you my plan is to run again."

Biden has long said he intended to run for re-election, but the lack of a formal announcement has sometimes given jitters to supporters unsure if the 80-year-old Democrat, one of the oldest world

leaders, would really commit to another four-year term.

Yet behind the scenes, close aides and allies have already begun putting the steps in place to stand up a campaign infrastructure and fundraising apparatus ahead of a 2024 bid that could be a re-run of the 2020 match-up with Republican ex-president Donald Trump, who has already launched his campaign. Biden's expected pitch is to "finish the job" after a first term that included several legislative wins, including billions of dollars in federal funds to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and for new infrastructure.

But Biden's age makes his re-election bid a historic and risky gamble for the Democratic Party, which faces a tough election map to hold the Senate in 2024 and is the minority in the House of Representatives now. Biden's approval ratings are stuck in the low 40s; he would be 86 by the end of a prospective second term, nine years older than the average US male life expectancy.

Doctors declared Biden, who does not drink alcohol and exercises five times a week, "fit for duty" after an examination in February. The White House says his record shows that he is mentally sharp enough for rigours of the job.

Military troops' deployment approved for operation in Katcha area

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government has approved deployment of military troops for operation against outlaws in the Katcha area, citing sources. According to sources, the cabinet has approved a circulation summary for deployment of military troops in Katcha area alongside the Indus River.

The Punjab government

had requested the federal government seeking military assistance for the operation by April 24, sources said. The government has also sought extension in deployment until May 05, if the operation could not be concluded on the given date, according to sources.

The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has revealed in a report that the

investigators have traced the presence of terrorist outfits in the Katcha area.

The revelations were made in a meeting chaired by caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi to review the grand operation launched by the police force in the Katcha areas. The report stated that terrorist outfits are present in the Katcha areas.