

16 dead in Dubai fire
DUBAI (Reuters): Sixteen people, including three Pakistanis, were killed and nine were injured in a Dubai residential building fire on Saturday, local media said on Sunday. The fire engulfed the five-storey building in the Al-Ras neighbourhood, one of the oldest parts of Dubai and home to many migrant workers and traders, on Saturday afternoon, according to Abu Dhabi-based newspaper The National.

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

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIX No. 91 Regd. No. 241 RAMAZAN 26 1444 -- MONDAY, APRIL 17 2023 PESHAWAR EDITION 12 PAGES Price. 20

PTI's govt intentionally delayed development pace in Punjab: PM

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that previous government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had deliberately interrupted the development pace in the Punjab which was initiated by their government.

Instead initiating new uplift projects, the earlier ones initiated by the PML-N government were put to halt. The people of the province were avenged for their support to Pakistan Muslim League-N, the prime minister expressed these views during a high-level meeting to review the ongoing public welfare and other proposed projects.

The meeting was attended by Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi, PM's advisor Ahmad Khan Cheema and federal and provincial authorities, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The meeting was given a detailed briefing over the construction work on Imamia colony flyover project. The prime minister directed for early completion of the project for the public use.

Addressing the participants, the prime minister said that during the last four years of the previous government, the affairs of the province were handed over to an incompetent and puppet chief minister.

Instead focusing on the progress of province, the office of the chief minister was misused for political maneuvering at the federal level, he opined.

The prime minister further observed that these public welfare-oriented projects which should have been completed and alleviated public woes, continued to hit snags for years during the previous government's tenure. He directed the early completing of all such ongoing projects.

The meeting was further briefed about the proposed Lahore-Sialkot motorway link road to facilitate the people of Gujranwala.

The prime minister directed the chief minister to constitute a three-member committee in this regard that would give a detailed briefing over the project in the next meeting.

PM visits different development projects; directs speedy completion: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday visited the under-construction Lahore bridge and CBD underpass to review the pace of work and directed for fast-paced completion.

During his visit to the construction site of Lahore bridge, the prime minister was apprised that the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) project worth Rs1712 million was started in the year 2021 but delayed for two years due to the issuance of no objection certificate.

The prime minister expressed his displeasure over the pace of work and the shutdown programme by the LESCO.

The prime minister directed for initiation of legal action against the official concerned for the delay and desired completion of the process in two weeks.

The officials were given one month time to complete the construction work instead of a period of two months. The prime minister was accompanied by Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi, chief secretary and other senior officials.

The prime minister also visited CBD underpass and termed the delay unfair.

He questioned the hiring of third-party for validation and directed the appointment of a renowned third party at the cost of a construction company.

The prime minister directed for expeditious completion of the project by advising the relevant officials to give special incentives to the workforce.

PM visits CBD, Kalma Chowk underpass, orders to expedite work: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visited under construction underpasses at Ferozpur Road here on early Sunday morning. The Premier, visited the Arfa Kareem underpass first and then Kalma Chowk underpass where he directed to expedite the construction work. He asked the authorities concerned to ensure complete safety and protection of common citizens in the project. Shehbaz Sharif reviewed all parts of the project. Both the underpasses have been opened for regular traffic, however, some finishing work is undergoing, the prime minister was informed.

Chief Executive Officer Central Business District Development Authority Imran Ameen told the Prime Minister in briefing that all link roads of Kalma Chowk Remodeling Project were operational and the remaining work would be completed after Eidul Fitr. Punjab's Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi also accompanied the Prime Minister.



LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visiting Lahore Bridge Construction site.

Thousands attend funeral prayers of Abdul Shakoor

LAKKI MARWAT (NNI): Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life attended the Namaz-i-Janaza of Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoor at his ancestral village in Lakki Marwat on Sunday.

The burial took place at the minister's native village Tajbi Khel in Lakki Marwat. The federal minister died in horrible accident in Islamabad on Saturday night. A case has been registered over the death of Mufti Abdul Shakoor.

The case was registered with the Secretariat police station on the complaint of Mufti Shakoor's friend, Qudratullah. The first information report mentions the provisions of accidental murder, speeding, damage to the vehicle.

Mufti Shakoor died on the spot after being hit by a high-speed vehicle, the report states. According to the preliminary investigation, the vehicle which hit the minister's car was being driven at a speed of 110 kms per hour while Abdul Shakoor's car was moving at a speed of 30kms per hour. The federal minister's official vehicle was also completely destroyed in the accident, the FIR added.

Moreover, the traffic police has submitted its initial report on the accident to the Islamabad police chief. As per the report, the cause of the accident was overspeeding. The speed of the double cabin vehicle was high, and the chance to apply brakes was very low.

A preliminary report of the Motor Vehicle Examiner of both the vehicles has also been received. According to the Motor Vehicle Examiner, the speed of Mufti Shakoor's car was 30kms per hour, while that of the Vigo that collided with it was 110 km/h. The speed limit at the site of the accident on Constitution Avenue is 60 km/h. Moreover, the report states that traffic signals were in-operational on the road at the time of the accident. There was no technical problem with the vehicle that hit the minister's car, the Motor Vehicle Examiner reported.

The tyre and axle of Mufti Shakoor's car got detached due to the accident, the report said.

A report has also been submitted regarding the airbags of the vehicles. The remains of both the vehicles involved in the accident have been moved to the Secretariat police station. In his application submitted to the police, JUI leader Qudratullah said that Maulana Shakoor came to his house for Iftar yesterday and left at 8pm. He said that he got the news of his death in an accident at 10pm. He requested the police to investigate Maulana Shakoor's death, pleading that it was a sensitive matter. Police have arrested the driver of HiLux Revo which crashed into Maulana Shakoor's vehicle and two other accused.

The Islamabad IG police and chief commissioner visited the place of accident. According to the post mortem report of Maulana Shakoor, he got severe head injury. Many of his bones were fractured and blood was oozing out from his mouth and nose. The report said that his death occurred due to head injury.

Tragic car accident in Khuzdar leaves 7 policemen dead

QUETTA (INP): In a tragic incident, seven policemen from the Bela police force lost their lives in a car accident that occurred in the Wadh area of Khuzdar, Balochistan, on Sunday morning. According to rescue authorities, the accident left two victims trapped in the wreckage of the car.

Reports suggest that the police officers were killed when their vehicle collided with a truck on the road in Wadh. Despite the rescue efforts, two cops remained stuck in the car and required a crane to be extricated. Unfortunately, one of the trapped victims later succumbed to his injuries. The bodies of the deceased were subsequently transferred to a nearby hospital.

Soon after the accident, police, levies, and rescue authorities rushed to the scene and immediately began rescue operations. A crane was deployed to help lift up the car and facilitate the rescue of the trapped officers. The authorities continued to work tirelessly to manage the situation and assist those affected by this tragic event.

PTI forms 3-member committee

LAHORE (NNI): A day after Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) emir Sirajul Haq launched a fresh bid to initiate talks between the government and the opposition, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Sunday constituted a three-member committee to hold a dialogue "on the ongoing political crisis in the country." According to a statement issued today, the three-member committee includes Pervaiz Khattak, Ejaz Chaudhary and Mian Mahmoodur Rasheed.

The development comes after the JI chief held meetings with PTI Chairman Imran Khan and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at their residences in Lahore with an agenda to bring the government and opposition closer and end the ongoing political crisis.

Sirajul Haq along with a three-member delegation held separate meetings with PM Shehbaz Sharif and Imran Khan and urged both parties to sit on the negotiation table. During the meeting with the prime minister, the current political situation in the country and the judicial crisis were discussed. The leaders agreed that issues should be resolved with collective wisdom. On the occasion, Sirajul Haq said that the political situation could only be resolved by sitting together and resolving issues politically.

"The country cannot afford any uncertainty at this time and holding elections at the same time is better for the country," he said. Meanwhile, Imran Khan agreed to continue future contacts after Eidul Fitr. Recently, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had formed a committee to engage with allies in the coalition government to reach a consensus on dialogue with all political parties.

Pulwama attack revelations vindicate Pakistan: FO

ISLAMABAD (APP): The latest revelations made by Satya Pal Malik, the so-called former Governor of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), have once again vindicated Pakistan's stance on the Pulwama Attack of February 2019.

"His disclosures demonstrate how the Indian leadership has habitually used the bogey of terrorism from Pakistan to advance its sham victimhood narrative and the Hindutva agenda, clearly for domestic political gains," the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a statement on Sunday.

The spokesperson further said that Pakistan hoped that the international community would take cognizance of the latest revelations and see through India's propaganda campaign against Pakistan driven by selfish political considerations and based on lies and deceit.

"India must answer the questions raised in the latest revelations. It is time India be held accountable for the actions that imperiled regional peace in the aftermath of Pulwama attack," it was stressed.

Pakistan, the spokesperson said, for its part, would continue to counter India's false narrative, and act firmly and responsibly in the face of different provocations.

In an interview with Karan Thapar for 'The Wire', Satya Pal Malik, the Modi government's former so-called governor of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), painted a damning picture of the PM and his closest advisors.

Malik, the last so-called governor of IIOJK before it was divided and reduced to Union territory status, said "Mein safely keh sakta hoon Prime Minister ko corruption se bahut nafrat nahin hain" ('I can safely say the PM has no real problem with corruption').

Malik, who was governor during the Pulwama terrorist attack of February 2019 and the scrapping of Article 370 in August that year, said the prime minister was "ill-informed" and "ignorant" about Kashmir and told him not to speak about the Union home ministry's lapses which led to the devastating terrorist attack on soldiers in Pulwama in February 2019.

During the interview, Malik revealed that the attack on the Central Reserve Police Force convoy in Pulwama was a result of "incompetence" by the Indian system and specifically the CRPF and the home ministry.

At the time, Rajnath Singh was home minister. Malik gave extensive details of how the CRPF had asked for aircraft to transport its jawans but was refused by the Union home ministry.

He also spoke of how sanitisation of the route was not done effectively. More importantly, he said all of these lapses were raised by him directly when Modi called him from outside Corbett Park shortly after the Pulwama attack. He said the prime minister told him to keep quiet about this and not tell anyone.

Separately, Malik said that NSA Ajit Doval also told him to keep quiet and not talk about it. Malik said he immediately realised that the intention was to put the blame on Pakistan and derive electoral benefit for the government and the BJP. Malik also said that there was grave intelligence failure in the Pulwama incident because the car carrying 300 kilograms of RDX explosives had come from Pakistan but was travelling around the roads and villages of IIOJK for 10-15 days without being detected and without anyone knowing.

Malik also gave details of how, when he was governor of J&K, he was approached by the BJP-RSS leader Ram Madhav to clear a hydro-electric scheme and a Reliance insurance scheme.

Madhav came to see him at seven in the morning to try and get him to change his mind. Malik said at the time people were telling him that he could get Rs 300 crores for clearing both schemes. Malik said the prime minister was "ignorant" and "ill-informed" about Kashmir.

He said removing IIOJK's statehood was a mistake and it should be restored immediately.

Speaking about Modi, Malik said "the prime minister is not at all concerned about corruption."

He said he was removed as governor of Goa in August 2020 and sent to Meghalaya because he had brought to the prime minister's attention several instances of corruption which the government chose to ignore rather than tackle.

He alleged that the people around the prime minister were indulging in corruption and often use the PMO's name. Malik said he had brought all of this to Modi's attention but added that the PM did not seem to care. That's when he said, "Mein safely keh sakta hoon Prime Minister ko corruption se bahut nafrat nahin hain".

At least 56 civilians killed in Sudan clashes

KHARTOUM (AFP/APP): Fighting in the Sudanese capital raged into the early hours of Sunday after a day of deadly battles between paramilitaries and the regular army that left at least 56 people dead and nearly 600 wounded.

Explosions and gunfire rang out on the deserted streets of Khartoum, according to witnesses, after the paramilitaries said they were in control of the presidential place, Khartoum airport and other vital facilities.

The army denied the claims, and in a statement late Saturday, the Sudanese air force urged people to stay indoors as it continued air strikes against bases of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Fighter jets were earlier seen flying overhead.

Windows rattled and apartment buildings shook in many parts of Khartoum during the clashes, according to AFP correspondents, with explosions heard early Sunday.

"The total number of deaths among civilians reached 56," said the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, an independent pro-democracy group of medics, adding there were "tens of deaths" among security forces but they were not included in the new toll early Sunday.

The committee said it had counted around 600 wounded including some among security forces and that many casualties could not be transferred to hospitals due to difficulties in moving during the clashes. Saudi Arabia's flag carrier Saudia said earlier one of its planes, with passengers and crew aboard waiting for departure, was "exposed to gunfire damage". Bakry, 24, who works in marketing, said Khartoum residents had "never seen anything like" this unrest, which left dark smoke hanging over the capital.

"People were terrified and running back home. The streets emptied very quickly", said Bakry, who gave only a first name. Violence erupted after weeks of deepening tensions between military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, over the planned integration of Daglo's RSF into the regular army.

The integration was a key element of talks to finalise a deal that would return the country to civilian rule and end the political-economic crisis sparked by the military's 2021 coup.

Created in 2013, the RSF emerged from the Janjaweed militia that then-president Omar al-Bashir unleashed against non-Arab ethnic minorities in the western Darfur region a decade earlier, drawing accusations of war crimes. UN chief Antonio Guterres called for "an immediate cessation of hostilities" and discussed ways to de-escalate with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and African Union Commission Chair Moussa Faki. He also spoke with Burhan and Daglo urging them "to return to dialogue." US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also called for a return to talks.

"Fighting between SAF (Sudanese armed forces) and RSF forces threatens the security and safety of Sudanese civilians and undermines efforts to restore Sudan's democratic transition. The only way forward is to return to negotiations," Blinken tweeted Sunday. The Arab League, following a request by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, is scheduled to hold an urgent meeting Sunday to discuss the situation in Sudan.

PTI urges President Alvi to refer caretaker govts issue to SC

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Sunday urged President Dr Arif Alvi to refer the matter of caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the Supreme Court.

In a letter to President Arif Alvi, PTI Central Senior Vice President and former federal minister Fawad Chaudhary recommended that the matter of deviation from the constitution by the federal government and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) be referred to the Supreme Court.

The letter stated that that under the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, sovereignty belongs to Almighty Allah and the state is bound to exercise its authority via elected representatives.

Therefore, to ensure the fair and transparent elections under article 224 of the constitution, the caretaker government for the limited time period of 90 days have been introduced, with only object to facilitate the commission in holding free, fair, just and honest elections in accordance with constitution and law. During such period the caretaker governments are vested with only authority and power to run day to day affairs and not to take major policy decision.

He further stated that due to the unconstitutional and illegal actions of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government and the ECP, the stipulated period of the constitution regarding elections has passed, even before the Supreme Court had to use its constitutional authority to determine the period of holding elections. The caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have already completed their constitutional period, and the constitution does not permit an extension of their tenure.



Govt making all possible efforts to restore the economy destroyed by PTI: Ameer Muqam



F.P. Report

SWAT: Adviser to Prime Minister on Political and Public Affairs and President Pakistan Muslim League-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Engineer Amir Muqam met a large number of people during a khuli kachehri held in Swat on Sunday and listened to their problems and resolved them. Orders have been issued to the concerned authorities.

Adviser to the Prime Minister said

that this is the vision of Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif to serve the people even on holidays.

Engineer Amir Muqam said that the current government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is making all possible efforts to restore the economy destroyed by the incompetent government of PTI. We are well aware of the problems of the people and are making efforts to provide maximum relief to the people.

He said that the Prime Minister has started the free flour scheme to give relief to the people.

Engineer Amir Muqam said that PTI's incompetent government is responsible for all the problems faced by the people today. The adviser to the Prime Minister said that the current government has saved the country from bankruptcy, but it will take time to restore all the systems destroyed by PTI.

Engineer Amir Muqam said that foreign agents were imposed to destroy Pakistan's economy and institutions, that's why funding came from Israel, India and America.

He said that Imran the puppet in D Chowk and puppets like Saqib Nisar, Asif Saeed Khosa were seated in the Supreme Court and the same agenda was followed. He said that Nawaz Sharif had left his case to Allah Ta'ala, Allah Ta'ala exposed all the conspiratorial characters who did injustice. The adviser said that Pakistan is coming out of difficulties, so conspirators have become active under a new name.

The adviser said that there was an attempt to interfere in the work of the Parliament, the Parliament will defend its authority.

Eid shopping on its peak

ISLAMABAD (APP): As a few days left for celebrations of the Eid-ul-Fitr, the eid shopping has gained momentum in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi as a huge rush of people is being witnessed in all markets and bazaars.

According to a private news channel, a huge rush is being witnessed in almost all shopping malls and bazaars including Commercial Market, Saddar Bazaar, Moti Bazaar, Jinnah Super, G-9 markaz and various other markets of the capital city.

A large number of women and children are thronging to markets and commercial plazas to purchase clothes, footwear, cosmetics, henna, bangles and other items.

The shopkeepers have decorated their shops with colourful lights to attract customers, a private news channel reported. Special eid stalls of cosmetics, mehndi and bangles, the most demanded items of Eid-ul-Fitr, are nowadays being witnessed everywhere particularly in busy markets and bazaars of the city. As the festival of Eid comes closer, the stalls of beautifully designed colourful bangles, jewellery and mehndi in the markets of the city have been set up which are attracting female customers.

The young girls are very much interested in buying matching bangles with the colours of their Eid dresses, while many of them are rushing towards mehndi stalls to embellish their hands before the arrival of the religious festival, Eid-ul-Fitr. With the start of the third Ashra of Ramazan, Eid shopping had gained momentum and the citizens were thronging bazaars and malls. Women and children are enjoying the signature hustle and bustle of Eid the most as they are seen in larger proportion at stalls, shops, malls and markets.

Frontier Corps North and CTTI Rawalpindi sponsoring two short courses

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Frontier Corps North, in collaboration with Construction, Technology & Training Institute (CTTI) Rawalpindi, is sponsoring two short courses aimed at enhancing mining industry skills for the students from Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber districts.

The courses, which include Heavy Machinery and Dumper Driver training, commenced on April 1, 2023 and will continue until June 30, 2023.

The students are undergoing comprehensive training that includes practical sessions to learn the latest skills in operating heavy machinery and dumper trucks. The program has allotted 50 vacancies to students from Bajaur,



Mohmand, and Khyber, ensuring equal opportunity for each district.

This initiative by Frontier Corps North is expected to have a positive impact on the local labour force in the mining industry, providing them with the necessary skills to thrive in the field.

The aim is to inspire similar steps by other organizations to improve

the skills of local communities in various industries.

The courses at CTTI Rawalpindi are being conducted under the supervision of experienced instructors, who are providing hands-on training to the students. The tribal students are enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn and acquire skills that can open up employment opportunities in the mining industry.

PSL collaborates with GBB to open Sakura Restaurant and Front Page Café in Lahore

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 management 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.



KARACHI: A large number of people are sitting and waiting to break their fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan at Chippa Welfare Association Office.

PM authorizes major crackdown against smuggling, hoarding of sugar

LAHORE (APP) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday authorized a major crackdown against smuggling and hoarding of sugar and profiteering. While chairing a high-level meeting here, he expressed strong displeasure on the reports of illegal profiteering and smuggling.

Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Ahad Cheema, Chief Secretary Punjab, Secretary Food Punjab, Inspector General Police Punjab and other officials attended the meeting. The PM decided to summon a high-level meeting in

Islamabad on Monday to finalize measures to stop smuggling. During the meeting, a strategy would be formed for countrywide action to eradicate the smuggling of sugar and other items. Shehbaz Sharif directed that the elements involved in profiteering and hoarding should be dealt with iron hands and given exemplary punishment. He said that people could not be left at the mercy of smugglers, profiteers and hoarders. "We will take action against those who are causing difficulties for the people."

He instructed Chief Minister

Punjab Mohsin Naqvi to take effective steps and monitor the situation in order to control the price of sugar in the province. He said the provincial government should devise a method to provide at a standard price the sugar confiscated from smugglers and hoarders. The prime minister also instructed the chief minister of Punjab to hold a meeting with sugar mill owners for taking steps with them to stop the prices of sugar from rising. He also held a meeting on the issue last week in Islamabad and measures taken by him brought the price of sugar to Rs 92 per kilogram.

JI's Hafiz Naeem terms digital census 'fraud'

KARACHI (NNI): Jamaat-e-Islami's Karachi chief Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rahman has announced to set up a camp outside the Census Bureau office on Monday, and to hold a protest march on Shahrah-e-Faisal on April 30 against the digital census process. He rejected the census conducted so far during a press conference at Idara Noor-e-Haq in Karachi on Sunday, terming it a fraud under the guise of digital census. He also announced to create a portal regarding the census and contact the people from house to house.

Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman has announced protest march on Shara-e-Faisal against 'census fraud'.

Hafiz Naeem said that a protest camp will be held in front of the office of the census department. He alleged that a bigger fraud is being orchestrated in the digital census than the manual population census. "Karachi has been target in the census fraud," he said. "Census has been untrained, while no oversight committee formed for monitoring," JI chief said. "This occupation of the census count has not been acceptable," he said. "Provincial and federal governments are hand in glove," he alleged. He demanded an extension of one month in the population census. "Federal government should form a committee of the stakeholders for census oversight," he demanded.

Govt provides relief to people through bachat bazaars: Nasir

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Minister for Local Government (LG) Syed Nasir Hussain Shah has said that the Sindh government is providing relief to the people through development projects and Bachat Bazaars.

He said that the government was providing relief to the people under the vision of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

He said this while talking to the people at Ali House. The Provincial Minister said that the ongoing development projects in Karachi were a major source of relief to the people and the completion of roads, bridges, underpasses and flyovers will also provide relief to the people.

Nasir Shah said that the supply of cheap items to the public through Bachat Bazaars was continuing and a campaign was also going on against profiteers and hoarders.

Naqvi orders speedy issuance of NOCs for petrol pumps

LAHORE (NNI): Punjab interim chief minister Mohsin Naqvi ordered the issuance of no-objection-certificate (NOCs) for the opening of new petrol pumps. He ordered for the issuance to

reduce joblessness and increase the investment opportunities and directed the relevant officials to issue the permission in 15 days. There are almost 1264 applications from all districts of Punjab

currently seeking approval and if allowed, it would generate thousands of jobs for the people. Mr Naqvi ordered to release NOCs while also directing officials to ensure transparency in the process.

Zig-Zag technology helping reduce kilns pollution

LAHORE (APP): With thick smog engulfing most parts of Punjab province every winter, the authorities have embarked on multiple initiatives including the latest techniques in the brick kiln industry to reduce air pollution.

Besides industrial, vehicular and domestic pollution, the brick kilns were seen as severe additives to pollution, especially during the winter season. Therefore, Zig-Zag technology initiative has been taken to protect climate, transform traditional brick sector, improve efficiency and reduce costs of the bricks. The traditional brick production consisted of hand-made bricks, baked in Fixed Chimney Bull's Trench Kilns (FCBTK), a widely used brick firing technology in South Asia. This is commonly ranked as the most contaminating techniques for brick production, resulting in adverse environmental effects including air pollution, climate change, cardio-respiratory diseases, land use impacts and deforestation.

Therefore, introducing Zig-Zag technology as modern day environment friendly technique is a step forward by the Punjab government to convert traditional brick-kilns to an efficient technology.

"Conversion of brick kilns to zig-zag technology would definitely curtail air pollution," remarked Director Punjab Environment Protection Department, Naseem-ur-Rehman.

He informed that Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) had been able to convert most of functional brick-kilns to new and cleaner technology from the old one, using smoke emitting fossil fuel.

Naseem explained that real difference between traditional FCBTK and the zig-zag technology driven brick kiln was that in the former method, placement of bricks is done on a straight pattern, where in the latter, bricks are placed in a zig-zag pattern that allows maneuvering of air for heating purposes efficiently.

"The new technology would help reduce breath-choking carbon emissions by 60 per cent and reduce air pollution," Director Naseem-ur-Rehman said. "The zig-zag technology also embellishes fuel efficiency, saves energy and lessens emissions as compared to traditional brick-kilns."

During conversion process, the Punjab government ensured provision of loans to brick-kiln operators to materialize transition while the EPD issued a notification allowing only the brick kilns with zig-zag technology to operate.

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (NEECA) had provided technical assistance to brick-kiln owners with the support of Punjab Environment Protection Department (EPD) and the PDMA.

"The Punjab province had successfully converted its brick-kilns to more efficient and cleaner technology in a short span of time, reducing the ratio of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) in the air," stated PDMA Punjab Director Nisar Sani.

He said PDMA had also developed "Saans APP" mobile application to help resolve smog-related complaints of citizens at their doorsteps. "The complaints received through this 'app' are immediately forwarded to relevant authorities for speedy action to resolve them." Nisar informed that departments like PDMA, traffic police, metropolitan corporation, PHA and transport, agriculture, industry and local governments departments are linked to this 'app'.

He said many kiln owners were not ready to convert to new technology but continued efforts and hard work of concerned departments and organization helped conversion of about 10,000 kilns in Punjab into zig-zag technology.

Earlier, these traditional brick-kilns were using coal, rubber and shoe soles as fuel, and emitting lethal

black carbon into the atmosphere with most of them located around urban areas. As they thought it a cheaper mode of preparing bricks, it was challenging to agree them to a new technology.

Convincing them to transformation was really an uphill task because it required upfront investment one-time and many among them were already working on marginal profits, but they could earn millions in the long run. However, they were continuously persuaded and briefed about potential long term benefits of new technology that could, in the long run, save millions for them.

"Initially it felt difficult to opt for this new technology," remarked All Pakistan Brick Kiln Association Secretary General Abdul Haq Mehr. "But, when we visited it in Nepal and held training session afterwards here in Pakistan, we convinced to an extent that it could work."

"Then, our association started supporting zig-zag technology and today the brick kiln owners who converted to this technology, can easily earn Rs 500 to Rs 1000 on every one thousand bricks and monthly coal consumption has also gone down to 160 from 200 tones," he informed.

He said the issue of labor for zig-zag technology has also been resolved after repeated training sessions with the labor. "Kiln industry makes up almost two percent of the GDP also employing five million people. Therefore, it should be paid proper heed to reduce production cost and ensure quality produce." Earlier, the brick kiln industry in the country was unregulated and operating across Pakistan especially in rural areas with very limited environmental and social compliance. But, with rising awareness on environmental issues and introduction of new techniques, the brick kiln owners have to finally opt for a modern and cleaner technology not only to earn better but also to reduce air pollution and ensure better environment for the people.



LAHORE: People are receiving free bags of flour from a distribution center organized by the Federal Government.

Iftar, conference, photo exhibition on relevance of ‘Al-Quds Day’ held

PESHAWAR (APP): Khana Farhang Peshawar Islamic Republic of Iran, in cooperation with the Imamia Council for the Unity of the Inter-Muslims of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the National Peace Jirga for Inter-Religious Harmony marked ‘Al-Quds Day, titled “Reputation and Recognition of the Holy World of Islam”.

A grand conference, photo exhibition and Iftar were organized, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

In the conference, Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran Peshawar Ali Banafsheh Khah, Director General Khana Farhang Iran Peshawar Mehran Eskandarian, Vice Chairman Qaumi Watan Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Vice President Tabligh Islam Institute Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Chairman Islamic Ideological Council of

Pakistan Dr. Qibla Ayaz, former Director of Pakistan Studies Peshawar University Dr. Fakhru'l Islam, Central Vice President of Shia Ulema Council Allama Ramzan Tawqeer, Provincial President of Majlis Wahdat al-Muslimeen Allama Jahanzeb Jafri, Chairman of Pakistan Defense Council and Deputy Mahtamim of Jamia Darul Uloom Haqqania Maulana Hamidul Haq Haqqania, Former Provincial Minister and Central General Secretary Awami National Party Mian Iftikhar Hussain, Ikhtiar Wali Pakistan Muslim League-N, Jamiat Ahl Hadith Provincial Leader Maulana Maqsood Ahmad Salafi, Jamiat Ulema Islam (F) Provincial Leader and Chairman Qaumi Aman Jirga Iqbal Shah Hydari, Secretary General Imamiya Council Syed Azhar Ali Shah, provincial leader of

Jamaat-e-Islami Muhammad Sadiq Paracha and other leaders and scholars of various schools of thought participated.

Speaking at the conference, the speakers expressed their views and paid tribute to the services of the great founder of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini for the freedom of Baitul Muqaddas and Muslims.

They expressed solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians and raised their voice against the imperialist powers.

Speaking at the conference, the speakers said that after the restoration of Iran-Saudi relations, every Muslim expects that the two countries will adopt common policies on other issues including the freedom of Qibla first, establishment of a Palestinian state and will compete Israeli conspiracies.

‘Role of civil servants in country’s uplift carried paramount importance’



PESHAWAR (APP): Director General, National Institute of Management (NIM), Captain (Retd) Usman Gul here Friday said the role of civil servants in development and prosperity of the country carried paramount importance and it was their duty to help people legally, morally and religiously besides ensuring prompt service delivery.

He was addressing the farewell function of 36th mid career management course as chief guest at NIM Peshawar. All the officers

and trainers of the institute attended.

“NIM is feeling proud that this time a large number of officers from federal, four provinces, AJK and Gilgit Baltistan has completed their professional training from here,” he said.

He said the country was facing tough challenges and bureaucracy could take it out from existing challenges through ensuring good governance and prompt service delivery to people.

Chief Instructor of Mid

Career Management Course (MCMC), Muhammad Tayab presented the course report and highlighted objectives, efforts and achievements of the NIM Peshawar in detail.

Director General, Captain Retd Usman Gul expressed the hope that all the 54 civil officers of the completed course would help utilize their learnt skills and training to address all the shortcomings in their respective departments quickly and ensure prompt service delivery to facilitate people.

Women rights neglected in ex-Fata

Najibullah Khan

After the merger of FATA through a constitutional amendment in 2018 with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province majority of the women in newly merged region are still deprived from basic rights. Women are treated as mere objects, who do not have freedom to live freely as per their choice. Women of this region still live under slavery, bound by family traditions.

Women are deprived from education, discrimination against women far worse in the region, sometimes women have to suffer immensely at the cost of their life. Even after its merger with KPK, the conditions are still the same. The provision of standard education for girls is absent from a majority of the schools in newly merged FATA. Literacy rates of the region are the lowest throughout the country. The literacy rate of girls is 7.8 percent in the region which is below average.

Most of the parents do not consider a girl’s education as important as a boy’s

in the region which have made the future of so many girls darker. Although poverty is a vital cause in hindering their future, most of the parents do not invest on their daughters’ education because after all they have to end up marrying someone of their parents’ choice.

A 13 years old Saba from frontier region Peshawar completed her primary school, and wants to continue her secondary education but her parents are not allowing her to continue her education. Likewise hundreds and thousands of other girls who wants to study but left their education because of their parents.

Furthermore, women health is a traditionally neglected issue in ex-FATA. If a woman falls ill, the male family members consider it shameful to admit her at a hospital in city. In fact, most tribal elders do not show their female patients to male doctors. The number of female doctors very few, and for any medical check-up in emergency there are just a few nurses or lady health workers available. The conditions in

hospitals where women patients are treated is terrible. There is a dire need to strengthen the health system in the region by providing basic health services to women who are dependent on men to survive.

The concept of dowry has been widely condemned and criticized in the mainstream society of Pakistan with laws made against the practice. Despite that dowry is still considered legal in ex-FATA.

Women are denied access to their share in the property. Laws had been extended to the former tribal belt after it was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in May 2018, the local traditions and a lack of administrative structures hindered their implementation.

The awful status of women’s rights in the region can only get better if it is brought in parallel with the other provinces of Pakistan. It is high time for the people of the region, especially its women, are included in the mainstream society of Pakistan, giving them equal rights and sources of equal development.

Governor, CM condole demise of Minister

PESHAWAR (APP): KP Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali and Caretaker Chief Minister, Muhammad Azam Khan has condoled the sad demise of federal minister for religious affairs, Mufti Abdul Shakoor in a traffic mishap.

In a condolences messages, they paid rich to the political and religious services of Abdul Shakoor and expressed sympathies with his family and highest place at Janatul Firdus.

The Governor underlined the need of complete probe of the traffic incident, saying the political vacuum created after his death would hardly be fulfilled.

Minister Information, transport express grief over demise of Mufti Shakoor: KP Caretaker Ministers Barrister Feroze Jamal Kakakhel and Shahid Khattak expressed grief and sorrow on Sunday over the death of Federal Religious Minister Mufti Abdul Shakoor.

In separate condolence messages, they prayed to Allah Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to bereaved family members to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude.

Police held five persons in operation

PESHAWAR (APP): Mathura Police Sunday arrested five persons by launching grand operations in different areas against criminals and the crackdown includes drug dealers and aerial firing in the areas.

This was stated by an official of the Mathra Police Station while talking to media men here.

He said the operations were conducted in different areas including Muhajir Bazaar, Dawood Garhi, Machni Pul areas etc.

The arrested alleged accused were identified as Mughaz, Sajid, Hamza, Shahab and Wahid. All the arrested alleged accused belong to the suburbs, Police said.

The accused is involved in drug selling, illegal weapons and various other crimes including aerial firing, Police said, adding, more than two kilograms of hashish, 4 pistols and hundreds of cartridges of different bores were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused.

Police have registered cases against the alleged accused and started an investigation.

Old coins recovered by police, 1 held

PESHAWAR (APP): The Police have recovered 600 years old antiquities coins from one alleged accused of smuggling in the jurisdiction of Pahari Pura Police Station area, official of the Police control confirmed.

The 1573 coins of the Islamic era were recovered from the accused Sher Khan, the Department of Archaeology also confirmed. The exported coins also include fake ones, Archeology Department officials said when confirming the antiquities of 600 years old coins.

The accused was moving coins from the Pahari Pura area to another city, the Department of Archaeology official said.

A case has been registered against the alleged accused under Antiquity Act in Pahari Pura Police Station.



PESHAWAR: Director General Khana-e-Farhang Iran Mehran Sikandaryan giving briefing about pictures to guests during Picture Exhibition.

Influx of professional beggars annoy Eid shoppers in Ramazan; action demanded

PESHAWAR (APP): The influx of professional beggars arrived from different cities to Peshawar have started employing different techniques to get maximum charity and alms that often annoying Eid shoppers in Ramazan.

With less than a week left in Eidul Fitr celebrations, the professional and unprofessional beggars of different cities of KP and Punjab province thronged the city’s markets and shopping arcades to secure maximum alms and charities by adopting irritating techniques, which are annoying Eid shoppers.

“I came from Attock to Peshawar to secure maximum charity and alms in last days of Ramazan,” said Rehmat Shah, a street begger while talking to APP at Qissa Khwani.

He said that people of all faiths and communities were living in Peshawar that helped the beggars to collect maximum charity in Ramazan.

Insipite of begging has been declared illegal under the country’s laws, the beggars’ influx including male, female, children and persons with disabilities are being witnessed in the jam-packed crossing points, mosques’ gates and mostly frequented public places and food outlets in the city and cantonment areas mostly before Aftar.

These days, Hashtnagri, Gantagar, Firdus, Nothia, Tehkal, Gulbahar, Faqirabad, Meena Bazaar, Karimpura, Shafi Market, Saddar Road, University Town, City Tower, Jawad Tower and Deans Trade Centre are flooded with beggars.

They have occupied key points in front of shopping malls, mosques, road signals, bus terminals, railway stations, traffic squares and streets.

Most professional beggars employ various tricks to exploit human nature and religious sentiments by crying, weeping and chasing people in public places while wearing miserable attire.

The unchecked trained beggars are pestering Eid shoppers in markets or running after them or behind their cars to collect maximum alms in name of Zakat, Fitrana, Sadqa and Khairat.

Some beggars roaming with exposed wounds keep on holding and touching customers when they come out of their vehicles, which could expose them to contagious diseases and viral infections including coronavirus, TB, flue and chest related infections.

It has been witnessed that some beggars were emotionally blackmailing people by carrying medical prescriptions and disability certificates.

‘Alms’ seekers can also be seen in city markets asking for charity in the name of construction of mosques while many beggars were resorting to lame-duck excuses like seeking treatment of their ailing family or lost jobs.

“Beggings has emerged as a major social evil in recent years to the nuisance of Peshawarties,” Professor Ehtisham Qaiser who was irritated by beggars during Eid shopping at Hashtnagri bazaar Peshawar, told APP on Sunday.

Besides bazaars and shopping arcades, he said Eid shoppers were facing great inconvenience at traf-

fic signals, food restaurants, bus terminals, railways stations, mosques, hospitals, markets and public places due to swarms of beggars in Peshawar.

“It is heartbreaking to see young girls and boys’ beggars carrying wipers in hands often start cleaning cars windows on traffic signals without permission in order to get money.”

He said some beggars come with water bottles, flowers, garlands, caps and rosary to give an impression that they are selling it, but actually they beg for money without an intention of selling anything.

Khayam Khan, a resident of Nowshera said he was busy in Eid shopping along with his family at Qissa Khwani where a teenage beggar with black colour in hand rushed towards me, asking for money or otherwise his clothes would be made dirty.

“In order to save my clothes, I immediately offered him Rs50, which was refused. On several requests, the beggar accepted Rs 100 and started running towards other shoppers by using the same technique that was intolerable in a civilized society.

He demanded the KP government to take instantaneous action against swarms of beggars in the city so that people could take a sigh of relief and do Eid shopping with ease.

“Beggars have been declared illegal under West Pakistan Loitering Ordinance 1958,” said Malik Ashfaq advocate.

Unfortunately, he said this law had not been fully implemented, which resulted in an increase of beggars

especially during Ramazan.

He said central and provincial laws such as Control of Narcotics Substance Act 1997, West Pakistan Vagrancy Ordinance 1959, Pakistan Employment of Children Act 1991, KP Child Protection and Welfare Act (KPCPW) 2010 and KP Orphanage Supervision and Control Act 1976 had been promulgated to check drug addiction and streets begging.

Similarly, KPCPWA was enacted in 2010 to protect rights of women and children, but it has not been fully implemented on ground, resulting in swarms of beggars in Peshawar.

Pukar provides Iftari to poor people

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: During holy month of Ramzan civil society including Pukar Organization providing Iftari to dozens of hundred people at Anam Sanam Chowk Gulbahar to perceive sense of responsibility among public.

According to details, the Pukar Organization providing Iftari 200 persons everyday in which most of the people belongs to poor and marginalized segments of society.

Public Information Officer Pukar organization Noor-ul-Huda also ensuring provision of food in reusable caterings to minimize plastic waste.

Haji Manzoor Afridi visits tribal leader’s Hujra for condolence



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Haji Manzoor Khan Afridi visited the tribal leader Haji Jan Gul SuranKhel and condoled with him on the death of his daughter-in-law who breathed her last the other day.

He remained there for some time, offered Fatiha for the eternal peace of the deceased and expressed heartfelt sympathies with the bereaved family members.

Meanwhile, Haji Manzoor Khan Afridi has expressed deep sense of sorrow and grief over the death of Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoor who lost his

life in the tragic traffic accident in Islamabad.

In a condolence message, the Minister said that the provincial government equally share the shock of this horrible accident and its moments of sorrow with the grieving family.

The provincial minister also paid rich tributes to Mufti Abdul Shakoor for his national and political services and said that he was a people-friendly person belonging to a religious family.

Digital cards outshine ancient cards business in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): The centuries- old tradition of sending Eid cards to the loved ones on Eidul Fitr has been replaced by the electronic cards (E Cards) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to mashroom growth of information technology and digital media in Pakistan.

Qissa Khwani Bazaar’s mohallah Jahangi with plenty of printing eid cards’ shops, have been converted into books, computers and shoe shops courtesy to the speedy growth of information and digital technology in last two decades in Pakistan.

The Eid card sellers in the past had arranged many stalls at different areas of Peshawar including Hashtnagri, Karimpura, Goara Bazar, Liaquat Bazaar, Jehangi mohallah and Qissa Khawani Bazaar to attract customers on Eid, however this practice have started dying due to E cards’ culture.

The people exchange E cards with heartfelt messages among relatives, friends and loved ones through social media services such as Facebook and WhatsApp on the eve of Eidul Fitre.

However, with introduction of IT technology, people prefer shortcut method of sending wishes and greetings through E-cards, SMS, Facebook and Whatsapp messages instead of sending traditional Eid cards through post offices and courier services as they consider it expensive and time consuming exercise.

Zahid Khan, a computer engineer told APP on Sunday that most of people lacked time to go to shop and buy old fashioned eid cards and then send it to friends and relatives through expansive courier services.

He said the social media tools were an effective way to send a nice E cards to all friends and relatives to congratulate them on joys occasion of Eidul Fitre in a single click.

He said prayers for someone was most important than sending Eid cards, adding money spend on Eid cards can be donated to poor people and orphans to include them in our joy.

Electronic cards give us an option to edit text and modify background besides an addition of animation of choice as such cards are liked especially by youngsters who are quick to adopt new technologies, he explained.

He said charges of postal and courier services also increased, which was behind purchasing power of poor people and white collars.

Zahid said he would deliver E cards through WhatsApp to all my friends, well wishers and relatives on Eid day.

The shops of Eid cards have also cut down at historic Liaquat bazaar in Peshawar cantt for which it was once famous for.

Eid card sellers said that PTI Govt poor printing policies and price hike have badly affected their business and urged the government to announce special relief package for them.

The book sellers and gift owners at Liaquat Bazaar said the trend of buy eid cards had significantly declined due to SMS, 3G and 4G, WhatsApp and Facebook services.

They said that majority of shopkeepers associated with decades old Eid cards business have said good bye to it.

Anees Khattak, who is running a printing unit at Jahangi mohallah said that the printing industry was affected first by coronavirus and later by price hike in KP.

He said KP printers and publishers were mostly rely on Punjab for printing materials after closure of Charsadda and Mardan paper mills. The transportation and electricity cost has also contributed to an increase in prices of finished goods and Eid cards, he said.

Zafar Khan Khattak, President All Printers and Publishers Association KP told APP that Peshawar based printers and publishers have earned great profits from printing of cards in the past on occasions of Eidul Fitre.

He said the printers of Qissa Khwani had received heavy printing orders of Eid cards in the past from merged tribal districts including South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Orakzai, Kurrum, Khyber, Mohmand and Bajaur, however great decline was witnessed in last few years in this regard.

He said the printing industry could flourish in Peshawar only, if we have the required expertise, quality manpower and a mechanism to control prices of papers and inflation besides government patronage was required to help poor printers.

He urged the KP government to announce a comprehensive financial package for revival of printing press industry and providing assistance to the jobless workers under BISP programme.



In brief

Youth shot dead over old enmity

GUJRANWALA (INP): A youth was shot dead by opponents in Rehmanpura area of Garjakh Police Station Gujranwala. According to police, unidentified assailants riding a motorcycle opened indiscriminate fire at Zaigham, who was sitting outside his house, leaving him dead on the spot. The assailants fled the scene soon after the incident. Police believe that the incident of murder is a consequence of an old enmity. Police said that the victim was shot in the face and chest. The body was sifted to the hospital for autopsy, they added.

Police recover stolen bike

DIR LOWER (APP): Lal Qila police on Sunday arrested the motorcycle thief and recovered a stolen motorcycle from his possession. According to a report lodged by a complainant Rashidullah at Lal Qila police station on April 10, District Police Officer Tariq Iqbal directed concerned police officers to investigate the robbery and recover the stolen motorcycle. Lal Qila police investigated the case with the help of modern tools and traced out the accused identified as Salman Khan of Alizo, Bajaur district, and arrested him. Police also recovered the stolen motorcycle from the accused.

MPA visits Burn ICU

QUETTA (APP): Member Balochistan Assembly Mir Muhammad Arif Muhammad Hasni on Sunday visited the Burn ICU of the Civil Hospital Quetta and Trauma Center. M e d i c a l Superintendent, Civil Hospital Quetta Dr. Ishaq Panizi gave him a briefing about Civil Hospital. MPA Mir Muhammad Arif Muhammad Hasni assured MS Civil Hospital Quetta his all-out support as saying "he will play his role to solve the problems faced by the Civil Hospital and will soon hold meeting with the ACS Development for the repair and decoration of the buildings of Civil Hospital Quetta. MPA further said that to reduce the rush of patients at the tertiary hospitals in Balochistan and to provide better medical facilities to the common man at the government-run hospitals, effective legislation will be made in the assembly.

Fire breaks out in yarn factory

MULTAN (PPI): A fire broke out in a yarn factory located at Zainab Textile Mill Industrial Estate in Multan on Saturday night, police said Sunday. According to rescue officials, the fire started when a spark from the yarn factory's chimney flew into the cotton bales, triggering the blaze. Rescue teams rushed to the scene and brought the spreading fire under control. The fire has been completely put out and cooling process was under the way, said rescue officials.

12 criminals arrested

SARGODHA (APP): Police claimed on Sunday to have arrested 12 criminals and recovered narcotics and illegal weapons from them. In a crackdown, the teams of various police stations raided in their respective jurisdiction and arrested Sajid, Majid, Wahid, Daood, Fahad, Arslan, Muneeb, Tahir, Taimoor, Razaq, Mushtaq and others, and recovered 13 pistols, 7 guns, 3 rounds, 122 bullets, 144 liters liquor, 1.1 kg hashish and valuables worth in thousands of rupees from them. Further investigation was underway.

Police reap big successes in Katcha operation

RAHIM YAR KHAN (INP): The anti-bandit operation in Katcha area of Rahim Yar Khan is continuing on the eighth consecutive day Sunday.

According to the spokesperson for Punjab police, the law personnel reaped big successes in the operation. He said police have also made advances in Katcha area in Karachi.

He said that the police took control of four hideouts of dacoits and militants after torching them.

Sporadic incidents of trade of fire between the police and the hardened criminals using heavy artillery were reported in the Katcha area of Karachi.

The spokesman divulged that several bandits have been killed and arrested during the ongoing operation and police have recovered heavy smuggled artillery and incendiary material from the razed hideouts of the dacoits.

Police have destroyed the secret sanctuaries of Lathani gang and took control of the turf.

Police also took control of Basti Ghani Lathani after the operation.

The spokesperson said

that the law enforcers established the writ of the state after clearing a no-go area stretching on thousands of acres of land.

Police have established its camps in the interior Katcha area of Karachi Bangli, Afzal Lathani and Noz Band.

The spokesperson said that the Katcha criminals are retreating to an island type riverine area in a jungle after the police destroyed, razed and touched dozens of militant hideouts.

On the other hand, a police operation in the Ghailpur area of Kashmir against the criminal elements is also underway.

Several armored personnel carriers (APCs) of police have reached the area.

Police have entered the houses of dacoits who have fled to Katcha area of River Sindh. However, an exchange of fire from both sides is going on.

On Saturday, dacoits attacked a police party in Kashmir bordering Ghotki and martyred two policemen and injured four others including an SHO.

The bandits and dacoits, who have long found refuge in the massive river-

ine area along the banks of the Indus with its inaccessible terrain and forest cover, held a show of strength of its own.

The federal cabinet on Saturday gave its assent for the deployment of Army troops in the ongoing anti-bandit operation in the Punjab riverine (katcha) area.

Punjab police launched a 'grand operation' against robbers and kidnappers in the katcha area of the Indus near the Sindh border on April 10.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Dr Usman Anwar at a presser at the DPO office Lahore said an intelligence-based operation against the outlaws was already in progress for the last few months after kidnap-for-ransom cases increased this year.

"However, a grand operation has been launched in the early hours of Sunday (April 9) on the reports of a premiere intelligence agency of the country and the Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab," he added.

The Katcha area which stretches up to Dehrki and Obaro in Sindh is over 100km long.

Tank administration takes action against profiteers

TANK (APP): The district administration is taking tangible measures to extend relief to the citizens during the holy month of Ramadan by ensuring provision of edible items at affordable prices.

As part of such efforts, Assistant Commissioner Tank Amin Ullah Khan visited Tank Bazaar and other markets and checked the prices, quality and expiry date of food items at various shops.

During the inspection, the AC found a butcher shop involved in overcharging the customers. The AC imposed fine on the butcher namely Noman and ordered to arrest him after the completion of necessary legal process.

The AC Tank said that the district administration was committed to extend relief to the citizens by providing them edible items at fixed rates and directed the shopkeepers to ensure the

display of notified price lists at prominent places at their shops and sell groceries accordingly.

He said that operations against profiteers would continue indiscriminately and in this regard, no one would be allowed to take law into their own hands and charge extra rate from the citizens. He also appealed to the people to register their complaints in his office so that timely action could be taken against violators.

Delegation of special persons meets Senator

QUETTA (APP): Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri on Sunday said that there is a dire need to educate and train special people to make them skilled as they are a segment of society.

She expressed these views while talking to the special person's delegation. She said that there is a dire need for a national awareness campaign at the school and regional level along with the Ministry of Information regarding special people.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the development and prosperity of spe-

cial people is the first responsibility of the government.

She further said that one out of every seven people worldwide is suffering from some kind of disability. According to preliminary estimates, about 20 per cent of Pakistan's population is suffering from mental or physical disabilities.

She said that special people face difficulties in accessing education and health facilities and public places. We need to take steps to increase access and mobility of such people.

In hospitals, shopping malls and all public places, ramps should be built for the movement of disabled people so that such people can easily carry out their daily routines.

"New opportunities should be created so that they can also play their role in the development and prosperity of the country as a useful citizen in the society," the senator maintained.

She said that along with the increase in the quota of special persons, the legislation should be made to make for other facilities.

Two held for repeated interference at flour centre

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Police claimed to have arrested two persons for continuous interference in the smooth process of free flour distribution in Muzaffargarh.

According to police sources, two citizens namely Ghiasuddin and Amanullah were found repeatedly visiting women's counters for getting tokens at free flour centres, established at Government School Basirah. The staff, deputed at the centre registered a complaint regarding the

said persons. Meanwhile, both the persons allegedly threatened the staff. Police took them into custody and started investigations against them.

PFA disposes off unhealthy ice cream, fine imposed: Punjab Food Authority (PFA) raided against elements involved in supplying unhygienic ice creams in the summer season and seized 2650 sub-standard ice creams.

PFA food safety teams checked the ice cream unit and juice plant at Yadgar

Chowk, Vishanpura and Capco road Muzaffargarh.

The team disposed of unhealthy ice creams and 10-kilogramme of fake packing material.

According to PFA spokesperson, Rs 25,000 fine was imposed on the ice cream unit, and beverages plant over violation of hygiene rules.

Food business owners were selling ice creams made with substandard ingredients while fake labelling was being used for the packaging.



SIALKOT: Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif held khuli kachehri for listening to public's problem at his residence.

Police force faces severe resistance from dacoits

GHOTKI (INP): The Sindh police's targeted operation in the katcha area of Ghotki continues with an exchange of fire with the Shar gang.

A heavy contingent of police is on its way to the katcha area of Ravanti.

Police claim to be conducting a targeted operation against the dacoits with head money on them.

Six armored vehicles have reached the hideouts of the dacoits, the police authorities said, adding the forces are facing severe resistance from the dacoits.

They further said rockets were being fired at the police teams.

Earlier this week, the Sindh police claimed to have completed preparations for an operation against dacoits in the katcha area of Ghotki.

According to police officials, the dacoits had been besieged in Ravanti and 60 checkpoints established on the banks of Indus River.

Officials say 8,000 police personnel will participate in the operation.

Muslim Hindu love story ends in tragedy

THARPARKAR (INP): The dead bodies of two lovebirds belonging to two different religions were found in a well in village Sura Chand in Tharparkar on Sunday.

According to police, the deceased Muslim boy and Hindu girl were lovers who ended their lives by jumping into the well in dejection after failing to get married.

Police said the bodies of the couple were recovered from a 40-foot deep well in village Sura Chand.

The deceased boy was identified as 22-year-old Asif, s/o Ismail Shoru and the girl was identified as 17-year-old Durga, d/o Diya Ram Kohli.

After getting the news of recovery of two bodies in a well, police reached the venue and pulled them out.

Four killed in firing

KASHMORE (INP): Four people were killed and three others got severe injuries in an exchange of fire between two groups of Domki clan over a land dispute in Bakshapur area of Kashmore on Sunday.

Two groups of Domki Baradri opened indiscriminate fire on each other near Andhi Stop in Bakshapur. As a result, four people were killed on the spot while three others received critical injuries.

The dead and injured were shifted to the Civil Hospital, Kashmore.

Motorcyclist hit to death

SARGODHA (APP): A car hit a motorcycle, leaving a man dead, in the precincts of Sahiwal police station on Sunday.

Police said that Muhammad Akhlaq (34), resident of Sahiwal was riding a motorcycle when a recklessly driven car coming from opposite direction hit his two-wheeler near Lagarwala Pull.

CM approves SME development strategy

QUETTA (APP): Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo has accorded approval to Balochistan's first Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) development strategy. Press Secretary to the CM told media on Sunday.

The Chief Minister gave this approval on a summary sent by the Department of Industry and Commerce.

Under the National SME Policy 2021, a Provincial SME Working Group was formed under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary. The handout said that the

working group will facilitate business development in the province by providing an easy and accessible SME environment. Besides, the Group will monitor the implementation of the SME Policy/Strategy.

It may be recalled that the National SME Policy has been prepared by the Federal Government and the Policy Action Plan is divided into short and medium-term action plans.

The provincial SME Working Group meeting was held on 05 December 2022 under the chairman-

ship of Chief Secretary Balochistan Abdul Aziz Uqaili wherein the technical paper of the SME Development Strategy of Balochistan was discussed.

During the meeting, the provincial working group considered the technical paper, establishment of the implementation management structure and other activities.

The same technical paper will be kept in the next session of the provincial cabinet in the meeting," the handout further read.

Assistant Food Controller crackdown in Abbottabad

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Assistant Food Controller, Qazi Bilal Ahmad, Sunday conducted a crackdown in Mangal, Qalandarabad, Abbottabad, and other

areas, against meat and vegetable vendors and imposed heavy fines for profiteering.

During the checking of various shops, the rate list for meat and vegetables was not displayed prominently and strict warnings were given to hang it in a

visible place.

While talking to the people on the occasion Qazi Bilal Ahmed said that in the month of Ramadan, illegal profiteering is not tolerable, we have issued directives to the vendors to sell food items according to the government rate list otherwise face strict action.

He also warned Chicken sellers in Mangal Qalandarabad and its surrounding areas to sell live

chickens at government rates. If any complaints of selling chicken meat from any unauthorized places would be received, strict action would be taken.

Assistant Food Controller said that during the month of Ramadan, shopkeepers should provide relief to citizens, in case of any complaint, citizens should contact the District Food Controller, Abbottabad.

Suspect held during police encounter

MULTAN (INP): A dacoit who was injured by the firing of own accomplices arrested during police encounter near Jinnah park in limits of Shah Rukn-e-Alam police station last night.

According to details, Dolphin force tried to stop two suspicious motorcyclists during blockade at Madni chowk but they didn't stop and drove away the motorcycle. The suspect opened fire on police team when Dolphin force chased motorcyclists near Jinnah Park.

Two Dolphin personnel named Ali and Naveed sus-

tained injuries after their bike fell down due to the firing. A suspect was arrested in an injured condition who was injured by the firing of his own accomplice. The other outlaw managed to escape by taking advantage of darkness.

Action was being taken to arrest the fleeing dacoit by cordoning off the area. The arrested dacoit was identified as Rashid Zafar s/o Zafar Iqbal resident of Shah Town Piran Ghaib road Multan.

Upon receiving the information, DSP New

Multan Syed Rameez Bukhari, SHO Shah Rukn-e-Alam police station Qarat-ul-Ain and Incharge Dolphin Force Muhammad Zeeshan reached the spot along with their teams. The injured Jawans were immediately taken to the hospital where they are being treated. While the injured bandit was also shifted to Nishtar hospital for treatment. The police also recovered a motorcycle and a pistol from the spot. Initially, more than 12 incidents of robbery have been revealed from the accused.

Food dept procured over 137164 metric ton wheat

MULTAN (APP): The food department has procured 137164.148 metric ton of wheat so far which is 21.07 percent of over six lac metric ton wheat procurement target set across Multan division.

Deputy Director Food Shahid Khokhar expressed these views while talking to APP here on Sunday.

He said that the gunny bags distribution process was also underway through

48 wheat procurement centres and 271945.5 metric ton gunny bags have been distributed among growers so far which is 41.77 percent of the total.

He said that the departmental teams have made 132 raids and took the 2248.37 metric ton wheat into custody and got registered three cases across the region.

As many as 1,84,558 metric ton wheat target set

for Multan district, 95,764 metric tons for Lodhran, 1,28,185 metric tons for Vehari and 2,30,000 metric tons of wheat to be procured in Khanewal district.

He hoped that they would easily achieve the set target as the procurement drive would continue till the completion of the target. He said that the timely payment to wheat growers was being ensured through Punjab bank branches.

Police arrest friends of slain Arsalan Jamali

HYDERABAD (APP): The Hyderabad police have arrested four friends of slain Arsalan Jamali, son of retired SSP Anti Corruption Establishment Ahmed Khan Jamali who was killed in Hyderabad in the wee hours of April 14, in connection with his murder.

The ASP Alina Rajpar told a press conference at the police headquarters late on

Saturday night that personal grudges and enmity among the friends were the reason behind the brutal killing of 26 years old Arsalan Jamali who had sustained around a dozen gunshots.

The ASP informed that the Jamali family used to live in the same neighbourhood in the Naseem Nagar area where Jamali was killed until a few years ago.

According to her, Jamali was friends with the arrested suspects Ali Imam Chandio, Waris Chandio, Mehrullah Rahujo and Waheed when he lived in that area.

However, she added, after developing differences with Jamali the accused persons warned him against visiting their locality in the future.



HYDERABAD: Girls selecting and purchasing jewelry during shopping in preparation of upcoming Eid-ul-Fitar at Resham bazaar.



Brazil, UAE seal climate, biofuels deals as leaders meet

Abu Dhabi (AFP/APP): Brazil and the United Arab Emirates announced a series of deals on combating climate change and advancing biofuels Saturday as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva paid an official visit to the oil-rich country.

"It was a highly fruitful visit," Lula said in brief comments to Brazil's TV Globo after meeting UAE president Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi on his way home from a trip to China.

The countries said in a joint statement the leaders had discussed a range of subjects including trade, technology, defense, aviation and food security.

They also announced a series of deals, including one for the UAE-controlled Mataripe refinery in northeastern Brazil to invest up to \$2.5 billion in a biodiesel project in the region, and another on cooperating against climate change.

The UAE is due to host the COP28 UN climate talks later this year, and Brazil is a candidate to host the 2025 edition. The countries said they had agreed to work together to "encourage ambitious climate action" from the rest of the world.

Sheikh Mohamed greeted Lula at the presidential palace, where a 21-gun salute rang out and formation jets trailed Brazil's national colours.

Lula, who returned to power in January after two terms as president between 2003 and 2010, was played the Brazilian national anthem and inspected an honour guard.

His counterpart also invited him to



attend an "iftar" dinner -- the daily fast-breaking meal during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

He is due to give a press conference early on Sunday before leaving, officials said. The strategically located Gulf monarchy is Brazil's second-largest trading partner in the Middle East, according to the official WAM news agency.

Bilateral trade excluding oil products totalled more than \$4 million last year, representing a 32-percent rise from 2021, WAM said.

In Beijing, where Lula sought to consolidate economic ties with Brazil's main trading partner, he said his country was "back on the interna-

tional stage" and ready to mediate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Lula also accused the United States of "encouraging" the war and said it should "start talking about peace". Both China and Brazil have refused to join Western nations in imposing sanctions on Moscow for its invasion, and there are concerns in the West that both potential mediators are overly cosy with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The UAE has maintained a neutral stance in the conflict. Its financial hub Dubai has attracted Russian professionals and businesspeople fleeing the impact of Western sanctions since the invasion in February 2022.

Japan PM resumes campaigning after blast incident

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida resumed campaigning on Saturday after being evacuated unharmed from the scene of an apparent "smoke bomb" blast.

The incident in Wakayama in western Japan came less than a year after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, which traumatised the country and forced a security shake-up for public officials.

Kishida was in the city to deliver remarks in support of a ruling party candidate at a local port when a disturbance rippled through the crowd gathered to hear him speak.

Footage from national broadcaster NHK showed the prime minister turning to look backwards as a person was detained by security and people moved away, some shrieking.

Seconds later, a blast was heard and white smoke filled the air.

Footage and photos from the scene showed a silver, pipe-like object on the ground, but it was not immediately clear whether it had caused the blast and smoke. Government officials said a man had been arrested on suspicion of obstruction of business. He has been identified as a 24-year-old man from the Hyogo region, a Wakayama police official told AFP. There was no immediate information on a potential motive. People at the scene described moments of panic.

"I ran frantically, and then, 10 or so seconds later, there was a loud sound and my kid started crying. I was stunned, my heart is still beating fast," one woman told NHK. A man at the scene told the broadcaster that "when we all stopped in front of the podium, someone started saying 'culprit!' or something, or 'an explosive was thrown,' so everyone started dispersing fast."

"And then, about 10 seconds after the culprit was captured, there was a blast," he said. Kishida was unharmed,



and soon resumed campaigning, including a stop at a local train station.

"There was a loud blast sound at the previous speech venue. Police are investigating details, but I'd like to apologise for worrying many people and causing them trouble," he said.

"An election that's important to our country is taking place, and we must work together and follow through on it." He made a campaign stop later in the day in Chiba, east of Tokyo, despite the incident, which his party's election strategy chairman Hiroshi Moriyama described as an "unforgivable atrocity". Security at local campaign events in Japan can be relatively relaxed, in a country with little violent crime and strict gun laws.

But the country bolstered security around politicians after the assassination of Abe, who was shot and killed while speaking at a campaign event in July 2022. His alleged assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, reportedly targeted him over his links to the Unification Church, and the incident sparked revelations about the connection between the sect and political

figures in Japan. Yamagami was reportedly angry over large donations his mother made to the group, which left the family bankrupt.

The head of Japan's National Police Agency, and the local police chief, resigned in the wake of Abe's assassination after an investigation confirmed "shortcomings" in the security for the former leader.

The investigation slammed a system under which local police were given responsibility for the security of visiting senior officials. With proper security, "it is deemed highly probable that this incident could have been prevented", the report concluded. The incident comes as climate and energy ministers from the Group of Seven countries meet in the northern city of Sapporo, and a day before the bloc's foreign ministers arrive in the resort town of Karuizawa for talks. Japan will host the G7 leaders' summit next month in Hiroshima and security concerns have regularly been raised. "The fact that an incident like this happened at this time must be taken seriously," anti-terrorism expert Isao Itabashi of the Council for Public Policy told NHK.

At least 12 inmates killed in Ecuador prison clashes

GUAYAQUIL (AFP/APP): At least 12 inmates were killed in clashes that broke out in a prison in the Ecuadorian port of Guayaquil, the prosecutor's office said Saturday, the latest deadly violence to rock the city's penitentiary system. The dozen inmate deaths occurred after a bloody confrontation erupted Friday -- part of a spate of brutality that began when six detainees were found hanged in the same prison and three female guards were killed earlier in the week.

Ecuadoran prisons are the scene of recurrent massacres between prisoners, against a backdrop of rivalry between criminal groups fighting for control of lucrative drug trafficking.

"An investigation has been opened to identify those responsible for the death of 12 inmates from the Litoral Penitentiary,"

which is also known as Guayas 1, the prosecutor's office said, adding that the bodies had bullet wounds. The country's main port on the Pacific coast, Guayaquil has in recent years become the epicenter of drug trafficking in Ecuador, located between Colombia and Peru -- the world's main cocaine producers.

Since February 2021, eight massacres have been recorded in these prisons, with more than 400 prisoners killed, most of them dismembered and burned.

After the six hanged inmates were found on Wednesday, three female guards were shot dead Thursday by hired killers at a restaurant outside the prison complex.

On Friday, AFP correspondents could hear gunfire from within the prison and were able to record aerial images in which five bodies could

be seen lying on the ground.

"We do not deny the reality and the fact that we are in the worst moment of violence in the country," Ecuadorian Defense Minister Juan Zapata said on Friday, when the clashes began.

Overnight Friday to Saturday, the police and the army regained control of the prison, which houses around 6,800 inmates and is part of a large prison complex.

Drug traffickers use prisons as centers of operation, leading to deadly clashes at regular intervals.

In September, some 120 prisoners were killed in the Guayas 1 penitentiary during the deadliest massacre in the history of the country and one of the bloodiest in Latin America.

Drug-related violence is endemic in Ecuador. On

Tuesday, around 30 armed men opened fire in the small fishing port of Esmeraldas, in the north of the country, near the Colombian border, killing nine people.

The assailants arrived by boat and car and, without a word, started shooting.

"What happened in Esmeraldas were not acts of common crime, they were terrorist acts," said Zapata.

Faced with the onslaught of violence, President Guillermo Lasso declared a 60-day state of emergency on March 3 in three provinces, including Guayaquil and Esmeraldas.

According to the first census of the country's prisons carried out in 2022, Ecuador has about 31,000 prisoners in 36 prisons with a capacity of 30,000 people.

French far-right veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen hospitalised

PARIS (AFP/APP): Jean-Marie Le Pen, the veteran leader of the far-right in France, suffered a "mild heart attack" and was taken to hospital on Saturday, a close source said.

"Jean-Marie Le Pen has been hospitalised in a public institution in the Paris region. His family and friends are concerned but calm," the 94-year-old's advisor Lorraine de Saint Affrique said, confirming a story run by Le Point news magazine.

Le Pen remains "conscious," he added.

Le Pen, father of current far-right leader Marine Le Pen, has suffered several health issues in recent years. In February 2022, Le Pen senior was hospitalised after suffering a "minor" stroke. Jean-Marie Le Pen ran for president five times, sending shockwaves through France in 2002 when he made it to the second round of the election, which was won by Jacques Chirac. The former paratrooper was the co-founder of the National Front -- later renamed the National Rally -- and spent decades whipping up anger over immigration.

While his political fortunes fluctuated sharply over more than half a century -- his unabashed racism leading to him being dubbed the "Devil of the Republic" -- he once boasted that the rise of the far-right around Europe showed his ideas had gone mainstream.

His daughter Marine Le Pen later tried to clean up the image of the party and kicked him out in 2015 over remarks he made that the Holocaust was merely a detail of history.

The party has since made significant inroads in both European and French politics.

Marine Le Pen got a far-right record of 23.15 percent of the vote in 2022 presidential elections, as the party won 89 seats in parliament, becoming the country's main opposition party. Born in the port of La Trinite sur Mer in the western Brittany region on June 20, 1928, Le Pen served in colonial wars in Algeria and Vietnam. He became France's youngest MP at 27 when he was elected to parliament in 1956.

Even in his later years, as he made fewer public appearances, he did not express regret for any of his controversial remarks or viewpoints.

"I was a committed fighter, loyal to my cause. An unfortunate cause, but I do not regret it," he told AFP in April.

Thousands in Jerusalem for Orthodox Easter 'Holy Fire' rite

JERUSALEM (AFP/APP): Thousands of Christians thronged Jerusalem on Saturday for the traditional Holy Fire rite ahead of the Orthodox Easter, despite a security clampdown in the holy city. The ancient Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the thousand-year-old rite takes place, was built over the site where Christian tradition says Jesus Christ was crucified, buried and resurrected. The ceremony, when a flame which the faithful believe sparks miraculously each year is brought from the tomb, marks the most important event in the Orthodox calendar. Clutching candles, so they flame can be passed from one to another, pilgrims attended the church this year in reduced numbers. The church is in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, and for the second consecutive year Israeli police had told church leaders access would be considerably restricted.

In the past about 10,000 worshippers would fill the church, with many more crowding outside, before the flame was flown to Orthodox communities internationally. This year's ceremony also comes after deadly attacks and clashes in Israel, east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, and cross-border fire several days ago between Israeli forces and militants in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria. On Wednesday, Israeli police said attendance inside the church would be limited to 1,800 people including 200 police officers as a safety measure. AFP journalists said thousands of Palestinian believers and foreign pilgrims also gathered in the square outside the church, in adjacent streets and outside the walls of the Old City on Saturday.

Theophilus III, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, emerged from the Edicule built over the presumed tomb of Jesus shortly before 3:00 pm (1200 GMT), bearing two bundles of lighted candles.

Cries of joy, cheers and singing broke out as the flame was passed between believers. "It's like I'm dead and alive again... I feel in heaven," said Laura, a 47-year-old Romanian tourist.

Georges, a Palestinian retiree living in the Old City, said he regretted that "many Christians from the West Bank cannot come" because of the lack of permits issued by Israel.

Police say the restrictions are intended to ensure safety after a stampede left several dead during a 2021 Jewish pilgrimage to Israel.

But many Palestinian Christians say they are proof of discrimination against them.

Ahmad Tibi, an Arab-Israeli member of parliament, said on Saturday: "All Palestinians in east Jerusalem, Muslims and

Christians, are suffering from the occupation. We must do more to end these restrictions, violations and police violence." Police spokesman Dean Elsdunne said the event was "very special, including for us the police". "Of course we want a lot of people to be able to come. But our number one priority is human life," he added. "We want to ensure that people can come and celebrate safely," Elsdunne said of the restrictions.

Palestinian teacher Tamar Ashariyeh, 45, said she could only get within 100 metres (yards) of the site. "I'm a local here, so I have to be inside this church, praying. I've been fasting for 55 days. It's Easter time, so we have to celebrate," she said.

Abed, a Palestinian merchant in the Old City, accused Israel of having "closed everything" for the ceremony. But Maria, 25, said she lives in the area and was used to the measures. "It's a security issue. It's much safer that way," she told AFP. Last year there were scuffles between worshippers and police who had set up barriers throughout the city's Christian quarter.

Christians made up more than 18 per cent of the population of the Holy Land when the state of Israel was created in 1948, but now they are fewer than two percent, mostly Orthodox.

Iraq's ancient treasures sand-blasted by climate change

UMM ALAQARIB (AFP/APP): Iraqi archaeological marvels that have survived millennia and the ravages of war now face a modern threat: being blasted and slowly buried by sandstorms linked to climate change.

Ancient Babylonian treasures, painstakingly unearthed, are slowly disappearing again under wind-blown sand in a land parched by rising heat and prolonged droughts.

Iraq, one of the countries worst hit by climate change, endured a dozen major sandstorms last year that turned the sky orange, brought daily life to a halt and left its people gasping for air.

When the storms clear, layers of fine sand cover everything -- including the Sumerian ruins of Umm al-Aqarib, "The Mother of Scorpions", in the southern desert province of Dhi Qar. Sandstorms have slowly begun to reverse years of work there to unearth the temples' terracotta facades and many priceless artefacts, said archaeologist Aqeel al-Mansrawi.

Archaeologists in Iraq have always had to shovel sand, but now the volumes are growing.

After a decade of worsening storms, sand at Umm al-Aqarib now "covers a good part of the site", that dates back to around 2350 BC and spans more than five square kilometres, he said.

In the past, the biggest threat was the looting of antiquities at the ruins, where pottery fragments and clay tablets bearing ancient cuneiform script have been discovered.

Now the changing weather and its impact on the land, especially creeping desertification, spell an



additional threat to ancient sites all across southern Iraq, said Mansrawi.

"In the next 10 years," he said, "it is estimated that sand could have covered 80 to 90 percent of the archaeological sites."

The fabled land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers hosted some of the world's earliest civilisations, the remains of which are under threat in modern-day Iraq.

The oil-rich country is still recovering from decades of dictatorship, war and insurgency and remains plagued by misrule, corruption and widespread poverty.

Compounding its woes, Iraq is also one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, including drought, says the United Nations.

Upstream dams in Turkey and Iraq have reduced the flow of its big rivers, and more water is wasted by Iraq's ancient irrigation system and outdated farming practices.

Summer temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit)

now often batter Iraq where droughts have parched agricultural areas, driving farmers and pastoralists into crowded cities.

"The sandstorms became more frequent, the wind became dustier and the temperatures increase," said Jaafar al-Jotheri, professor of archaeology at Iraq's Al Qadisiyah University.

"The soil has become more fragile and fragmented because of the lack of vegetation and roots," he explained.

As more farmers flee the countryside, "their land is left behind and abandoned and its soil becomes more exposed to the wind".

Winds pick up "more sediment fragments that reach the archaeological sites", Jotheri said, adding that the "sand and silt cause physical weathering and disintegration of buildings". The problem is compounded by salinisation, said Mark Altaweel, professor of Near East Archaeology at University College London.

During extreme heat, he explained, water on the land surface evaporates so

quickly that the soil does not reabsorb the crystals, which are left behind as a crust.

"When it's hyper dry, the water quickly evaporates and that leaves that salt residue," he said, adding that "you can see it on the bricks".

Jotheri said that salt in the earth carried by sandstorms causes "chemical weathering for archaeological buildings".

Iraqi authorities insist they are tackling the complex and multi-layered problem.

The government "is working to contain the sand dunes", said Chamel Ibrahim, director of antiquities of Dhi Qar province. He pointed to a plan to plant a "green belt" of trees at a cost of about \$3.8 million.

But Jotheri voiced doubt, saying that to keep the vegetation alive, "you need a lot of water".

When it comes to climate change, he said, "we are the country facing the most and acting the least. We are at the bottom of the list in terms of acting against climate change."

'Not our friends': Anger with Russia builds in Armenia

YEREVAN (AFP/APP): Standing in a busy street flanked by green sycamores near Yerevan's Opera House, Artur Sargsyan says Russia is an unreliable partner and Armenia should look for allies elsewhere.

"I dream of a day when Armenia leaves the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Russian sphere of influence," said Sargsyan, a 26-year-old philologist, referring to the Moscow-led regional pact.

"Russia and the CSTO have not helped Armenia during a very difficult time," he told AFP, referring to the inaction of the security bloc in the face of hostilities with arch-foe Azerbaijan. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has sent shock waves across former Soviet countries and prompted Moscow's traditional partners to seek allies elsewhere. A key illustration of Russia's diminishing

regional influence is Armenia, until now one of Moscow's closest allies.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the tiny Caucasus country of around three million people has relied on Russia for its military and economic support. The country hosts a Russian military base and many people in the country speak Russian.

But now many in Armenia say they cannot forgive Moscow for shirking its responsibility to defend their country militarily against Turkey-allied Azerbaijan. The two Caucasus nations have fought two wars for control of the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the latest conflict in 2020 led to Armenia's defeat and the loss of swathes of territory it had controlled for years.

The frustration with Moscow, which is bogged down in Ukraine, has grown further after

Azerbaijan blocked the sole land link between Karabakh and Armenia in mid-December.

"Armenia is a small country and it must join a Western bloc, an alliance where it will receive real help," said another Yerevan resident, Arpine Madaryan.

"We should leave the CSTO. They are not helping us, they are not our friends," added the 42-year-old English teacher.

During the six weeks of fighting that claimed thousands of lives in autumn 2020, Turkey backed Azerbaijan diplomatically and militarily, while Armenia was left alone in the face of the much more powerful enemy. The Kremlin only intervened diplomatically. President Vladimir Putin brokered a ceasefire deal that saw Yerevan cede territory it had controlled for decades, and Russia deployed peacekeepers to oversee the fragile truce.

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.
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Afghan issue, conflicting efforts and contradicting ideas

US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West has noted that every Afghan participant at Afghan Future Thought Forum in Doha voiced support for dialogue as a solution to the Country's challenges and oppose armed conflict in Afghanistan. The US Special Representative for Afghanistan attended the meeting of the Afghanistan Future Though Forum (AFTF) that brought a broad group of Afghan men and women, civil society leaders, economists and politicians, foreign diplomats, and Afghan elders including Taliban to the negotiating table to deliberate on the Afghan issue and conceive a mutually agreed solution to the problem. According to the US Diplomat, the participants spoke out in favor of dialogue and condemned the use of violence and force, while different recommendations regarding the role of the international community in Afghanistan had been discussed during the session. The participants urged the Taliban authorities to initiate dialogue and lift their restrictions on women's employment and education.

Afghanistan has been a victim of civil unrest, ethnic and communal violence, and persistent foreign interference over the past several decades. Meanwhile, the people of Afghanistan endured massive internal displacement, mass evacuation, and refuge in other nations as a result of recurrent foreign interventions, domestic armed conflicts, and civil insurgencies in the past. Historically, foreign-backed political and armed groups had been at the forefront of dispelling violence and chaos in the country and an all times battle for power and control had been continuing throughout history. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan took place in aftermath of the Doha agreement and the decade-long war between the US-led coalition and the Taliban. Although the United States, the global community, and regional neighbors including Pakistan had been endeavoring for a consensus political setup to realize the dream of a stable Afghanistan, however, Taliban resurgence and a lack of cooperation from Afghan Republicans exposed the country to fresh anarchy once again. Meanwhile, certain policies of the Taliban regime have caused deep frustration at domestic and global levels and reduced the scope for an inclusive government that steers the Afghan nation out of the current political and economic upheavals in the country.

Ostensibly, the Taliban takeover, the fall of the Ghani regime along with the hasty withdrawal of the United States set the stage for fresh anarchy in Afghanistan. Apparently, the foreign interference and global conspiracies had yet not come to an end in the country as several multilateral initiatives are separately underway to conceive a sole purpose of gaining political inclusiveness and sustainable peace in Afghanistan yet major nations such as the United States, Russia, and China are not ready to launch a collective endeavor that brings lasting peace in Afghanistan. After the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, Iran, and Pakistan, a US-sponsored think tank initiative, the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum (AFTF) held its meeting for the same purpose in Doha that portrays a wide gap and confronting schemes of opposing blocs regarding the issue of Afghanistan. Apparently, such divided and conflicting efforts would complicate the matter and less likely to conceive a mutually agreed wide-ranging solution to the problem that ends conflict in the country and pave the way for lasting peace in Afghanistan. Multiple forums including the Quad Foreign Ministers meeting, the AFTF, and other mechanisms have their perspectives regarding the current situation in the country, that contradicts others while the scopes of consensus diminish because of diverging interests of the warring Afghan groups and their backers. In fact, the United Nations should take the lead and brings Afghan parties, and all regional and global stakeholders to one table to conceive an equally acceptable inclusive political setup that guarantees peace and stability in the country and promotes the same in the region, and beyond.

Handing a militia to Ben-Gvir is one step closer to the abyss

Yossi Mekelberg

In light of the breathtaking events that continue to engulf Israel, one might be forgiven for feeling somewhat dizzy and finding it difficult to make sense of them all.

One reason for this is that the country has never before experienced a government that is so determined to so rapidly destroy its very democratic fabric, while carelessly sowing the seeds of disruption and division as it does so.

It has embarked on a blitz of 144 bills for the Knesset to vote on, some of which are designed to have fundamental and detrimental effects on the very democratic character of Israel.

These developments are characterized by the immaturity, brutality, haste, and greed of a government that perceives winning an election as a license not only to pursue the policies they promised their voters, which would be completely legitimate, but to change the very rules of the game and set Israel on the path to dictatorship and the silencing of all opposition.

But this sixth government presided over by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also a chaotic one that makes decisions on a whim. Nothing is more illustrative of this than the "decision" to form a national guard that would be a new law-enforcement body operating independently of all other branches of the security forces. Even more terrifying is the fact that this new body, if and when it is implemented, will operate under the purview of far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Once again, like so many of this government's destructive, power-grabbing "reforms," this move is being hurried through to satisfy one of the coalition's loose cannons and effectively amounts to nothing less than a criminal act.

In a highly militarized country that is one of the world's biggest spenders on security, it is more than reasonable to question the

need for yet another security body, and to seek to properly scrutinize the proposal.

All that the government is prepared to reveal, however, is that it has established a committee to consider such a security organization but it will not discuss its structure or its remit — hardly reassuring. As with all of the plans the government is attempting to rush through, there is no transparency and decisions

or backup force for the regular army and, sometimes, the police.

However, Israel has no need for such a force, as it has a very active military reserve comprising all of those who previously served as conscripts or stayed on for further service, including those who have served with the Border Guards which is a unit within the police force.

Netanyahu's judgment, his suitability for the job of prime minister, and the suitability of most of his ministers to serve in government.

First, the prime minister sacked his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, for suggesting the progress of the contentious legislation be put on hold for a few weeks. Then, when tens of thousands of protesters sponta-

demanding it, and under whose authority it is expected to operate.

It is not only Ben-Gvir, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and their ilk from the outlandish, messianic far right who claim that the security forces are leftist and under the thumb of the Supreme Court, and consequently cannot fulfill their role of providing security for Israelis; so do Netanyahu and his close allies. Their claims amount

with far right elements of the coalition against his will and judgment, simply to ensure the survival of his government, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to establishing a national guard.

There is an agreement between the prime minister and the even more zealous members of his coalition, although not one anchored in any reality, that the police have been too soft on the protesters, to the point that Ben-Gvir leaned on Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai to remove the commander of Tel Aviv District, Amichai Eshed, from office for that very spurious reason. The attempt was prevented only by the intervention of Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara.

In truth, and I have witnessed this myself over the past two weeks, the police should be praised for facilitating peaceful protests with only a few incidents of excessive force.

Just imagine handing a militia to someone like Ben-Gvir, who has been indicted 53 times and convicted seven times on charges including incitement to racism against Arabs, interfering with a police officer in the course of his duty, and supporting an outlawed terrorist group (Kach).

Just imagine the horrendous consequences of Ben-Gvir's militia being let loose against peaceful protesters. They are out in the streets to defend Israel's democracy, and against Palestinian Israelis whose loyalty is always questioned, or against those who live under occupation in the West Bank. This would reinforce the violence by settlers in which he, and some of those close to him, have been previously involved.

These are chilling thoughts and Netanyahu needs to ask himself this: Is this a price worth paying for him to avoid justice being done in his corruption trial? The answer to that is probably self-evident to the rest of us.

The entire saga raises questions about Netanyahu's judgment, his suitability for the job of prime minister, and the suitability of most of his ministers to serve in government. First, the prime minister sacked his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, for suggesting the progress of the contentious legislation be put on hold for a few weeks. Then, when tens of thousands of protesters spontaneously took to the streets in anger over the sacking, Netanyahu granted Gallant's request but did not reinstate him until a week later. And to get Ben-Gvir to agree to the pause, the prime minister paid him off with the promise of assembling his longed-for national guard — what a mess. When considering the idea of forming a national guard, it would be utter folly to ignore the context in which such a proposal is taking place, who is demanding it, and under whose authority it is expected to operate. It is not only Ben-Gvir, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and their ilk from the outlandish, messianic far right who claim that the security forces are leftist and under the thumb of the Supreme Court, and consequently cannot fulfill their role of providing security for Israelis; so do Netanyahu and his close allies. Their claims amount to a dangerous combination of being exceedingly laughable but at the same time deeply sinister.

are being made on the hoof — in this case to appease Ben-Gvir so that his party will support a brief pause in the implementation of anti-democratic legislation aimed at weakening the role of the judiciary.

The idea of a national guard is not an Israeli invention, nor has it been dreamed up by Ben-Gvir. For more than two centuries, governments around the world have formed such organizations to support their regular security forces, mainly as a reserve

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that many eyebrows have been raised and suspicions voiced regarding the true intentions behind handing such a force to the most extreme elements within Israel's current coalition government. It would be a move that appears to be a point-blank ransom payment merely to gain the far right's support for a brief pause to the progress of the anti-democratic legislation.

The entire saga raises questions about

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to a dangerous combination of being exceedingly laughable but at the same time deeply sinister.

This is an attempt to form not a national guard but a militia answerable to Ben-Gvir and, through him, the most extreme and violent of the settlers in the occupied West Bank, who have already been operating as a law unto themselves for many years.

And while on certain issues Netanyahu would like to be perceived as being forced to comply

Tunisia's decision to snub IMF deal is both reckless and bizarre

Hafed Al-Ghwel

In a move that was less of a surprise and more a reflection of just how far gone Tunisia now is, President Kais Saied this month rejected the idea of implementing economic reforms required by the International Monetary Fund as part of a \$1.9 billion bailout package agreed in October last year.

Tunisia, a North African country that emerged from the Arab Spring as a beacon of democracy, has been grappling with economic hardships and political instability in recent years.

Citing concerns over subsidy cuts and potential unrest, Saied rejected the terms of the bailout package. His administration also balked at cutting public sector wages, even though Tunisia has one of the biggest public wage bills in the world. Meanwhile, record high inflation has left the Tunisian government highly sensitive about making any decisions that might hurt the average citizen's rapidly decreasing purchasing power.

Without the IMF's help, however, Tunisia faces significant sociopolitical and economic consequences that are not exactly unknown, and so Saied's decision has far-reaching implications for the nation's sociopolitical and economic landscape.

Firstly, the country faces a balance of payments crisis without any readily available financial support. Its fiscal deficit has been growing, with public debt now exceeding 90 percent of the gross domestic product. An already precarious economic situation could be exacerbated, as long as combative politics continues to weigh heavier in the government's decision-making processes than the more evident needs of average Tunisians.

Ironically, in an attempt to ease pressure on the domestic front, Saied's government continues to trudge along through a disaster of its own making, neither keen to accept much-needed assistance nor in a hurry to find alternative financing. Nonetheless, Tunis is not able to dodge the

inevitable, because the only way out of this quagmire is to resort to increased borrowing, even if it places further strain on already high debt levels.

Secondly, inflation has been a significant issue for Tunisia, now edging past 10 percent. Without the IMF's support, the country might struggle to implement the necessary fiscal and monetary policies to

impact on the swelling ranks of Tunisia's struggling lower and middle classes.

Thirdly, the deal with the IMF would not only help Tunisia avoid defaulting on debt, it would also enable the embattled country to access up to \$5 billion in external funding, mostly from creditors in Europe

Foreign direct investment inflows have been crucial to the nation's development, particularly in sectors such as tourism and manufacturing. Any further declines would likely result in reduced job opportunities, complicating economic diversification efforts and long-term interventions to enhance

bailout could further polarize the country, hindering the government's ability to implement much-needed reforms.

Moreover, Saied himself has acknowledged that subsidy cuts could lead to unrest, and when this is coupled with the potential for reduced social programs, mass civil sector layoffs and rising prices, the risk of violent protests

that Saied's "back to basics" brand of populism sought to tackle, yet has consistently failed. Now, nearly one in three Tunisian youths are out of work and, with inevitable austerity measures looming, the bleak economic prospects will only continue to agitate a promising demographic that is key to unleashing the country's so-far squandered potential.

Tunisia's maladies are eerily reminiscent of the prolonged periods of economic hardship, social unrest, and political instability faced by Argentina and Greece. Those countries ultimately faced years of austerity measures and reduced social services, which led to widespread public protests and political upheaval.

Therefore Saied's decision to reject IMF help is more than just confounding — it is reckless.

The regime in Tunis has not put forward any alternative plan for reducing a ballooning debt-to-GDP ratio, which is compounding fiscal pressures and slowly forcing the Tunisian government into a corner.

For instance, without urgent assistance Tunisia will probably fail to make some foreign loan repayments this year totaling about \$2 billion, including a 500 million (\$554 million) Eurobond maturing in October.

Meanwhile, Tunisia's business community is increasingly frustrated with Saied for his seemingly erratic decision-making, so it seems likely that protests will erupt regardless of what happens with the IMF deal.

The short-term consequences of Saied's expected, yet nonetheless bizarre, decision are already apparent; the longer-term consequences, however, could be more severe and extend beyond the nation's borders, potentially plunging another North African country into chaos.

Time is quickly running out for Tunis to implement necessary reforms and prolonging the inevitable will only compromise Tunisia's stability, ultimately hindering its recovery, development, and prosperity.

Paradoxically, if Tunisia is to increase social protections for its most vulnerable people, it will have to rely on the IMF's help, which entails enacting austerity measures to reduce the fiscal deficit. However, cutting public spending will imperil public sector wages, social safety nets, and other interventions designed to reduce the impact on the swelling ranks of Tunisia's struggling lower and middle classes. Thirdly, the deal with the IMF would not only help Tunisia avoid defaulting on debt, it would also enable the embattled country to access up to \$5 billion in external funding, mostly from creditors in Europe and the Arabian Gulf, equivalent to about 65 percent of 2023 government-funding needs, or 17 percent of the gross domestic product. The remaining financing could be provided mostly by local banks but the mechanics of how they can do this without putting significant pressure on their own liquidity remains unclear. This only strengthens the case for accepting the IMF's terms, since doing so would help restore some investor confidence in the country, which would be key to attracting voluminous foreign direct investment to help accelerate economic growth. Foreign direct investment inflows have been crucial to the nation's development, particularly in sectors such as tourism and manufacturing.

curb inflation, which would lead to rapidly rising prices for essential goods and services. This would disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people who are already struggling with high unemployment, stagnant wage growth, and worsening poverty levels.

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Tunisia's resilience to external shocks - for example, the ongoing adverse effects of the war in Ukraine on food inflation. Fourthly, tensions arising from a three-way standoff between the Saied regime, the labor unions, and the political opposition will only rise, sparking even more sociopolitical crises and governance deficiencies in a landscape that has been marked by intense fragmentation and instability since 2011.

Tunisia's post-Arab Spring era has experienced multiple changes in government and lack of consensus on key policy issues; the puzzling decision to reject a

will only increase.

Tunisia has experienced waves of social unrest in recent years, particularly in 2018 when demonstrations erupted in response to austerity measures and increased living costs. Thus, the memories in Carthage Palace are somewhat fresh which likely explains the costly hesitancy.

Unfortunately, without a viable alternative, the Saied regime risks inflaming tensions among Tunisian youths who constitute a significant segment of the country's population. Chronic unemployment among young people has been a persistent issue, one

‘Natural Capital’ is the key to Earth Day success

This year’s Earth Day, which will be celebrated on April 22, has an intriguing economic theme: “Investing in our Planet.” The goal of organizers is to engage more with businesses and other organizations in addition to the more than 1 billion citizens who participate in the annual event, to ensure they do their part so that everyone is accounted for and that everyone is accountable.

To this end, one of the key activities organizers are promoting is an effort to get more individuals and organizations to plant trees around the globe. Since 2010, Earth Day has helped oversee the planting of tens of millions of trees through the Canopy Project which works worldwide to strengthen communities.

However, the motto “Investing in our Planet” is interesting, too, in a wider sense given a growing body of opinion that putting a valuation on so-called “natural capital” is key to protecting the planet.

Natural capital accounting refers to the process of calculating the total stocks and flows of natural resources and services in a given ecosystem. Such accounting might occur in physical or monetary terms. This process can subsequently inform organizational and consumer decision-making, as each relates to the use or consumption of natural resources and land, and sustainable behaviors to preserve them.

The importance of this approach can be illustrated using the forestry example cited earlier. Previous research has underlined the significant value that resides in elements such as: soil stabilization that prevents a neighboring farmer’s soil being washed away; watershed protection that purifies a neighboring town’s water supply; flood prevention that protects a local village; and provisioning and pharmaceutical services that feed and medicate indigenous peoples, let alone carbon sequestration to mitigate global warming.

Collectively, such measures are estimated by some researchers to provide more than half of the value of a tropical forest. Yet many economists regard them as “externalities” which, although potentially immensely valuable, do not accrue to any individual property owner because the benefits are experienced by

Andrew Hammond

quantify and value natural capital in these ways, a price can be put on these “free goods” as a way of trying to protect them. The need for such an approach is illustrated by the alarming results of studies that reveal an increased decline of tropical forests resulting

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office on Jan. 1 promising to put a stop to deforestation after his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, reduced environmental protection operations in the Amazon.

Overall, during the first quarter of this year Amazon deforestation was at the second-highest level on

announced in January that it intends to contribute to Brazil’s Amazon Fund, which supports conservation projects. Norway also pledged its support last month for Brazil’s efforts to attract additional donor countries for the fund.

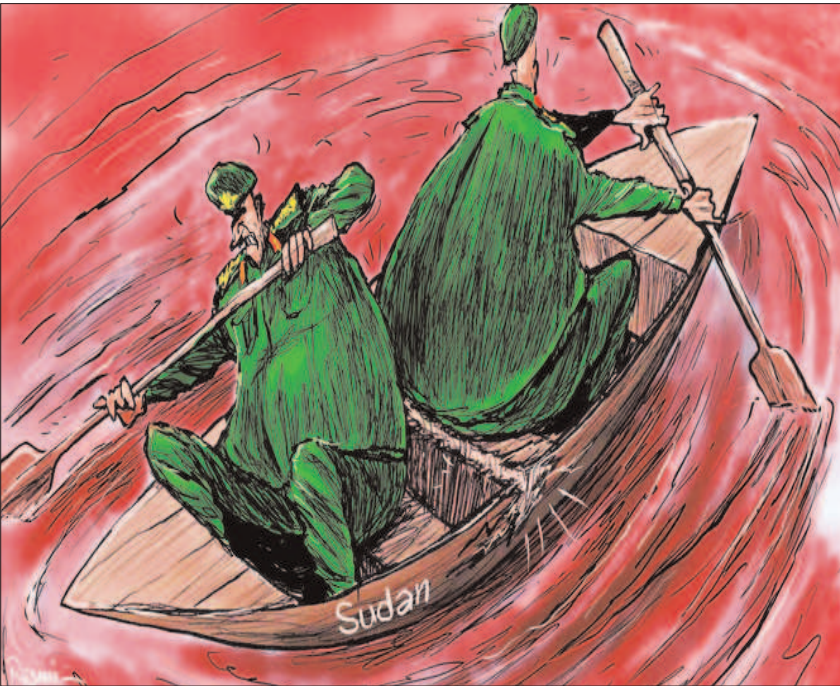
Yet despite these imperfect international efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, global developments are very concerning. Reducing carbon emissions is vital, and deforestation represents up to a fifth of global carbon dioxide emissions — more than that of the entire transport sector. Brazil and Indonesia alone account for more than half of the world’s emissions from forest loss.

In the Amazon, for example, about a fifth of its forests have been lost in the past six decades. It is critical we recognize that more than 1.5 billion people rely directly on the externality benefits (the outcomes of a given economic activity that affect a third party not directly related to the activity) that forests offer, including food, fresh water, clothing, traditional medicine, and shelter — not to mention the role that such forests play in stemming global warming.

The American and Norwegian announcements underline the fact that there are growing moves for developed economies with emission-reduction obligations to launch initiatives such as payments to developing countries where most of the world’s major intact forests are located, for the service they provide in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it away.

However, it is clear that national and global processes that could put the world onto a more sustainable path need a serious injection of post-pandemic political urgency.

This underlines the fact that the time is ripe for new energy and ideas that could create a foundation for genuine sustainable development, and secure post-pandemic prosperity for billions around the world.



France’s Constitutional Council approves key elements of pension reforms

Zaid M. Belbagi

It has been decades since France’s 17th-century Palais-Royal has been under such heavy guard. However, in circumstances unique to France’s very particular republic, the royal building has been surrounded by police and armored vehicles — for it hosts France’s Constitutional Council.

France’s highest constitutional authority has been the center of attention this week as protests wracked the country on the 12th day of rage in a year that has seen significant political turbulence.

Established by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic to ensure its basic principles are upheld, the council has a role central to French democracy. Usually

reforms to France’s pensions system have faced significant opposition from the outset. Bolstered by significant social unrest, and despite the reforms having been passed in France’s Senate, the president’s would-be allies and political opponents alike in the National Assembly withheld their critical support, leading the government to employ Article 49.3 of the French Constitution and compel the majority to adopt its proposals.

Friday’s ruling had been keenly anticipated, as within the context of French President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist alliance losing its parliamentary majority, a no confidence

ting France up for further turmoil. On Friday, the headquarters of the leading French luxury group LVMH was stormed and protesters clashed with police across the country.

France’s socialist opposition have made sure not to criticize the council’s decision, sharing that its decision was a legal one though this issue has become a wider societal problem in which the majority of the French people are in opposition and therefore to promulgate this law in haste would be undemocratic. The leaders of the conservative Les Republicains have belatedly supported the reforms following the council’s decision. Though they have advocated for the raising of the retirement

Currently headed by former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, the council’s members, known as les sages or “the wise,” have a significant influence on new legislation. Only when they have made their ruling can new proposals be signed into law by the president of the republic. Their task on Friday was to decide if the pension reform and the process through which the legislation was passed is in line with the constitution, and if a referendum can be held on the retirement age. Given the lack of parliamentary majority for the president’s Renaissance party following elections last year, the proposed reforms to France’s pensions system have faced significant opposition from the outset. Bolstered by significant social unrest, and despite the reforms having been passed in France’s Senate, the president’s would-be allies and political opponents alike in the National Assembly withheld their critical support, leading the government to employ Article 49.3 of the French Constitution and compel the majority to adopt its proposals. Friday’s ruling had been keenly anticipated, as within the context of French President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist alliance losing its parliamentary majority, a no confidence vote, and already having used special constitutional powers to pass the 2023 budget — the government was on shaky ground.

a discreet body, the council no doubt carries out the important work of ruling whether proposed statutes conform with the constitution after they have either been voted on by the parliament or, as in the case of current pension reforms, passed by the government as a decree.

Over its lifespan, the council has reviewed 744 bills and struck down 369, only 17 of them completely. Currently headed by former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, the council’s members, known as les sages or “the wise,” have a significant influence on new legislation. Only when they have made their ruling can new proposals be signed into law by the president of the republic.

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vote, and already having used special constitutional powers to pass the 2023 budget — the government was on shaky ground.

Having approved the most controversial element of the proposal, namely the raising of the retirement age, the council’s work is far from over. An 11th-hour proposal from the opposition on Thursday requesting a referendum on the reforms was resubmitted in the hope of stalling matters. However, given that the court has announced it will take several weeks to review this latest proposal, it is more likely that the president will see his reforms become law within a fortnight.

The president said that he would meet with relevant trade unions on Tuesday regardless of Friday’s outcome. Though this meeting is still expected to take place, several trade unions have announced they will not be attending. Rather, France is likely to see more protests. Following the court’s decision, far-left leader, Jean-Luc Melenchon, said “the fight will continue” — set-

age, they have been hesitant to extend their support to a government that has undermined their previous electoral success.

France’s unions will be issuing a statement concerning the reforms and will continue to advocate for a decision on a referendum that is expected on May 3. In the interim, Macron can expect further political upheaval, which Friday’s legal decision will not have discouraged. His Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne has said that “there are no winners or losers” from the ruling, echoing a wider sentiment in the country regarding the controversial reforms. In circumstances where the cost of France’s aging population and outdated generous public spending must be reviewed, it is little surprise that the government has already stated the reforms will become law by September. Nevertheless, in a country where welfare spending is sacred, the president will face a very tough remaining four years of his presidency should his reforms come into effect.

Biden’s Northern Ireland intervention reveals a weakened West

US President Joe Biden’s visit to Belfast last week inevitably drew comparisons with key interventions made by fellow Democratic President Bill Clinton in the Northern Ireland Peace Process more than two decades ago.

Clinton’s three visits — in 1995, 1998 and 2000 — were widely viewed as being instrumental first in nudging unionists and republicans toward a deal, and then in keeping the 1998 Good Friday Agreement alive during the turbulent months and years after it was signed.

Observers in Belfast, Dublin and London, as well as interested parties further afield, hope that Biden’s visit will have a similarly galvanizing effect on politics in the province which, once again, appear to be deadlocked.

Biden, of course, lacks the pull of Clinton. As one Irish civilian who witnessed both presidents’ visits told The Guardian: “Clinton was charismatic, like a film star. Biden is ... older.”

Thankfully, Northern Ireland is in a very different place now compared with when Clinton first visited. The peace agreement has held for 25 years despite numerous challenges along the way. It is perfectly possible that Biden’s intervention will do the trick — aided by the \$6 billion of investment in the province he has promised reluctant unionists if they return to the power-sharing agreement.

Even so, it is hard not to reflect that, in addition to lacking the charisma of Clinton, Biden also does not bring the same power projection enjoyed by his presidential counterpart in the 1990s. This is not a question of personality, per se, but rather of the different global reality in which Biden operates.

While Clinton could charm the people of Northern Ireland toward a settlement as head of unquestionably the most powerful state on earth, and leader of a victorious West, Biden instead leads a divid-

ed US and a weakened West.

Clinton’s intervention was part of a wider global American agenda in the 1990s and 2000s. Successive presidents pursued a liberal global hegemony that frequently promoted its two values of neo-liberal capitalism and democracy.

Unchallenged by any

Christopher Phillips

from illegal logging, agriculture, and mining activities. Take the example of deforestation in Brazil’s Amazon rainforest. It increased by 14 percent in March 2023 compared with last year, according to preliminary official statistics. This is despite the fact that

Fast forward to 2023, and Biden is not operating from the same commanding

declined to do so.

While Clinton came to Northern Ireland keen to heal Britain and Ireland’s long-running problem and to boost the Western coalition as it pursued a US-led “New World Order,” Biden’s challenge is simply keeping the fragile Western coalition together.

Indeed, Biden would be justified in feeling frustrat-

Tony Blair, the former British prime minister and one of the original architects of the Good Friday Agreement, proved to be a partner in US activism after his election to the British premiership in 1997. While Clinton and Blair would later be criticized, rightly, for some aspects of their liberal interventionism, their actions reflected a period of unparalleled Western confidence, belief, and power. Fast forward to 2023, and Biden is not operating from the same commanding position. The US remains the most powerful state in the world but it is far from unchallenged. China is close to matching it economically, if not militarily, while Russia is more combative than it was in the 1990s. Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has shown the limits of Western power in today’s multipolar world. Only Western states have joined Washington’s sanctions on Russia, while almost all states in Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East have declined to do so. While Clinton came to Northern Ireland keen to heal Britain and Ireland’s long-running problem and to boost the Western coalition as it pursued a US-led “New World Order,” Biden’s challenge is simply keeping the fragile Western coalition together.

serious rivals after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this “unipolar” moment allowed Clinton to intervene in Bosnia, Sierra Leone and the Israel-Palestine peace process, though he would later be criticized for not acting to prevent the genocide in Rwanda.

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Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has shown the limits of Western power in today’s multipolar world. Only Western states have joined Washington’s sanctions on Russia, while almost all states in Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East have

ed that he needs to intervene at all. The Northern Irish stalemate that threatens peace in the province has come about because of Brexit, a damaging goal for the Western coalition in which two of Washington’s allies, Britain and the EU, have turned on one another in mutual recrimination.

At a time when Biden would rather these key Western partners were uniting to face down shared Russian and Chinese threats, years of wrangling and recriminations over Brexit have only made the

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Pakistani auto dealers to explore new avenues of collaboration with China

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistani auto dealers are moving ahead to explore new avenues of collaboration with China.

"In recent years, made-in-China products and Chinese brands have begun to become real players and drivers in the global auto industry. With the help of China's leading automotive industry communication platform, we can learn about the latest exciting trends in the automotive industry," said Bilal Chaudhary, a Pakistani auto dealer in Gujarat, while expressing his excitement to participate in the Auto-mobile show in Shanghai and Chery's Annual Global Dealer Conference, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro on Sunday.

Chery will present its latest products, create live experiences, and host user-salon co-creation sessions at the Shanghai International Automotive and

Manufacturing Technology Exhibition, one of China's most authoritative and influential auto shows, on April 18.

It will coincide with its 2023 Global Dealer Conference, which is also the first face-to-face meeting between Chery and its global partners in three years.

The conference aims to strengthen Chery's internationalization strategy, listen to the needs of the global market, and negotiate future development plans with its global partners. It also means that Chery will once again accelerate its global marketing strategy.

The year 2022 was full of both risks and opportunities. Despite numerous uncertainties, such as chip shortages and logistics constraints, the global automotive market experienced a 1% year-on-year sales decline.

While Chery sold

450,000 units in overseas markets, matching its best-ever performance, it defied the trend by increasing by 68 percent year on year.

"Chery's products have been incredibly successful in the global market, and we have been very impressed with its performance in Pakistan as well," Bilal's collaboration with Chery resulted in the successful introduction of two vehicle models, the Tiggo 4 and Tiggo 8.

The quality of the vehicles has consistently impressed Pakistani customers. "We propose launching more Tiggo models and variants in our region so that customers have more options to choose from." "The internationally successful Arizo could be a good project to launch in the Sedan category," Bilal added.

Bilal believes that the convention will provide a great opportunity for

Pakistani dealers and Chery to reconnect, share insights and explore new ways of working together.

"We will work with nearly 1,000 Chery dealers from Europe, South America, the Middle East and other regions to closely appreciate Chery new energy products, hybrid platforms and other scientific and technological exhibits, exchange on industry trends, cooperative products and models, and bring the advanced concepts back to Pakistan."

Another driving force of Bilal's visit to China is the upcoming on-the-spot exchanges with Chinese partners.

"The Chery team has always been highly professional, responsive and easy to work with. Chery may consider investing in training programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of our local sales force," Bilal added.

Italian private sector keen to invest in Pakistan, says Sheheryar Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Investment Consular of Pakistan to Milan, Italy Muhammad Sheheryar Khan on Sunday said that the Italian private sector was keen to invest in Pakistan, finding it a lucrative destination and Italy was making efforts to further cement economic relations between two countries with special emphasis on frequent exchange of trade delegations.

Talking to Chief Executive Officer Pakistan

Furniture Council Mian Kashif Ashfaq, he said that the Confederation of Italian Industries was representing private sector, making efforts to globalize their activities.

It has 6,000 companies as its members that were keen to enhance cooperation with Pakistani businessmen through direct meetings with local entrepreneurs.

He further added that they were arranging a delegation from Italy that

would visit Pakistan and had direct talks for marketing of their products.

The Italian Development Committee has opened its office in Pakistan, and we are making efforts to attract more Italian companies to come and invest in Pakistan which has become a lucrative destination after Chinese investment in the CPEC and its related projects, he said.

Muhammad Sheheryar Khan said the Pakistani entrepreneurs can contact

and get any type of information from the IDC.

He said that both the countries were already doing business but the volume of bilateral trade was just a peanut of their existing potential.

Mian Kashif Ashfaq said as Italy has special expertise in the fields of engineering, alternate energy, agri products, livestock, dairy, processed food, leather, textile, marble. There is a need for technology transfer to Pakistan, he concluded.

'Land acquired for Small Industrial Estate, Surgical City'

SIALKOT (APP): Deputy Commissioner Adnan Mehmood Awan said that land for Small Industrial Estate and Surgical City had been acquired, and the area acquired for Surgical City would be handed over to the Punjab Small Industrial Estate Corporation soon after the wheat harvesting.

The district administration was fully cooperating with the institutions concerned to complete these projects as soon as possible for the promotion of economic activities in the city,

says a news release issued here on Sunday.

He said this during a meeting with Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry President Abdul Ghafoor Malik during his visit to the Chamber.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Ahmed Raza, Chairman Sialkot International Airport Limited (SIAL) Khawaja Masood Akhtar, former SCCI Presidents Chaudhry Toheed Akhtar, Rana Nadeem and other members were also present on the occasion.

During a meeting, Deputy Commissioner Adnan Mehmood Awan said that funds had been released for the road project from Sambrial Dry Port Chowk to Airport.

He said that in the first phase, one lane would be completed and opened for traffic while streetlights would also be restored after the completion of road.

He said that patchwork on the city roads would be completed in the next eight weeks at a cost of Rs 35 million, while a request has

been made to the government for the required funds for Pasrur Road and Wazirabad Road.

Similarly, only such projects would be given NOC for remodeling of important squares of the city which do not obstruct traffic and were long lasting besides being beautiful, he added.

He said that price magistrates had been fully activated against the profiteers in the city and fines of Rs 2 million were imposed on violators during the current month.

Yiwu fuels new boom in Pakistan-China trade

BEIJING (INP): Yiwu, city in China known as the "world supermarket", export of Pakistan's specialty products to China fuels new boom in Pak-China trade.

"With the inauguration of the Pakistani national pavilion in Yiwu, a city in China known as the "world supermarket", export of Pakistan's specialty products to China and the world will be promoted.

We anticipate that more enterprises will learn about Pakistani products through this window and furthermore, invest in Pakistan," emphasized Ghulam Qadir, Commercial Counsellor at

the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro. The pavilion displays a range of products including handmade carpets, jewelry, sports goods, rice, Himalayan salt lamps, textiles, handicrafts, dried fruits, and more, all of which are among the featured products exported by Pakistan to China.

Cotton yarn, grains, and mineral sand have long been Pakistan's top three exports to China, accounting for approximately 60%, 10% and 6% respectively.

Yiwu is a vital cross-roads for trade between

China and Pakistan. The city is home to a significant number of Pakistanis, and Yiwu, China has the highest number of Pakistani registered foreign companies among world cities.

Imports and exports between Pakistan and China in Yiwu reached \$180 million in the first two months of 2023, a 49.4% year-on-year increase, including \$11 million in imports, a 3.2-fold year-on-year increase.

According to the Yiwu Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the import and export from Yiwu, China to Pakistan in 2022 was

\$1.057 billion, an increase of 81.3% year on year, with import amounting to \$83 million, an increase of 7.6 times year on year.

At the Pakistan Economic and Trade Information Sharing Conference held by Yiwu Municipal Bureau of Commerce and Pakistan Purchasers Service Center on Wednesday, the Commercial Counsellor introduced trade and investment opportunities in Pakistan and hoped more enterprises in Yiwu to tap the huge potential of Pakistan, which is predicted to be the 6th largest economy by 2075.

flood impacts, import controls, high borrowing and fuel costs, low confidence, and protracted policy and political uncertainty. Despite some projected recovery, growth is expected to remain below potential in the medium term.

With dampened imports, the current account deficit is projected to narrow to 2pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2023 but widen to 2.2pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2025 as import controls ease. The fiscal deficit is projected to narrow to 6.7pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2023 and further over the medium term as fiscal consolidation takes hold. The macroeconomic outlook is predicated on the completion of the IMF program, sound macroeconomic policy, continued



ISLAMABAD: Women selecting and purchasing dresses for preparation of upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

WCCIS hosts zoom meeting with PCSUMEA

SIALKOT (APP): Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) hosted a zoom meeting with Pakistan Cutlery and Stainless Utensils Manufacturers' and Exporters Association (PCSUMEA) Wazirabad.

During the meeting, various avenues of possible collaboration were discussed such as facilitating the women entrepreneurs in both of the bodies and sharing the pool of information among the bodies, says a news release issued here on Sunday.

An MoU will be signed between WCCIS and PCSUMEA to collaborate on a vast array of productive projects for job creation and other opportunities for females.

WCCIS President Dr Mariam Nouman chaired the meeting. PCSUMEA Chairman Shakeel Azam, PCSUMEA Senior Vice Chairman Adnan Javaid, WCCIS Executive Committee Members Nadia Qaiser, Uzma Zaka, Nakash Khan and others attended the meeting.

Property rights market sees record trading

BEIJING (APP): The trading volume of China's property rights market hit 22.5 trillion yuan (3.28 trillion US dollars) last year, marking a new high, data showed.

About 14.86 trillion yuan of financial assets were traded in 2022, according to the Chinese State-owned Property Exchanges Association. Procurement transactions and asset and equity transactions came in at 5.1 trillion yuan and 1.88 trillion yuan, respectively.

While natural resource deals stood at 649.7 billion yuan, transactions of various environment-related rights, including carbon emission and pollution discharge rights, were 13.33 billion yuan.

While acknowledging the notable improvement, Xia Zhongren, secretary-general of the association, said the market still needs to be more modernized and digitalized, meet higher standards, and offer more market-oriented services.

Xia called for pushing forward reforms and innovation and accelerating national integration.

Coordinator to FTO stresses need to boost manufacturing sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis Sunday stressed the urgent need for strengthening the manufacturing industry for sustainable economic growth.

He also sought relaxation in imports of essential raw materials to meet the pre-requisite industrial sector requirements for boosting indigenous production that's will be instrumental in increasing the volume of pak exports as well.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists and traders led by Shahid Nazir he said the manufacturing sector is the backbone of development in general and economic development in particular.

He said this mainly because manufacturing industries not only help in modernising agriculture but

it also reduces the heavy dependence of people on agricultural income by providing them jobs in secondary and tertiary sectors.

He said Industrial development is a precondition for the eradication of unemployment and abject poverty from our country.

He said it was also aimed at bringing down regional disparities by establishing industries in tribal and backward areas.

He said exports of manufactured goods expand trade and commerce and brings in much-needed foreign exchange.

He said countries that transform their raw materials into a wide variety of furnished goods of a higher value are prosperous.

The role of the manufacturing sector is of paramount significance in driving economic, social, and

environmental change, with a focus on emerging economies, he remarked.

Meher said the importance of manufacturing in contributing to economic growth is well recognised by economists and investors globally.

He said COVID-19 has exposed the fragile nature of globally-dispersed manufacturing supply chains and it has reiterated the importance of creating and strengthening local and high-quality manufacturing hubs capable of serving the basic needs of their populations.

E-invest across many sectors but prioritise those that help further development, he said adding that without a strong local manufacturing sector as a foundation, growth in other economic sectors is also constrained.

Vegetables, fruits prices increase in local markets

PESHAWAR (APP): The last Ashra of Ramadan is almost over, but the people could not get relief as the prices of fruits and vegetables increased with every passing day.

The prices of fruits and vegetables in Ramadan are still beyond the reach of the people as there is no Sunday market in the city, the citizens are forced to buy vegetables and fruits at expensive prices. The officials of the district administration also failed to keep a check on the increase of prices of fruits and vegetables, a woman of a family

of six, said. "I do not know where the officials of the govt who are claiming to keep a vigilant check on the prices in the markets," she added. The rates would increase further because of the increase of fuel prices overnight, she said.

Everything is now beyond the reach of the people. "I do not know why people are coming to the street against such an increase in the prices," she questioned.

The prices of Adrak increased to Rs. 700 per kg, garlic Rs. 360 and lemon

280 rupees per kg while Peas 140, Arvi 180. Zucchini 70, Karela 70 and Onion 80 per kg are being sold. The price of green chilli 100, tomato 50 and okra per kg will reach 170 rupees.

The prices of fruits also increased sharply as Malta 440, Cano 340 and banana 280 rupees per dozen while pomegranate 400, Iranian apple 410, guava 270 and grape 480 rupees, strawberries 220, Melon 100 and loquat 220 rupees per kg. The price of live chicken has increased to Rs 360 per kg.

China EximBank extends 300 billion yuan of loans

BEIJING (APP): The Export-Import Bank of China (China EximBank) said it has issued 300 billion yuan (43.73 billion US dollars) of loans to the country's manufacturing industry during the first quarter of this year.

By the end of March, the bank's outstanding loans to the manufacturing sector came in at nearly 1.9 trillion yuan, including 1.62 trillion yuan of medium and long-term loans.

During the first quarter,

the bank supported the upgrading and transformation of key enterprises, and beefed up credit support to foreign trade companies and small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises.

The China Eximbank is a state-funded and state-owned policy bank supporting China's foreign trade, investment, and international economic cooperation.

China records expansion in number of EV charging piles in Q1: New charging piles for electric

vehicles (EVs) in China saw stable expansion in the first quarter of the year, industry data showed.

Some 632,000 charging piles were added in the January-March period, rising 28.6 percent from the same period in 2022, said the China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance.

By the end of March, China had more than 5.84 million charging piles, surging 87.9 percent year on year.

Jump in oil rates unfair as businesses stuck in inflation quagmire

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Businessmen Panel (BMP) of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Sunday said that the sharp rise in oil prices before Eidul Fitr is unjustified, calling it totally destructive and dangerous for the trade and industry, which was already stuck in the quagmire of hyperinflation and facing exceptionally high cost of production.

FPCCI's Businessmen Panel (BMP) chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, who is also the former president of the FPCCI, observed that the businessmen totally reject further jump in petroleum products' rates for the second fortnight in-a-row ahead of Eid, which is like-

ly to be celebrated at the end of this week, stating the move would further hinder economic activities, as the massive hike in prices of petroleum products and electricity tariff has already jolted the trade and industry amid record high inflation.

It is unfortunate that the the government has again jacked up the prices of petrol and kerosene oil by Rs10 per litre and Rs5.78 per litre with effect from April 16, 2023, in a fortnightly review of petroleum prices. Presently, the government is charging Rs 50 per liter petroleum levy (PL) on both petrol and high speed diesel (HSD) and zero general sale tax (GST) to meet one of the conditions of the IMF. The new ex-depot price of

petrol will be now be Rs 282 per litre instead of Rs 272 per litre following increase of Rs 10 per litre. The price of kerosene oil has also been raised by Rs 5.78 per litre.

Mian Anjum Nisar, quoting a report, warned that the inflation is projected to further rise to 29.5 per cent in the fiscal year 2023 due to higher energy and food prices and the weaker Rupee while the real GDP growth was expected to slow sharply to 0.4 percent in the fiscal year 2023 reflecting corrective tighter fiscal policy, flood impacts, high inflation, high energy prices and import controls.

He said that the economy is under stress with low foreign reserves and high inflation. Activity has fallen with policy tightening,

flood impacts, import controls, high borrowing and fuel costs, low confidence, and protracted policy and political uncertainty. Despite some projected recovery, growth is expected to remain below potential in the medium term.

With dampened imports, the current account deficit is projected to narrow to 2pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2023 but widen to 2.2pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2025 as import controls ease. The fiscal deficit is projected to narrow to 6.7pc of GDP in the fiscal year 2023 and further over the medium term as fiscal consolidation takes hold. The macroeconomic outlook is predicated on the completion of the IMF program, sound macroeconomic policy, continued

structural reforms and adequate external financing.

Referring to the report, he further added that agricultural output was also expected to contract for the first time in more than 20 years due to last year's catastrophic floods.

Industry output is also expected to shrink with supply chain disruptions, weakened confidence and higher borrowing costs and fuel prices. The lower activity is expected to spill over to the wholesale and transportation services sectors, weighing on services output growth. Furthermore, distortive policy measures, including periods of exchange rate caps and import controls, delayed the IMF program and contributed to creditworthiness downgrades, lower confidence, high yields, interest payments and the loss of access to international capital markets. He noted that in recent developments, official remittance inflows fell by 11.1pc, partly due to the exchange rate cap that made informal non-banking channels preferable.

Key risk is the non-completion of the IMF program due to policy slippages and the non-materialization of expected financing. Additional risks include political instability, deterioration of domestic security and external economic conditions and financial sector risks associated with revaluation losses, liquidity shortages, and high sovereign exposure. Despite an inevitable increase in the prices that will unleash a strong wave of inflation, the coalition government remains short of clinching a deal with the International Monetary Fund that still requires an agreement. On the other hand the NEPRA has increased the electricity rates mainly on account of fuel prices, capacity cost payments and the impact of rupee devaluation against

the US dollar.

He condemned the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's decision to increase electricity tariffs, stating that the burden of power theft, mismanagement, and inefficiencies cannot be shifted to consumers on the pretext of fuel adjustment.

Anjum Nisar stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry. Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electricity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers.



In brief

WBC Continental C'ship title

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Asian heavyweight boxing champion Taimoor Khan would be up for the next fight for the World Boxing Council (WBC) Continental Championship on April 27 in Thailand. Khan would face his Thai rival for the World Boxing Council Continental Championship fight on April 27. "This is the first time, a heavyweight boxer from Pakistan will compete for the continental champion title," he told APP. Khan was undefeated in seven bouts so far, while his rival boxer Chomphoophuang Panya is undefeated in 25 bouts. "I'm determined to win the title of heavyweight continental champion for Pakistan for the first time," he said. It may be mentioned that Taimoor Khan retained his Asian Boxing Federation Heavyweight Championship title after defeating his Thai counterpart, Aekaphob Auraiwan, in a highly-anticipated bout in Bangkok earlier this year. He knocked out his opponent in the second round to defend his title and extended his overall fight record to seven wins, which now include six knockouts.

Tendulkar Jr makes IPL debut

MUMBAI (APP): Arjun Tendulkar made his Indian Premier League debut on Sunday bowling for Mumbai Indians, the team once captained by his illustrious batsman father Sachin Tendulkar. Standing at over six feet (1.83 metres) tall, the 23-year-old left-hander was given the new ball in the match against Kolkata Knight Riders at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. He joined five-time IPL winners Mumbai in 2021 -- making his T20 debut for the state team the same year -- but this was the first time he had been picked for the franchise. The paceman has played seven first-class matches for Goa, after shifting bases to the western state last year. His father, who has almost god-like status in cricket-mad India, began his career with Mumbai state's junior team before being picked for the senior side at the age of 15. He won his first cap for India in 1989 before going on to become the highest Test scorer of all time as well as the first player to score 100 international centuries. He retired in 2013.

Chelsea beat Villa to reach FA Cup final

LONDON (Agencies): Holders Chelsea booked their place in the Women's FA Cup final with a narrow victory over Aston Villa and remain on course to win the trophy for the third year in a row. Sam Kerr headed in the winner at the back post in the second half but there were chances for both sides throughout an evenly-matched encounter at Bescot Stadium. First-time semi-finalists Villa almost took the lead when Rachel Daly's effort was blocked by defender Magdalena Eriksson, before Chelsea's Eve Peris set up a golden opportunity over the bar on the brink of half-time. Carla Ward's Villa side grew into the match but lacked quality in decisive moments which proved costly as they looked to cause an upset. In contrast, Blues striker Kerr only needed one chance to make her mark, rising highest to meet Guro Reiten's cross for her 24th goal in all competitions this season.



LONDON: Said Benrahma of West Ham United scores a penalty for their team during the Premier League match between West Ham United and Arsenal FC.

Babar reveals reason behind his lively century celebration

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): In a befitting response, Pakistan captain Babar Azam has answered the unnecessary criticism aimed at him regarding his strike rate in the T20 format, first with his actions followed by his words. Babar smashed a phenomenal ton during Pakistan's 38-run victory in the second T20 international against New Zealand on Saturday in Lahore. He scored 101 runs from 58 balls, marking his third century in the shortest format, to help his side take a 2-0 lead in the five-game series. Pakistan's captain reached the three-digit mark on the final delivery of Pakistan's inning and after reaching his century

he celebrated the feat in a passionate manner. In a post-match interview, Babar was asked by the presenter Zainab Abbas whether his animated celebration was aimed at the 'strike-rate brigade' who unnecessarily criticise him. "You can say so," quipped Babar with a hearty laugh on his face. "But I don't keep these types of things in my mind. I play according to the situation and build my innings according to the team's requirement," he added. Pakistan skipper reiterated that for him, winning matches for the country was far more important than personal milestones. "I'm not too worried about personal milestones. I'm focused on performing

in a way that I can help my team win. The team comes first and then milestones," he said. "But from an individual perspective, you can say this was a special hundred." It may be noted here that the right-hander smacked 11 boundaries and three sixes during his blistering knock to steer Pakistan to a massive 192-run total. New Zealand in reply, could only amass 154/7 in their quota of 20 overs thanks to Haris Rauf's consecutive four-for in two matches. The Green Shirts next play the tourists on April 17 at the same venue before the final two matches in Rawalpindi on April 20 and 24.

Babar Azam is the best player in the world: Imad

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Following the fantastic performance of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam — who scored a sensational century — in the second T20I against New Zealand on Saturday in Lahore, Pakistan all-rounder Imad Wasim heaped praises on the skipper, calling him the "best player in the world". During the match, Azam helped his side take a 2-0 lead in the five-match series by scoring 101 runs in 58 balls, with the help of 11 fours and three sixes, at a strike rate of 174.13. During a chat with Azam after the match, Wasim said that the right-hander is the best player in the world at the moment. "I have seen many innings but this was at the top of the line in my opinion, especially the way he [Babar] carried on after we lost three wickets. The

wicket was holding as well. But the way he played was simply brilliant. There's no doubt that he's the best player in the world," he said. It must be noted that Pakistan won the second T20I by 38 runs courtesy Azam's brilliance with the bat and pacer Haris Rauf's four-wicket haul. "I am very happy to perform in this match," said Azam, who is now the joint most successful T20I captain with 42 wins, alongside England's Eoin Morgan and Afghanistan's Asghar Afghan. "I had two good partnerships and then our bowling was once again excellent. We have got experienced and exciting young bowlers who gave us back-to-back wins." Chasing a target of 193 runs, the Kiwis were restricted to 154-7 in 20 overs.

Eight Kiwis are missing because of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and skipper Kane Williamson has a bad knee injury, leaving the captaincy to batsman Tom Latham — and providing plenty of opportunity for newcomers to shine. The remaining three T20 matches are on April 17 in Lahore, and 20 and 24 in Rawalpindi. Pakistan and New Zealand will also meet in five one-day internationals after the T20 series, honing preparations for this year's 50-over World Cup in India. The tour comes as something of compensation for New Zealand pulling out of their visit to Pakistan on the day of the first game in September 2021, citing security concerns. The Black Caps played two Tests and three ODIs in Pakistan just three months ago.

Ex Olympians want stern measures taken to bring hockey back on track

ISLAMABAD (APP): Former Olympians have asked for stern measures to be taken in bringing the national game back on track through proper planning from the grassroots to the top level, as to regain hockey's lost glory. There were times when Pakistan was the most successful team in World Cups, Olympics and Champions Trophy winning four World Cups in 1971, 1978, 1982 and 1994. Pakistan also has three gold medals in Olympic Games field hockey tournaments in Rome in 1960, Mexico City in 1968 and Los Angeles in 1984. Then its downfall began and an always-winning team that played all World Cup editions, could not qualify for the 2014 and 2023 mega-events. Speaking on the revival of the national game, Olympian Shahbaz Ahmed Sr emphasised proper education of players as he deems that an illiterate cannot carry on in international sports without education. "There is also a need to build four to five hockey

centres in the country directly operated under the federation," he added. "Youth must be spotted from grassroots, educated and fed properly and trained at these centres according to international standards." Shahbaz further pleaded that the PHF must have a proper annual budget and the federation should itself manage its affairs. "Every time we have to request the government for grants to participate in national and international championships or preparation of training camps abroad." He said, "Young players must also be offered regular jobs as was happening during our times when all players had jobs in different departments." Shahbaz advocated organizing Pakistan Hockey League (PHL) as he believes it would prove a key step towards reviving the national game. "Besides providing financial support to PHF, the league will help explore new talent for regaining our lost glory." Once an unbeaten center-forward and a star

Olympian Shahnaz Shaikh pleads to blend young players with experienced hands for forming a squad that owns the potential to beat any team in the world. "Players need to improve their movements and points marking in the D area. They should avoid counterattacks and improve the conversion of penalty corners. If we get three to four penalty corners at least two must be utilized," Shahnaz said. "We need to strongly work on all these things if we want to improve our game. Our players must play with unity and avoid individual point scoring in any game," he commented. Further suggesting measures for improvement, he said, there were around 28 Education Boards in the country with hundreds of schools affiliated with each Board. "Therefore, if each government school is allowed to participate in tournaments, the total number of participating teams would be in the hundreds. This practice would be a sort of talent hunt bringing new players to the national squad."

PPC Ramadan Sports Festival enters into final round

PESHAWAR (APP): The Ramazan Sports Gala organized by Peshawar Press Club and an NGO Hope for the members of Peshawar Press Club has entered the final round with great thrill witnessed especially in the last round matches in five different Games including Badminton, Table Tennis, Ludo, Snooker and Carrom Board. The competition between the players who qualified for the finals of all five games part of the PPC Ramadan Sports Gala will be held on Monday at 10 pm. There were thrill-packed semifinals wherein a large number of members enjoyed the tough battle. On this occasion, former adviser on information Barrister Saif was the chief guest. He was accompanied by the President of Peshawar Press Club, Arshad Aziz Malik, General Secretary Irfan Moszai, CEO Hope Zubair Elahi.

Speaking on this occasion Barrister Saif appreciated the office-bearers of Peshawar Press Club and CEO Hope for extending support in holding healthy sports activities for the members of the Peshawar Press Club. He said that he had always seen journalists running after the news. Such activities are vital for journalists' health and enhancing mental health in such a difficult time that Pakistan is going through, Barrister Saif said. He said that organizing such healthy activities is very important for journalists who are performing their duties in harsh conditions. Barrister Saif said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is famous all over the world for sports and good governance. Appreciating the organization of a sports festival for journalists from the platform of Peshawar Press Club with the support of NGO Hope, Barrister Saif said that he was surprised to see the talent of different Games among journalists. The leadership and organizers of the Press Club deserve congratulations. At the end, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif was also presented with a senior Peshawar Press Club president Arshad Aziz Malik and Secretary Irfan Musazai.

Arsenal held again as West Ham fight back for 2-2 draw

LONDON (AP): Arsenal threw away another two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with West Ham on Sunday and prompt further questions over the Premier League leader's title bid. A week after drawing with Liverpool by the same score, Mikel Arteta's team was held by relegation-fighting West Ham at London Stadium. Gabriel Jesus and Martin Odegaard had fired Arsenal into a controlling lead, but a Said Benrahma penalty and another goal from Jarrod Bowen meant the Gunners could only extend their lead over second-place Manchester City to four points. Defending champions City have a game in hand and also host Arsenal at Etihad Stadium later this month. "Very disappointing," Arsenal manager Arteta said afterward. "The way we started was superb again, we were in total control, then we lost purpose."

"We gave them hope, conceded a terrible penalty, then credit to them. We got on the roller coaster where everything is going, corners and throw-ins, and we never got away from that." City had cut Arsenal's lead to three points after beating Leicester 3-1 on Saturday. But there was little sign of the Londoners feeling the pressure in the early stages on Sunday, taking the lead in the seventh minute through Jesus and Odegaard added a second in the 10th. West Ham was handed a route back into the game when Gabriel fouled Lucas Paqueta in the box and referee David Coote pointed to the spot. Benrahma converted in the 33rd to make it 2-1 going in at halftime. Arsenal had the chance to restore a two-goal advantage nine minutes after the restart, also from the spot. Antonio was penalized for handling in the box, but Bukayo Saka could not take

advantage with his shot going wide. The visitors were almost immediately made to pay for that wastefulness, with Bowen volleying an equalizer in the 54th. "A player who takes penalties misses penalties, I don't know anyone who hasn't," Arteta said. It was a similar story to last week when Arsenal led 2-0 at Liverpool, only for the Merseyside club to fightback and salvage a draw. It could have been worse for Arteta when Antonio rose to meet a cross later on, but his effort hit the outside of the post. A draw leaves West Ham four points clear of the relegation zone. "It would have been a good result getting a point anyway but going 2-0 down and coming back shows great character," West Ham manager David Moyes said. "The games are coming thick and fast and the players are doing a really good job."

Danish offers unconditional support for squash uplift

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's top player Danish Atlas Khan has offered his unconditional services to put the country once again on the path to success, saying there was no shortage of talent in the country but a stern roadmap was needed to help regain lost glory in the game. Danish, who is also the nephew of former world squash champion Jansher Khan, speaking about his plan for the revival of the game, said the Pakistan Squash Federation (PSF) was making all-out efforts to promote and encourage the game and players in the country. "However, other stakeholders must also come forward to help encourage and promote, not only squash but all sports. We should take all departments on board to promote all sports in the country. Wapda, PIA, NBP, Railway, banks, all

government departments should include senior and junior players as to support the games," he told APP. He was of the view that in the past, departments used to support players which resulted in giving us many world champions in squash, hockey and cricket. "Sports cannot grow or flourish, without the support of departments. We should form academies on the grassroots level as well," he said. Danish, who has won 32 gold medals for Pakistan, said PSF was providing players with squash facilities and spending hefty amounts on making squash courts. PSF funds should also be increased so that it can be utilized for the betterment of players. He said there should be squash courts in schools as to promote the game at the grassroots level.

"The more courts and academies there will be, the more talent will come to the fore. In Egypt, players are picked from schools to train in academies with modern techniques and skills and improve their physical fitness." Danish, who won the silver medal in the World Junior team championship in Ecuador in 2010 as a team captain and bronze medal in World Junior Championship, said, "If we want to compete with international players then we have to train like them and use the same track they have been working on". He said the coaches should also be qualified as they have to pass training onto the players. "I have also offered my unconditional support to PSF and for the promotion of the game in the country and I hope we will get a world champion soon," he said.

World Snooker C'ship 2023 Neil Robertson sweeps Wu Yize aside in first round

SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Neil Robertson says he will leave "no stone unturned" in his bid to win a second World Championship after ruthlessly dispatching Chinese debutant Wu Yize 10-3 in the first round. Holding a 6-3 lead overnight, Robertson opened up with a century and then made two sublime 146 breaks - the highest of the tournament so far - as he wrapped up victory in just over an hour on Sunday. "It's the best I have played here for sure," the 2010 champion told BBC Sport. "What let me down last year is I was probably a bit too open and naive. I made it very hard for him [Wu] and didn't give him any easy chances through a poor shot or reckless safety. This year the mindset is perfect." Robertson's failure to add to his Crucible triumph 13 years ago is a mystery within

the game, with the 41-year-old Australian widely regarded as one of the circuit's most gifted players. He will face Jak Jones or Ali Carter in the second round, acutely aware he has not even managed to get to the one-table set-up the comes with the semi-finals since 2014. "I played absolutely fantastic. He earned all his chances and for a debut he made two tons and an 82 and he hardly did anything wrong," added Robertson, who is now the only player to make 145, 146 and 147 breaks at the Crucible. "My preparation coming in has been the best it's ever been. I've been practicing multiple times every day because you have to be ready to play well in the morning, afternoon and evening. There is going to be no stone unturned this year." Ruthless Robertson A long, straight red dis-

patched in trademark fashion to the bottom-right corner pocket set the tone for a dominant display by Robertson, who has also won three UK titles and the Masters twice. When Wu narrowly failed with his own attempt to the same pocket in the 11th frame, it enabled sixth seed Robertson to dole out a heavy punishment from among the balls, as he made the third of his four centuries in the match. Wu briefly rallied in the next, a stunning three-ball plant down the left cushion a highlight of the afternoon, but then missed a pink to the middle. That allowed Robertson to take the frame with a 58 and he dropped in another long red in the final frame before exhibiting exemplary cue-ball control and his full repertoire of shots as he made his second 146 in three frames.



GALLE: George Dockrell celebrates after trapping Kusal Mendis lbw.



In brief

AIOU to close admissions tomorrow

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has set April 18 (Tuesday) as the last day of its 2nd phase admissions of postgraduate programs whereas April 17 (today) is the last day for enrollment for the continuing students of matric and intermediate for the semester spring 2023. The programs offered in this phase include Post Graduate Diploma Programs, 2.5-year and 4-year BS Programs, Associate Degree in Arts (BA General), Associate Degree in Commerce (B.Com), BBA, 1.5, 2.5 and 4-Year B.Ed programs and Certificate courses. Prospectuses and admission forms of these programs are available on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk). Moreover final exams of the Associate Degree in Arts (BA), Associate Degree in Commerce (B.Com) and B.Ed programs offered in the second phase of the semester autumn 2022 will begin simultaneously across the country from April 25. The roll number slips have been uploaded to the CMS account of the students.

IRSA releases 102,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 102,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 88,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1434.92 feet and was 36.92 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 25,700 cusecs while outflow as 30,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1108.10 feet, which was 58.10 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 28,100 cusecs and 38,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 41,500, 29,000, 31,400 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 16,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 10,600 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ANF recovers over 195 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in five operations managed to recover over 195 kg drugs, 1840 intoxicated tablets and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman. He informed that in two operations at Rawalpindi International Mail Office, ANF recovered 1840 intoxicated tablets from two parcels being sent to London. In an operation at Bacha Khan International Airport, 83 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from the possession of a Dubai-bound passenger resident of Khyber. In another operation conducted in Khyber area, ANF and FC recovered 27 kg charras concealed in plastic bags. In fifth operation, ANF conducted a raid near Hub Winder RCD Highway and foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from Quetta to Karachi. 168 kg charras was recovered during the operation from secret cavities of a bus while four accused residents of Quetta were also sent behind the bars. He said that separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.



ISLAMABAD: Tailors busy in stitching clothes in connection with upcoming Eid ul Fitr Festival at Khana pull.

Punjab seeks merit-based scholarship applications

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Punjab government has asked the deserving non-Muslim regular students, studying in government institutes within the province, to submit their merit based scholarship applications by May 12, 2023.

An official told APP on Sunday that, only minority students with exceptional educational records, whose monthly family income does not exceed Rs. 38,375, will be eligible for the scholarship program for the financial year 2022-23.

Interested applicants from matric to PhD levels who hold a Punjab domicile are eligible for the scholarship. Applications must be submitted to the Department of Human Rights and Minority Affairs at 24-C-II, Gilberg-III, Lahore.

The eligibility criteria for the scholarship program includes regular students of Hindu, Sikh,

Christian, Buddhist, and other minority communities, who have achieved a minimum of 40 percent marks in their most recent annual examination. Minority students enrolled in professional-level programs such as MBBS, DVM, BDS, BSc (English), BSc (Nursing), Pharm-D, PhD, or equivalent are eligible for an annual scholarship of Rs 50,000.

Postgraduate students pursuing MA, MSc, M.Com, MCS/MBA, M.Phil, LL.M, or equivalent programs will receive Rs 35,000 per annum, while undergraduate students pursuing BA, BSc, BBA, B.Com or equivalent programs will receive Rs 30,000 per annum.

Additionally, students pursuing intermediate-level programs such as FA, FSc, I.Com, A Level, DAE, or equivalent programs will receive Rs 20,000 per annum, while matric-level

students will receive Rs 15,000 per annum.

The initiative aims to empower regular students studying in government institutes within Punjab, including those run by the federal government in Punjab, to achieve their academic goals and contribute positively to society.

Students studying in federal government institutes located outside Punjab are not eligible to apply for the scholarship program. Additionally, students receiving distance or virtual education are also not eligible to apply.

It is important to note that applications received through post or any other means after the due date will be rejected. Similarly, incomplete applications will also be rejected.

The Department of Human Rights and Minority Affairs reserves the right to cancel a stu-

No one will be allowed to occupy an inch of Rakh graveyard: Commissioner

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chatta has said that no one would be allowed to occupy even an inch of Rakh Dhamial graveyard space.

He informed that during a visit, he had inspected the facilities available in the cemetery. The 1000 kanals of land was allotted for the Rakh cemetery. The boundary walls of the graveyard have been completed besides construct-

ing rooms for the graveyard staff, he said. The Commissioner said that the grave space is properly allotted with a number while the buses and ambulance service are available for the burial.

The Commissioner said that the graveyards in the city are full and Rakh cemetery is serving the burial needs of the twin cities. Rakh graveyard is an exemplary graveyard of twin cities, he added.

More space would also

be acquired for the graveyard, he said and directed the authorities concerned to open an account to meet the expenses of the cemetery. He also instructed to hire employees for the cleanliness of the graveyard. Rakh graveyard also has 100 kanal area reserved for the minorities, he added. He said the minorities in Pakistan have full religious freedom and an atmosphere of brotherhood is established by inter-faith harmony.

Eid shopping gains momentum in city markets

RAWALPINDI (APP): With Eid ul Fitr just around the corner, shopping has started to gain momentum in city markets with a large number of people, particularly women and children, flocking to main city markets, bazaars and malls.

With less than a week before Eid ul Fitr, the residents can be seen thronging shopping malls and other city markets.

People are seen rushing to buy dresses and household items.

Temporary stalls selling ready made clothes, bangles, earrings and cosmetics have also sprung up throughout the city.

The markets and bazaars in the city remained abuzz with customers on Saturday night as the buyers resorted to Eid shopping without being worried about the early closure of the shops.

A festive environment in shopping was noticed at the busy markets including Saddar, Lalkurti, Commercial Market, Moti Bazar, Tench Bhatta, Peoples Colony, Raja Bazaar and various other markets of the town.

Several local and international brands have begun displaying their latest Eid editions of dresses, shoes, and other essential accessories to attract buyers and gain maximum profits.

The shopkeepers have decorated their shops with colourful lights to attract the customers. The shopping frenzy is expected to reach its peak during next few days.

Families come out for shopping soon after iftar and seen buying shoes, cosmetics, ready-made garments, eye-catching artificial jewellery, multi-coloured bangles, and other items for the upcoming festival of Eid ul Fitr.

Women are busy in buying clothes, footwear, cosmetics, henna, bangles and other items.

Big crowds of girls were witnessed on Saturday night on bangles and henna

stalls in various areas of city.

Taking advantage of the shopping rush, some shopkeepers have also started to fleece the shoppers with both hands.

A bangle seller said, "The number of customers is gradually picking up and hopefully it will go further up as Eid ul Firt approaches."

A customer said, "I have completed shopping for my kids and I have bought clothes and matching shoes."

Hawkers are also making brisk sales of clothes, footwear, cosmetics, and other goods as these products are generally purchased by low-income people ahead of Eid, said another citizen.

Several Eid shoppers also complained of overpricing, especially of women's and kids' clothing.

They said that only the people with deep pockets could afford to complete their shopping lists as it is difficult to buy clothes, footwear and other accessories during these inflationary times.

"The prevailing price-hike is limiting me to be content with buying clothes only for my children," said Rozina, a visitor to Chota Bazaar Saddar.

Shabana, a visitor to the Commercial Market, said buying bangles and henna were always one of the greatest Eid thrills.

She complained that the shopkeepers were exploiting the Eid shopping frenzy and overcharge the customers.

A shopkeeper at Raja Bazar said a great number of shoppers were thronging markets and that he was having a good business.

Rawalpindi police have increased the security of the bazaars and markets by deploying additional personnel.

Meanwhile, special arrangements have also been made by the City Traffic Police to ensure traffic flow.

CDA set to develop several new parks

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is all set to develop several new modern parks in Islamabad to provide better recreational facilities to the residents.

The civic authority has already developed around 37 public parks in the federal capital during the last ten years and is working on a policy to increase their number in the coming years.

"We need three to four months to develop a new park after completion of the codal formalities," official sources in the Capital Development Authority (CDA) told APP.

At present, they said the federal capital had six amusement parks, which were considered sufficient to cater to the recreational needs of Islamabad residents.

"But the policy has been made that whenever a new sector will be developed, an amusement park will be constructed along," they added. The sources said that the CDA was developing several new sectors, including I-11, I-12, I-14, I-15, I-16, D-12, and Park Enclave, adding that Model Villages and parks were also being developed in those areas.

"As and when these areas are developed and completed, the new parks will be there to meet the demand and requirement of the general public as per Capital Development Authority (CDA) approved layout plan," they added.

ISLAMABAD (APP): As China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project matures to decade-long affable cooperation between Pakistan and China, both nations are celebrating this initiative as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

It was almost ten years back when China signed a multibillion-dollar CPEC Framework Agreement with Pakistan under its remarkable Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that remained central to Pakistan's economic growth and greater regional connectivity.

China had sent a loud and clear message of friendship and cooperation across borders by agreeing to invest US\$ 46 billion under CPEC, at a time when no country was willing to invest even a single dollar in Pakistan. This portfolio later extended to US\$ 62 billion.

The launch of historic China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) program during the visit of then Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif to Beijing in July 2013, endorsed the all-weather and time-tested friendship between the two countries. It was the hallmark of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) that brought the CPEC to fruition but its pace was badly affected when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government became part of the international agenda of sabotaging this flagship project.

The damage caused to the project by the PTI government due to its failed policies also affected Pak-China relations and after dethroning the arrogant Imran Khan, the present coalition government besides others also faced the challenge of reviving the CPEC.

The task was entrusted to Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Chaudhry Ahsan Iqbal whose relentless efforts under the guidance of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have shown of a ray of hope for a revival of CPEC with the same vigor, it was launched by the

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

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mushaal Hussein Mullick Chairperson Peace and Culture Organization 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, the 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.

BISP reaches over 287,180 children and 266060 PLW

ISLAMABAD (APP): The benefits of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) have so far reached to over 287,180 children and 266060 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) under the Benazir Nashonuma initiative. According to an official source, these beneficiaries had been served through the network of over 470 Nashonuma Centers across the country.

The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) intervention of Benazir Nashonuma was designed in August 2020 to increase the uptake of Health and Nutrition services of its beneficiaries.

The primary objectives of the program were to prevent stunting in children under two years of age, improve weight gain of pregnant women during

pregnancy, reduce anemia and micronutrient deficiencies and prevent low birth weight. World Food Programme (WFP) is the lead implementing partner for Ehsaas Nashonuma. The programme aims to address stunting among pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and their children less than two years of age through the provision of additional cash of Rs. 2,000 per quarter per PLW and boy child and PKR 2,500/- per quarter per girl child of BISP beneficiary families.

In return, mothers must commit to attending regular antenatal health checks and awareness sessions during pregnancy, consuming specialized nutritious food (SNF), and taking their children for immunization and regular health checks.

According to the statistics, Pakistan's high rates of malnutrition (40.2 percent stunting, 28.9 percent underweight, and 17.7 percent wasting) are indicative of an ongoing child nutrition crisis. Such levels of malnutrition rank Pakistan as the second-highest burden country in the region. The first 1,000 days of a child's life are a window of opportunity to lay a strong foundation for later achievements. This time-frame is a period of enormous change characterized by a high degree of plasticity in the child's neurological development.

Investments in the early years of life are the foundation of human capital, and human capital is a key driver of economic development in the modern economy.

Scope of safe city to be extended from Srinagar Highway to airport

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Safe City project has got approval for the installation of 185 surveillance cameras which would help to extend its scope from Srinagar Highway to the Airport.

Chief Commissioner Islamabad has approved 185 new cameras to further improve the surveillance and monitoring of the federal capital Islamabad. With the installation of new cameras, the number of cameras in the scope of Islamabad Safe City will exceed up to 2700, a police source told APP on Sunday.

Due to the special interest of Minister for Interior Rana Sanaullah Khan, 1100 cameras have increased in the Safe City Project during the last 11 months while the capacity and scope of Safe City Islamabad are being extended from Srinagar Highway to Airport as per Interior Minister's directions. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan has said that the installation of cameras would also be helpful in the security of the New Zealand cricket team's visit to Pakistan.

CPEC – A decade long saga of undeterred cooperation

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The task was entrusted to Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Chaudhry Ahsan Iqbal whose relentless efforts under the guidance of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have shown of a ray of hope for a revival of CPEC with the same vigor, it was launched by the

PML-N government in 2013.

For the purpose, the minister paid an important visit to China last week. Before departing for Beijing, he chaired a meeting to review progress on CPEC projects and discussed work-pace on Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Main Line-I (ML-I), Karachi Circular Railway and various new initiatives to be taken up at upcoming sittings of the Joint Working Groups (JWGs).

The meeting reaffirmed the firm resolve of the present government for the successful implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Minister during his Beijing visit conveyed this resolve to Chinese authorities.

"The year 2023 marks the Decade of CPEC and the strong partnership between the Planning Division and China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC)," he said recalling the CPEC Framework Agreement signed in Beijing on July 5, 2013, in the presence of the leadership of the two countries.

"The government of Pakistan is planning to hold special events to mark this milestone," he said and invited Chinese leadership to attend the events.

During meeting with the Minister for the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC) Liu Jianchao, Ahsan Iqbal admired role of CPEC in the peaceful rise and economic development in China.

The IDCPC Minister, in response appreciated Planning Minister's role in furthering the CPEC projects during current and earlier tenures.

Senior Chinese leadership including Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong, Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and Vice Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Li Chunlin spoke highly of Ahsan Iqbal terming him "Mr CPEC" and "key role player" in making CPEC a suc-

cess. After an unpleasant era of Pak-China bilateral ties during the PTI government, both China and Pakistan are once again on way to maintain momentum of overall economic cooperation.

The CPEC's next phase envisages industrial cooperation and Business to Business links. As 2023 is year of CPEC's decade, a delegation of Chinese scholars will be invited to Pakistan to observe progress on CPEC. Recently, almost 11 sessions of CPEC's top forum, Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) have been held including the April 10 most important and latest 'progress review' during Ahsan Iqbal's meeting with Vice Chairman NDRC, Li Chunlin. The meeting resolved, "As year 2023 marks the Decade of CPEC and the strong partnership between Pakistan and China, both Pakistan and China are celebrating 10 Years of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC on July 5, 2023 whereby high-level Chinese delegations are scheduled to visit Pakistan to witness achievements made since the inception of CPEC."

Both sides expressed a desire to sign minutes of the 11th Joint Cooperation Council (JCC) meeting before end of April 2023 to pave way for relevant Technical Joint Working Groups (JWGs) to hold meetings by mid-May 2023 and workout tangible outcomes for 12th JCC Meeting planned for July 2023.

Total planned investment under CPEC is US\$ 62 billion between FY2015 and FY2030 out of which projects worth \$27.4 billion have been realized mostly in energy sector like power generation, coal mining and transmission lines.

During last 10 years, over 30 projects directly or indirectly generated 200,000 jobs, more than 6,000 MW of electricity added to national grid, 809 kilometers highway built and 886 kilometers of transmission lines installed for the first time in country's history.

Education packages delivered

SAR-I-PUL (Agencies): Local officials at the Education Department of Sar-i-pul say that the UNICEF has delivered 432 educational packages to province. The provincial head of education of the province, Mawlawi Mohammad Rehmani thanked the UNICEF for the assistances and asked for more support in the sector of education and providing trainings courses for Sar-i-pul. Lately, UNICEF has started distributing educations resources to the schools of Sar-i-pul province.

Needy families received aid

JALALABAD (Agencies): Local officials in Nangarhar province said more than five hundred needy families in this province received help from a charity organization. These aid packages included food items that were distributed to the needy in Surkh Rod district of Nangarhar. Tajuddin, Nangarhar police chief, has asked international organizations and the country's traders to increase their aid to poor families during the holy month of Ramazan.

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

Hospital staff at loggerheads with services provider

MAIMANA (Pajhwok): Over 200 employees of the provincial hospital in Maimana city, the capital of northern Faryab province, have written a letter to the governor's house complaining about a 20 percent cut in their salaries by Care of Afghan Families (CAF) organization.

The staff also complained they had not received their salaries for the past two months.

The plaintiffs added CAF, an independent humanitarian organization, is implementing basic package of health services (BPHS) in the Maimana hospital.

Pajhwok Afghan News received a copy of the letter signed by 201 personnel of Maimana hospital. They complained in the letter that their salaries have been reduced by 20 percent while there is no such thing in other provinces where health personnel are paid in full.

Doctor Ghulam Sakhi Halim, general surgeon of the hospital, said that CAF organization took responsibility of the hospital two months ago and had since fired 21 personnel and had not paid salaries to the remaining staff.

Halim said he had discussed the issue with Mohammad Asif, a senior provincial official of CAF, but no desirable outcome was received from the meeting.

Halim said: "The hospital is in a dire situation, medicines and necessary equipment are not available. Food and logistics are in short supply, the person-

nel were hungry for some days but another welfare organization donated 150 pieces of bread and accidentally the provincial public health director was also present at the night of breads donation and he witnessed the situation himself". He said personnel of the hospital promised to work for free for the sake of the people and the country, but they would not accept the conditions imposed by CAF.

Doctor Ezatullah Hadaf, another specialist doctor at the hospital, said the number of patients was very high and available facilities were inadequate.

The Maimana Hospital has been upgraded to a 300-bed hospital, but has not been provided with the required facilities.

Patients are also complaining about lack of medicines and other facilities in the hospital.

Gul Mohammad, a resident of Khwaja Musa district, said his three nephews have been hospitalized since last 20 days and he has to 500 afs daily for their medicines, something he could not afford, but has no choice.

Gull Mohammad said: "We came hoping it is a government hospital, there will be more facilities and free treatment, but there is nothing except the advice of doctors. The doctors advised us that all the three children (nephews) must stay for two months in the hospital, I decided, if my brother (children's father) agrees, to sell one of the three children and save the other two".

Naqibullah, a resident of Khwaja Sabz Posh district and a patient who underwent a surgery in the hospital, was happy about his treatment by the doctors, but said that he paid 3,000 afs for medicines from the market.

He said if he had money he would not have come to the government hospital and have visited a private hospital.

Doctor Zahir Shah Jihad Mal, provincial Public Health Department head, said, the CAF organization was taking arbitrary actions as it fired 21 personnel of the hospital without consulting them.

"We have shared the issue with officials of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and called the representatives of CAF and expressed our disagreement about the action."

Jihad Mal alleged: "The aim of this organization is to misappropriate the budget, not to provide health services."

Jihad Mal said the complaints of the hospital personnel and patients about insufficient doctors, medicines and logistical issues were genuine.

He said the hospital should be provided facilities of a 300-bed hospital in order to enable it to cater to the needs of the population.

But added, the current 100 personnel establishment of the hospital does not respond to the needs of the population of this province, the hospital must be upgraded into a 300 beds hospital to respond to the need of the people.

He also acknowledged

that patients purchase medicine from the city drug-stores, but added this issue would be addressed soon because the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) had pledged provision of medicines for hospitals and other health centers.

The Public Health Department head urged the Public Health Ministry to upgrade the hospital in Maimana city.

Pajhwok Afghan News also tried to seek comments of the CAF office about the complaints of the employees and patients of Maimana hospital, but Doctor Mohammad Asif, the provincial CAF official, said that the Ministry of Public Health had prevented them by sending a letter from talking to the media.

Artists concerned by lack of opportunities

KABUL (TOLOnews): For World Art Day, which was on Saturday, April 15, Afghan artists expressed criticism over the lack of attention of the interim government and relevant departments toward the art field, saying that they are facing economic challenges due to lack of opportunities.

Sayed Mehdi Hossieni, who has been engaged in art for the past 12 years, said there is no market for artistic work.

"Art in Afghanistan has a special place. This was due to efforts and perseverance of the artists themselves," he said.

"There are some restrictions on our work currently, in that we cannot draw the face," said Rishad, an artist.

UNESCO named April 15 as the World Art Day.

However, the calligrapher expressed optimism over their business work after the Islamic Emirate swept into power.

"There are some fields whose business dropped to zero after the Islamic Emirate swept into power; but some of the arts such as Islamic calligraphy has increased," said Basheer Ahmad, a calligrapher.

The Ministry of Information and Culture said that it make an effort to improve art in Afghanistan.

"Any art which is in line with our tradition and culture in Afghanistan and also in line with Islam, the Islamic Emirate provides opportunity for such arts," said Abdul Haq Humad, a special envoy of the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Customs exceeds target

KABUL (Agencies): The Afghan Ministry of Finance said on Sunday that the General Directorate of Customs has significantly exceeded its target of revenue collection in the past solar year.

According to the ministry, at the beginning of the last financial year (1401), a revenue target of 96 billion afghani was set for customs, but that target was increased mid-year to 105.4 billion afghani. This target was reached by the end of the fiscal in March this year.

The last fiscal saw customs collect 111.5 billion afghanis in total, which shows an excess of 5.8 percent or 6.1 billion afghanis against the set target.

Customs revenue collected makes up 57.7 percent of all revenue collected by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1401.

This is the highest amount ever generated through customs in the country.

The Ministry of Finance added that the General Directorate of Customs received 94.27 billion Afghani from imports, 15.24 billion Afghanis from exports, and 2.02 billion Afghanis from foreign transit in the past fiscal year.

Kazakhstan interested strengthen ties with IEA



KABUL (Agencies): Top Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan delegation led by Deputy Minister, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, met with Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Serik Zhumangarin who traveled to Kabul.

The two sides discussed political, economic, trade, transit, railway, and basic projects, according to a statement by Arg.

Deputy PM Baradar thanked Kazakhstan for its humanitarian assistance and called Kazakhstan a

good neighboring country with Afghanistan.

During the meeting, Mr. Baradar asked Kazakhstan to accept the new Afghan diplomats to develop diplomatic ties.

For his part, the Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan said that the two countries have good relations in history, and ensured that his country will accept new Afghan diplomats shortly.

Zhumangarin termed the main purpose of his visit to Afghanistan as

developing business ties, creating a joint group for the quick solution of business problems, providing visa facilities to Afghan businessmen, opening bank branches in both countries and opening the Afghan Trans.

In the last year, the two countries had trade worth about \$900 million, which shows a double increase compared to the past years.

In the end, the two sides stressed positive developments for the common interests of both countries.

Herat Municipality to invest 700m Afs in uplift projects



HERAT (Agencies): The Governor of Herat province, Maulana Noor Ahmad Islam Jar, has praised the services provided by the Herat Municipality to the citizens of the province.

He noted that after 40 years of conflict, the coun-

try's security has been maintained, and the number of kidnapping cases has dropped to zero, creating an opportunity for development.

In a meeting with the municipality officials, the Revenue Director Mawlawi Jamil Jawad reported that

the municipality collected 874,922,245 Afghanis in revenue during the last solar year.

He also announced that the department is ready to invest over 700 million Afghanis in development projects in the province for the current year.

25 kiled, 16 wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called the ban on women working for the world body illegal and unacceptable, with the Samarkand foreign ministerial meeting underlining the need for an inclusive government in the country.

Casualties
Last week, 25 people were killed and 16 more wounded in various incidents across the country.

Mujahid said two Daesh militants were killed during an operation conducted by security forces in Kabul. Two other Daesh rebels were killed in the Nimroz province.

The Ministry of Defence said eight militants, including their commander, were killed during an operation by security personnel in the Salang district of central Parwan province.

According to reports, unidentified gunmen shot dead the son of ex-governor of Maidan Wardak Muzafaruddin Yameen in Kabul. The head of a health center was gunned down in Badakhshan.

Unknown people shot dead a moneychanger in Khost, a young man in Kandahar and a lady doctor in Takhar. The body of 65-year-old man was found in Kapisa.

Reports shows two children were killed as a result of an unexploded ordnance blast in Ghazni, while two people lost their lives in Kandahar and Nangarhar. Two more were wounded.

Local officials say a clash erupted between robbers and security personnel in Kandahar. As a result, one robber was killed. In Kapisa, one person was killed and four others were wounded in a clash between two families.

About nine people were injured due to a tribal clash in Ghor. In Faryab, one individual was gunned down and another wounded.

In the previous week, 21 people had been killed in various incidents across the country. Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, security forces and insurgents were killed and wounded every week.

Samarkand meeting on Afghanistan

On Thursday and Friday, a 2-day meeting was held under leadership of Russia in Samarkand. Foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan participated.

The gathering urged the Afghan caretaker administration to create an inclusive government, fight terrorism and reopen secondary schools and universities

for girls.

Uzbek Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov, during a meeting with Afghan counterpart Ami Khan Muttaqi, said talks on Afghanistan in its absence were futile.

In addition to thanking Uzbekistan for hosting the meeting, Muttaqi said the two countries had a shared religion and language and they were good economic partners.

He voiced Afghanistan's readiness to initiate work on trans-Afghan railroad, which could play a positive role in the region's economic integration.

The foreign ministers of Iran, China, Russia, and Pakistan held an informal quadrilateral quadrilateral to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

In a joint statement, they called on IEA to form an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups and political institutions.

Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said Afghanistan remained firmly committed not to allow any group or individual to use its territory against any regional state or beyond.

Addressing a the meeting in Samarkand, he said: "This commitment is not only in words, rather we are practically engaged in serious security and stabilisation efforts inside Afghanistan, and have made discernible achievements."

Muttaqi claimed nearly since the establishment of the current government, no significant security incident had transpired with roots in Afghanistan.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting of foreign ministers of regional countries, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang asked the United States to learn from its failures in Afghanistan.

He said the US was politically and militarily defeated in Afghanistan. He alleged America's so-called war on terrorism had further fuelled the menace.

West's trip to region & Qatar meeting

The US special representative embarked on a trip to Qatar, the UAE and Turkey for consultations with allies on issues including the situation in Afghanistan.

Thomas West tweeted on Friday: "Appreciated meeting with Qatar's Prime Minister HE @MBA_AlThani & Special Envoy for Conflict Resolution HE Dr Mutlaq Al-Qahtani regarding the way ahead in Afghanistan."

Calling Qatar a crucial partner, the diplomat wrote the US sought to protect its interests, support the Afghan people and defend their rights.

But every Afghan partic-

ipant, West claimed, voiced support for dialogue and opposition to armed conflict as a solution to the country's challenges.

Hikmat Khalil Karzai, former deputy foreign minister, tweeted that he met the US diplomat and both called for the resumption of girls' education in Afghanistan and providing women their rights.

Interaction with Islamic Emirate

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Friday that he would continue to interact with Kabul without recognising the current Afghan government.

Last week, Japanese Ambassador Takashi Okada, during a meeting with Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, said his country was in favor of interaction with the Afghan authorities.

Last week, Muttaqi hosted a reception for the ambassadors of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia. Diplomats from other countries and UN special representative of Afghanistan Roza Otabayeva and the Agha Khan Foundation head were also in attendance.

Muttaqi noted IEA's relations and interaction

with the world had been good over the last 20 months. He hoped the current problems would be resolved.

Ban on UN's women workers

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) asked its staff across the country not to come to work until further notice after the Islamic Emirate issued an order banning Afghan female employees of the world body.

The UN condemned the decision as illegal and unacceptable under international laws. UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Roza Otunbayeva has been talking to senior officials of the caretaker government in this regard.

UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez denounced the ban as a violation of the inalienable fundamental human rights of women and called for immediately revoking the decision.

"It also violates Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law and infringes on the principle of non-discrimination, which is a core tenet underpinning the United Nations Charter," he commented.

The EU also wanted of reviewing the continuation of aid to Afghanistan if the

ban on female workers of UN agencies was not lifted.

The German embassy also slammed the ban on women workers as a violation of human rights and said the full empowerment of women in Afghanistan was important for a sustainable future.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the caretaker government's spokesman, said: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) does not want to create any obstacles for the United Nations ..."

Instead, he added, the interim government wanted to explain the decision on banning women workers was Afghanistan's internal issue, causing no problems for anyone else. The decision should be respected by all sides, he insisted.

"We remain committed to the rights of all compatriots, considering our religious and cultural interests," the spokesman commented.

Continuity of aid

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

After the regime change 9n 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on the interim government and froze Afghanistan's over \$9

billion reserves.

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

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

Kazakhstan donated 81 wagons of food items to Afghanistan, including oil, rice and baby food.

India will provide Afghanistan humanitarian assistance of 10,000 tonnes of wheat via the Chabahar port in Iran.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed with World Food Program, India will supply Afghanistan the fifth shipment of humanitarian aid involving 10,000 tonnes of wheat.

This United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has sought \$4.6 billion in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan for the current year. The World Food Organisation says it needs 800 million dollars for emergency aid to the needy Afghans in the next six months.

President directs FBR to provide hearing to company in refund claims case

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has upheld the decision of the Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) directing FBR to dispose of the refund application of a private food company after providing it with the opportunity of hearing as per law in a matter where the company had filed refund claims after a delay of 5 to 8 years.

The president gave this decision while rejecting FBR's representation against the decision of FTO in a case where a private food company had requested the Large Taxpayers Office (LTO), Karachi in 2020 for condonation in delay under the Sales Tax Act, 1990 for filing refund claims relating to the period of 2012 to 2016 as the Sales Tax amount of Rs.88.5 million was not claimed/adjusted in their previous Sales Tax Returns due to some technical issues at the company.

The president in his decision pointed out that as per a Supreme Court's judgment (PLD 1998 SC 64), a genuine refund could not be refused, even if refund applications were filed late, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release on Sunday.

He said that the fundamental rights as enshrined in Article 24 (1) of the Constitution postulated that no person should be compulsorily deprived of his property save in accordance with Law.

The president further said the principle evolved and approved by the judicial pronouncements was that it was the duty of the state to return what had been taken erroneously or wrongly; and that a democratic government could not take a plea of limitation to deny what was due to a citizen.

The president referred to the Supreme Court's decision (PLD 1998 SC 64) in M/s Pfizer Laboratories Ltd. Vs

Federation of Pakistan case that held that if one party under a mistake, whether of fact or law, paid some money to another party (which included a Government department) which was not due by law or contract or otherwise, that must be repaid in view of Section 72 of the Contract Act, 1872.

It was added that where some money was received by the government not lawfully due, the plea of limitation by its departments was one which the court always looked upon with disfavour as it was violative of the principles of morality and justice. It further said that there might not be a legal liability on the part of a government functionary to refund any amount received by it as a tax or other levy by virtue of certain special provisions under the special law but keeping in view that we lived in a democratic society governed by the rule of law and every government, which claimed to have ethical and moral values, must do what was fair and just to the citizens regardless of legal technicalities. The president reiterated that as per Indo-Pak laws the fact that the amount of tax of which the refund was claimed was voluntarily paid, did not preclude the right to claim the refund if it was not lawfully payable.

He also pointed out that the commissioners of two different Zones in the company's matters of identical nature [M/s Zakariya Traders (M/s Unilever Distributors) and M/s Unilever Pakistan Foods Ltd (UPFL)] had passed orders contrary to each other i.e., in the former case, the delay was condoned whereas in the latter it was rejected. "Such contrary approach in identical matters raises suspicions which as far as possible must be avoided", he stated and rejected FBR's representation.

Nearly \$100b finance gap for countries to reach their education targets: UNESCO

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Without \$97 billion in extra funding, a range of countries will fail to meet their 2030 national education targets, a new UN report has revealed, calling for an urgent review of financing. The paper 'Can countries afford their national SDG4 benchmarks?' by the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a Paris-based UN agency, was written as input for the spring meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

It focused on Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning

opportunities for all.

Findings showed that the education sector will need an injection of funds if countries are to meet their targets. In addition to mobilizing additional resources, strategies are needed to increase the effectiveness of funding. The largest financing gap is in sub-Saharan Africa: \$70 billion per year. The region has the furthest distance to travel, with 20 per cent of primary school age children and almost 60 per cent of upper secondary school age youth not in school. Around one-third of the gap could be filled if donors fulfilled their aid commitments and prioritized basic education in the poorest countries, the report found.

Other key findings emphasize that costs include the need to triple the number of pre-primary

teachers in low-income countries and double them in lower-middle-income countries by 2030. The number of primary school teachers needs to increase by nearly 50 per cent in low-income countries.

While the full impact of COVID-19 pandemic disruptions remains unknown, the report found that costs also include making up for massive learning losses that exacerbated the pre-existing learning crisis. Only half of children and adolescents are now prepared for the future having completed their education and with minimum proficiency in reading. Meanwhile, two-thirds of low and lower-middle-income countries had cut their public education spending in the first year following the onset of the pandemic in 2020, it was pointed out.

Germany ends nuclear era as last reactors power down

BERLIN (AFP/APP): Germany switched off its last three nuclear reactors on Saturday, exiting atomic power even as it seeks to wean itself off fossil fuels and manage an energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

While many Western countries are upping their investments in atomic energy to reduce their emissions, Germany brought an early end to its nuclear age. It's "the end of an era," the RWE energy firm said in a statement shortly after midnight confirming the three reactors had been disconnected from the electricity grid.

Europe's largest economy has been looking to leave behind nuclear power since 2002, but the phase-out was accelerated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011 after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan. The exit decision was popular in a country with a powerful anti-nuclear movement, stoked by lingering fears of a Cold War conflict and atomic disasters such as Chernobyl in Ukraine. "The risks of nuclear power are ultimately unmanageable," said Environment Minister Steffi Lemke, who this week made a pilgrimage to the ill-fated Japanese plant ahead of a G7 meeting in the country.

Anti-nuclear demonstrators took to the streets in several German cities to mark the closures. Greenpeace, at the heart of the anti-nuclear movement, organised a celebratory party at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

"We are putting an end to a dangerous, unsustainable and costly technolo-

gy," said Green MP Juergen Trittin. In front of the Brandenburg Gate, activists symbolically slayed a model dinosaur.

Initially planned for the end of 2022, Germany's nuclear exit was delayed as Russian gas supplies dwindled. Germany, the largest emitter in the European Union, also powered up some of its mothballed coal-fuelled plants to cover the potential gap left by gas. The challenging energy situation had increased calls domestically for the exit from nuclear to be delayed. Germany had to "expand the supply of energy and not restrict it any further" in light of potential shortages and high prices, the president of the German chamber of commerce Peter Adrian told the Rheinische Post daily.

Friedrich Merz, leader of the opposition CDU party, said the abandonment of nuclear power was the result of an "almost fanatical bias".

Meanwhile the conservative daily FAZ headlined its Saturday edition "Thanks, nuclear energy," as it listed benefits it said nuclear had brought the country over the years.

Outside observers have been similarly irked by Germany's insistence on exiting nuclear while ramping up its coal usage, with climate activist Greta Thunberg in October slamming the move as "a mistake". As expected, the Isar 2 reactor in the southeast of the country, the Neckarwestheim facility in the southwest and Emsland in the northwest were disconnected from the electricity network

before midnight. Earlier, Guido Knott, CEO of PreussenElektra, which operates Isar 2, said it would be "a very moving moment" to power down the reactor. The three final plants provided just six percent of Germany's energy last year, compared with 30.8 percent from all nuclear plants in 1997.

"Sooner or later" the reactors will start being dismantled, Economy Minister Robert Habeck told the Funke group ahead of the scheduled decommissioning, brushing aside the idea of an extension.

The government has the energy situation "under control", Habeck assured, having filled gas stores and built new infrastructure for the import of liquefied natural gas to bridge the gap left by Russian supplies.

Instead, the minister is focused on getting Germany to produce 80 percent of its energy from renewables by 2030.

To this end, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has called for the installation of "four to five wind turbines a day" over the next few years -- a tall order given that just 551 were installed last year.

But the current rate of progress on renewables could well be too slow for Germany to meet its climate protection goals. Despite planning to exit nuclear, Germany has not "pushed ahead enough with the expansion of renewables in the last 10 years", Simon Mueller for the Agora Energiewende think tank told AFP.

To build enough onshore wind capacity, according to Mueller, Germany now has to "pull out all the stops".

Sindh, Punjab police reap big successes in Katcha operation

RAHIM YAR KHAN (NNI): The anti-bandit operation in Katcha area of Rahim Yar Khan is continued for the eighth consecutive day on Sunday as Sindh and Punjab police killed and arrested a number of robbers in a joint operation in Katcha areas.

According to the spokesperson for Punjab police, the law personnel reaped big successes in the operation. He said police have also made advances in Katcha area in Karachi.

He said that the police took control of four hideouts of dacoits and militants after torching them.

Sporadic incidents of trade of fire between the police and the hardened criminals using heavy artillery were reported in the Katcha area of Karachi.

The spokesman divulged that several bandits have been killed and arrested during the ongoing operation and police have recovered heavy smuggled artillery and incendiary material from the razed hideouts of the dacoits.

Police have destroyed the secret sanctuaries of Lathani gang and took control of the turf. Police also took control of Basti Ghani Lathani after the operation.

The spokesperson said that the law enforcers established the writ of the state after clearing a no-go area stretching on thousands of acres of land.

Police have established its camps in the interior Katcha area of Karachi Bangli, Afzal Lathani and Noz Band. The spokesperson said that the Katcha criminals are retreating to an island type riverine area in a jungle after the police destroyed, razed and torched dozens of militant hideouts. On the other hand, a police operation in the Ghalipur area of Kashmir against the criminal elements is also underway. Several armored personnel carriers (APCs) of police have reached the area.

Police have entered the houses of dacoits who have fled to Katcha area of River Sindh. However, an exchange of fire from both sides is going on. On Saturday, dacoits attacked a police party in Kashmir bordering Ghotki and martyred two policemen and injured four others including an SHO.

PPP formed a reconciliation committee

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Pakistan Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday said that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had formed a reconciliation committee for the sake of national interest.

Talking to a private news channel, he said that a two-member reconciliation committee led by former Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani had been formed which include Qamar Zaman Kaira and Naveed Qamar as its members. The committee will talk with collations and the Opposition parties for the sake of national interest.

He said that the PPP senior leadership assumed that we need for reconciliation to break the current political deadlock between political parties. "If this deadlock prevails, political parties must suffer", he added.

He said that PPP had always talked about reconciliation and even today we believed that the solution to the political crisis in the country is possible only through negotiations.

The minister further said that this committee will try to convince all its supporting parties to negotiate and then go to the Opposition so that the country and the people can get rid of this conflict.

He said that the problems could not be solved on the streets, therefore the Opposition should leave the politics of abuse and threats and sit in discussions and the present the demand for elections with political understanding. Regarding the separate election in Punjab and KPK, he said that elections should be held in the whole country one day otherwise the country will go towards further instability. But even if action is taken, PPP is fully prepared for it. Rather, we have also short-listed the names of our candidates, he added.



LAKKI MARWAT: JUI-F leaders, workers and others attend the funeral prayers of Religious Affairs Minister Mufti Abdul Shakoor in Lakki Marwat .

G7 pledges to quit fossil fuels faster, no new deadline

SAPPORO (AFP/APP): The G7 pledged on Sunday to speed up the phase-out of fossil fuels and urged other countries to do the same, but did not set any new deadlines on the exit from polluting energy sources such as coal.

In a statement following two days of talks in Japan, climate and environment ministers from the leading developed nations outlined efforts to keep global warming under the key 1.5 degree Celsius limit.

They vowed to "accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels so as to achieve net zero in energy systems by 2050 at the latest... and call on others to join us in taking the same action". But the group did not offer any new deadlines beyond last year's G7 pledge to largely end fossil fuel use in their electricity sectors by 2035. France's energy transition minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said the wording on a fossil fuel "phase-out" was nonetheless a "strong step forward" ahead of the G20 and COP28 summits later this year.

"The most important progress we have made is clearly the fact that we agree to move away from non-car-

bon-offset fossil fuels," she told AFP.

Britain and France had proposed a new goal of ending "unabated" coal power -- which does not take steps to offset emissions -- in G7 electricity systems within this decade.

But with global energy supplies still squeezed by the war in Ukraine, that target faced pushback from other members, including bloc president Japan and the United States.

"I would obviously have liked to have been able to make a commitment to phase out coal by 2030," Pannier-Runacher said.

"This was not possible, and it is one issue on which we can still make progress in forthcoming discussions, particularly at COP28."

The Group of Seven, which also includes Germany, Italy, Canada and the EU, all target net-zero emissions by 2050 or sooner after signing the Paris Agreement to cap warming at well under 2C, and ideally 1.5C.

The ministers had been under pressure to announce ambitious steps after a major UN climate report warned last month that 1.5C increases would be seen in about a decade without "rapid and far-reaching" action. But campaigners expressed

fears ahead of the talks that Japan, supported by Germany and others, could lead backsliding on pledges such as ending new overseas fossil fuel financing.

G7 leaders said last year that the "exceptional circumstances" of Russia's war in Ukraine made gas investments "appropriate as a temporary response".

While Sunday's statement contains similar language, it also sets multiple parameters around such investments and highlights the "primary need" for "gas demand reduction".

Japan also wanted G7 recognition for its strategy of burning hydrogen and ammonia alongside fossil fuels to reduce carbon emissions -- which activists say only serves to extend the lifespan of polluting plants.

But the statement simply notes that "some countries are exploring" the potential of hydrogen fuels, adding that this should be "aligned with a 1.5C pathway". Other new pledges were hotly debated in draft statements seen by AFP, such as a goal to halve CO2 emissions from G7 vehicles by 2035. In the final statement, the countries only "note the opportunity" to do so.

OIC, UN urged to take practical steps for resolving Kashmir, Palestine issues

ISLAMABAD (INP): The leadership of various political and religious parties, expressing solidarity with the oppressed people of Kashmir and Palestine, urged the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and United Nations (UN) to take practical steps for resolving the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine issues immediately. Addressing the 'Tazeem-e-Harmain Al-Sharifain Conference' held under the leadership of International Tazeem-e-Harmain Al-Sharifain Council Secretary General and Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi the other day, they addressed the increasing number of atrocities committed by India and

Israel in Kashmir and Palestine, respectively. They expressed alarm at the growing number of such incidents and called on the Muslim Ummah to respond to these issues with unity and collective efforts.

The leaders emphasized the need for a united response to these issues in order to bring an end to the ongoing suffering of the people of Kashmir and Palestine.

They were of the view that after the restoration of Saudi-Iran relations, the Muslim Ummah hoped that all the attention of the OIC should be shifted towards the resolution of Kashmir and Palestine issues.

The restoration of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Syria and Arab countries, Qatar and Bahrain and the exchange of prisoners between the

governments of Yemen and Houthis were good news for the Muslim Ummah, they added. Appreciating the role and services on part of Saudi leadership in the patronage of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman for pilgrims, Ulema and Mashaikh said the entire Islamic world was quite satisfied with the services.

They also facilitated and announced to support Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman for the title of Quaid-e-Salam (Leader of Peace) for the year 2022-2023.

They said the political and religious parties of Pakistan believed that Saudi Arabia and other Arab Islamic countries should take an immediate step to resolve the issue of Palestine and Kashmir.

Poland, Hungary ban Ukraine grain to protect local farms

WARSAW (AFP/APP): Poland and Hungary on Saturday banned imports of grain and other food from Ukraine to protect local farmers, officials from both countries said.

Ukraine's grain exports have been transiting through the European Union to other countries since the war-torn nation's traditional Black Sea routes were blocked by Russia's invasion. But because of logistical issues, the grain had been piling up and driving down prices, which led to protests from farmers and the resignation of Poland's agriculture minister. "Today the government decided on a regulation to ban the entry, imports of grain into Poland, as well as of dozens of other kinds of food," the governing party's leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski said.

Otherwise "it would lead to a far-reaching crisis of Poland's farming sector... We have to protect Polish agriculture," he added.

Speaking at a convention of his right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party in the northern village of Lyse, Kaczynski stressed that Poland remained a staunch supporter of neighbouring Ukraine.

"We remain, without even the slightest change, friends and allies of Ukraine," he said. In a similar announcement, Hungarian Agriculture Minister Istvan Nagy in a Facebook message also said Hungary was banning the import of agricultural products from Ukraine. Both Warsaw and Budapest said that their bans will last until June 30. In Poland the ban will apply to imports of grain, sugar, meat, fruits and vegetables, milk, eggs and other food items.

A Hungarian agriculture ministry statement sent to MTI news agency said grain, oilseeds and several other agricultural products would be banned. Responding to Poland's announcement, Ukraine's ministry of

agrarian policy said on Saturday that it "regrets the decision".

"Polish farmers are facing a difficult situation, but we emphasise that Ukrainian farmers are facing the most difficult situation" given the war, it added. The ministry proposed for the two countries to come to a new agreement in the coming days that would satisfy both sides.

Polish government spokesman Piotr Muller told the PAP news agency that "we are open to other actions that could stabilise the situation." Budapest said in its statement that, during the ban period "the government expects a permanent solution and the adoption of EU measures". Hungary "is committed to representing the interests of the Hungarian farming community," it added. Last month, Poland and Hungary were among several European countries that requested help from the European Union to counter the impact of cheap Ukrainian grain.

Yemen rebels and government complete prisoner exchange

SANAA (AFP): Yemeni rebels and government forces freed scores of prisoners on Sunday on the last of a three-day exchange of nearly 900 detainees, boosting hopes of ending their protracted civil war.

Planes carrying detainees took off at the same time from the Houthis rebel-held capital of Sanaa and the government-controlled northern city of Marib, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said. "The first flight from Marib and the first flight from Sanaa have left," ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan told AFP. "Forty-eight former detainees were on board the Marib-Sanaa flight, and 42 on the Sanaa-

Marib flight." Three other flights during the day were to complete the deal reached in Switzerland last month to exchange 181 government forces for 706 rebels. Four journalists sentenced to death by the Iranian-backed Houthis are part of the exchange, said government negotiator Majed Fadail.

Rebel political chief, Mahdi al-Mashat, said the next round of talks with Saudi Arabia, which leads the military coalition against the Houthis, would start after the Eidul Fitr holiday expected on April 21, Yemen's Saba news agency reported. The last talks ended hours before 318 prisoners were transported on four flights on Friday between government-con-

trolled Aden and Sanaa, reuniting detainees with their families.

On Saturday, 357 detainees took flights between the Saudi city of Abha and Sanaa. Saudis were among the prisoners freed.

It is not known how many prisoners each side still has. The Houthis seized Sanaa in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led intervention the following year. Hundreds of thousands have died in the conflict which triggered a major humanitarian crisis.

An UN-brokered ceasefire that started in April 2022 has sharply reduced casualties. The truce expired in October, but fighting has largely remained on hold.