

**21 die in hospital fire**  
BEIJING (Agencies): Twenty-one people have been confirmed dead following a hospital fire in Beijing's Fengtai District on Tuesday, according to the district's fire and rescue department. Firefighters received a report of a fire at an inpatient department building of Beijing Changfeng Hospital at 12:57 p.m. The fire was extinguished at 1:33 p.m., with 71 patients evacuated. By 6 p.m., 21 people had been confirmed dead.

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**FM calls on PM**  
**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister, Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday discussed in detail the political situation of the country. During the meeting, the foreign minister also briefed the prime minister about the matters pertaining to the ministry of foreign affairs, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

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# Allied parties remained united: PM

Shehbaz says COAS made ‘tremendous efforts’ to secure financial pledges for IMF deal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said out of sincerity and commitment with the country, the coalition parties had shown an unprecedented unity throughout the first year of their government, becoming a matter of worry for the opposition parties.

The prime minister, addressing a meeting of the coalition parties, said in the beginning, the opposition and even the people in the coalition parties were not hopeful of the durability of the alliance. However, all of the allied parties manifested their democratic spirit and played their constructive role to maintain unity as well as for steering the country out of pervading challenges, he added.

PM Shehbaz said despite time to time differences on certain matters, the allied parties remained united to face the challenges inherited from the previous government. In the democracy, the decisions were made through consultation, not imposition, he added. Referring to the ongoing controversy regarding the court verdict on general elections in Punjab, he said nowhere in the world had ever happened that a court granted a stay on the implementation of a law even before its promulgation.

The decision of the three-member bench even prompted the bar councils to raise their voice – for sake of the rule of law, not out of love for the government – as they also believed that the decision was contrary to the norms of the justice, he added. PM Shehbaz said the coalition parties were striving wholeheartedly to take the struggle of overcoming the challenges to a logical end, despite all odds.

He told the participants that the International Monetary Fund's agreement was in the final phase as their last conditionality was to make deposits. He lauded the efforts of Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Army Chief General Asim Munir for the success of the process.

He also told the participants of his upcoming telephonic conversation with new Chinese Premier Li Qiang during the last week of April when they would discuss the matters of mutual interest. He reiterated the coalition government's resolve to overcome the challenges it had taken up for sake of the country's progress. "I again

assure you that you have elected me your prime minister and I will try my best to live up to your expectations," he concluded.

**Premier stresses ‘no politics’ on health, education projects:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday stressed that the development projects, particularly those relating to health and education, must not be politicized and be implemented in the best interest of the general public.

During his visit to the Rawalpindi Institute of Urology and Transplantation (RIUT), he said no one should be allowed to politicize the projects of any government. Shehbaz Sharif said it was time to get united for the proper implementation of the Constitution of the country.

He expressed satisfaction with the successful completion of the first phase of the hospital where patients were being provided best medical treatment in areas of dialysis, kidney ailments, and surgeries. He lauded the Punjab administration of health for effectively carrying out the operationalization of the hospital and appreciated doctors and nurses for their dedication.

He mentioned that Rs 5 billion were spent on RIUT so far and recalled that he laid the foundation stone of the hospital in 2012. He regretted that the previous government delayed the project, which otherwise could have been made operational much earlier. PM Sharif said earlier, an allegation put against him by a former chief justice of the Supreme Court halted the work on a kidney and liver transplant hospital in Lahore.

He said such discouragement of development and social work badly impacted the provision of civic facilities for the general public. He said serving the masses was a noble cause that needed a synchronized effort by all stakeholders.

The prime minister took a round of various sections of the RIUT and inquired about the health of patients. He also instructed the administration to leave no stone unturned in providing best medical facilities to the patients. Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) leaders Hanif Abbasi, Tahira Aurangzeb, and others were present.

## Marriyum refutes rumours

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Tuesday said all parties to the ruling alliance were ‘united’ and there was no truth in the false reports about its meeting which was underway.

“Speculations being made in some section of the media about the meeting of ruling parties are baseless and incorrect,” she said in a news statement. The minister regretted that the media started airing news regarding the meeting by attributing to leaders of allied parties even prior to the issuance of final communiqué.

She said decisions were being taken with the input of all the parties which were united. “Consultation is underway and the information minister would issue a joint communiqué [of the meeting],” she added.

## SC moved for disqualification of President

ISLAMABAD (INP): A plea has been filed with the Supreme Court seeking the disqualification of President Arif Alvi. The petition, moved by citizen Chaudhry Muhammad Imtiaz, sought the disqualification of President Dr Arif Alvi under Article 41.

According to the petition, President Arif Alvi is violating his oath by working on the directions of one political party. He pleaded with the court to immediately remove Alvi from the top office. Back in March this year, a similar disqualification plea was filed against Arif Alvi which was turned down by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

A two-member bench headed by Justice Ijaz-ul-Ahsan heard the petition filed by a citizen, Zahoor Mehndi, under Article 62 1(F) of the Constitution. The petitioner raised six objections to his candidature, and one of them was that at the time of the presidential election, he (Alvi) was an under-trial accused and was not eligible for the presidency. According to Mehdi, he also submitted his nomination papers to contest the election of president but his papers were rejected as he had no proposer and seconder.

The petitioner had said that the country was in crisis due to the appointment of an unqualified person as president and the political parties were at odds with each other. Subsequently, the SC dismissed the petition.

**President announces 90-day remission in sentences for prisoners on Eid:** President Dr Arif Alvi on Tuesday approved remission in sentences for prisoners on the occasion of Eid ul Fitr. The president approved the remission of 90 days in exercise of the Article 45 of the Constitution, the President House said.

The relief will be applicable to male prisoners above 65 years, who have completed their one-third sentence. The remission will also be applied to the female prisoners aged above 60 years, who have completed their one-third sentence. Likewise, the prisoners under the age of 18 years, who have completed their one-third sentence, would also be eligible for availing the relief.

However, the remission will not apply to those convicted of capital punishment, espionage, rape, anti-state activities, kidnapping, terrorism, incurring loss to national exchequer, financial crimes, and robbery.

clinging to power at any cost, even if he has to violate the constitution.

**LHC bars police from harassing Imran:** The Lahore High Court (LHC) has barred police from harassing the former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan.

As per details, the Lahore High Court announced the reserved verdict. A five-member bench headed by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi heard the Imran Khan plea against the summons notices in 140 cases and inquiries. The court clarified that according to the statement of the Law Officer the court



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

# ‘Election on May 14 impossible’, ECP tells SC

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In its response to the Supreme Court of Pakistan regarding elections in Punjab, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Tuesday said the conduct of polls on May 14 is getting impossible due to the non-provision of funds and forces for maintaining law and order.

“At least 466,000 personnel are required for security in Punjab,” the ECP said in its reply. The electoral authority added that it had written a letter to the federation for providing Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps and Rangers personnel, but did not receive a reply. The ECP added that today (April 18) was the last date to make payment for the printing of ballot papers. “Printing of electoral rolls with photographs is already delayed,” it stated.

The electoral body mentioned that it is its responsibility to conduct transparent, fair and peaceful polls. “In view of ground facts, October 8 is

the appropriate date to conduct elections,” it said and added that if there is no adherence to this date, then there is fear of anarchy in the country.

Earlier on Tuesday, top officials of the intelligence agencies briefed the Supreme Court on the current security challenges being faced by the country regarding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Geo News reported citing sources. Justice Ahsan and Justice Akhtar were briefed by the security officials, said the sources. They added that the meeting went on for more than two hours at the CJP's chamber. The apex court, in its April 4 order, had directed the government to submit a report regarding the provision of security personnel for polls in the two provinces by April 17.

Meanwhile, in a fresh development, the Ministry of Defence – responsible for allocating armed forces for the elections – Tuesday moved the Supreme Court seeking

elections across the country on the same date.

The ministry's view is in line with the federal government's stance, which has persistently opposed holding separate general elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The tenure of the National Assembly and the legislature of two other provinces – Sindh and Balochistan – will end later this year and the federal government wants the polls to take place then, not in May, as directed by the Supreme Court on April 4.

“...the instant application may be granted, the order dated 04-04-2023 passed in C.P. No. 5/2023 may kindly be recalled with the directions that the general elections to the National and all Provincial Assemblies be held together, upon completion of the term of the National and the other two Provincial Assemblies i.e. of Sindh and Balochistan,” the ministry's plea stated.

# Massive landslide near Torkham border buries trucks, kills 3 people

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: As many as three drivers so far were killed and eight others injured when a massive landslide buried more than 20 of Afghanistan bound truck along with its crew members here at Pak-Afghan sharing border, Torkham in the wee hours of Tuesday.

Rescue 1122, Khyber official said that so far they shifted two bodies and eight wounded to nearest health center while rescuers strived hard to retrieve a body that was visible under the debris. In the absence of heavy machinery, the relief efforts would take days as hundreds of tons of rubble slipped down on the trucks, he added and said continuous landslides on the site had affected rescue activities. Deputy Commissioner, Khyber Abdu Nasir while confirming the incident said that a long queue of export loaded vehicles was present on the export route of Torkham terminal when a huge avalanche of mud fell on it. He feared human loss in the event however he said that the actual situation would be cleared after completion of rescue works.

An injured driver Ajar Ullah said that he was present on the driving seat of his truck when, with a big explosion an avalanche of mud fell down on his truck along with dozens of others buried under it.

According to eyewitness almost at 02:00 am, following a heavy downpour, a landslide occurred at the export route and fire erupted that engulfed few vehicles. Soon after the incident, Rescue 1122, Pak army rescuers, National Logistic Cell (NLC) officials, volunteers of Al-Khedmat Foundation and locals rushed to the site and initiated a rescue operation.

Rescue workers used small shovels and light machinery to dig out the wounded and the bodies. Besides human loss, million dollars-worth of merchandise and more than 20 trucks destroyed in the mishap, rescuers said.



Because of the incident, trade was suspended at Pak-Afghan trade via Torkham crossing, official said. A few rescue machineries were sent by the Afghan government from across the border but it was insufficient to provide timely relief, rescuers said. On the other hand, an emergency was announced in the District Headquarter Hospital, Landi Kotal and all health staff was asked to ensure their presence on their duties. Locals blamed that due to construction work on a custom terminal being progressed in Torkham, contractor NLC dynamited the nearby mountain to widen export route that caused land sliding.

Moreover, Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North conducting rescue operations at Torkham along with Rescue 1122 and other welfare organization. The area has been affected by a landslide, and the Army rescue teams have been working tirelessly to help those affected by the disaster, on Tuesday. According to details, Urban search and rescue teams from the Army have been using specialized equipment to locate and rescue those who have been buried in the debris. So far, the rescue teams have been able to recover the bodies of two individuals

who were buried in the landslide. They have also been able to rescue 12 people alive, whose condition is said to be stable. The rescue operation will continue until the last person buried in the debris is found.

Lieutenant General Hassan Azhar Hayat, Corps Commander Peshawar, has also visited the accident site to oversee the rescue operation. The joint efforts of the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps North, Rescue 1122 and civil administration are commendable, and their selfless service in the rescue operation is appreciated by all.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday expressed sorrow and grief over the loss of lives and property in a land-sliding incident near Torkham area of District Khyber. The prime minister prayed to Allah Almighty for the elevation of ranks of those killed in the incident. He also expressed condolence with their families.

He also prayed for the early recovery of those injured in the incident. PM Shehbaz directed the relevant authorities to provide all possible health-care facilities to the injured. He also directed to speed up the rescue work and to restore the road as soon as possible.

# Imran sees Shehbaz's disqualification like Gilani

LAHORE (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan Tuesday said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will also be disqualified like former premier Yousuf Raza Gilani for contempt of court.

Khan said this while talking to former chief minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi in a meeting held here at his residence in Zaman Park, Lahore. In the meeting, detailed consultation on the

tickets for the election in Punjab and the political situation of the country was discussed. Imran Khan also inquired about the well-being of Moonis Elahi.

Imran Khan said to Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi that by not accepting the decision of the Supreme Court, the rulers are creating a wrong tradition in the country. Imran Khan said that earlier Yousuf Raza Gilani would have suffered disqualification for contempt of

court, now, Shehbaz Sharif will face the same too. Imran Khan said that his party is going to file an application in the Supreme Court regarding Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections through Khawaja Tariq Rahim and Fawad Khawaja.

After the meeting, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi told the media that there has been a detailed consultation on the candidates in Punjab and Imran Khan himself will announce the tickets. He said every unconstitutional tactic is being used to stop the election from incompetent rulers who will have to answer it. Elahi said that Shahbaz Sharif wants to

clinging to power at any cost, even if he has to violate the constitution.

**LHC bars police from harassing Imran:** The Lahore High Court (LHC) has barred police from harassing the former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan.

As per details, the Lahore High Court announced the reserved verdict. A five-member bench headed by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi heard the Imran Khan plea against the summons notices in 140 cases and inquiries. The court clarified that according to the statement of the Law Officer the court

cannot bar police from legal action but the court said that the complainant should not be harassed.

The PTI chairman Imran Khan told the court that the nation know him for fifty years, the party's only demand is an election and the PTI does not want any confrontation and bloodshed. He informed the court that when he left his Zaman Park Lahore residence, the police attacked his home. PTI have no other choice but to approach the court, Imran Khan added.

**IHC extends Khan's interim bail in eight cases:** Islamabad High Court (IHC) has extended the bail of former

prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan in eight cases till May 3. As per details, the Chief Justice Islamabad High Court Amir Farooq and Justice Hassan Aurangzeb heard the case and accepted PTI chief Imran Khan's exemption plea in all eight cases.

The court ordered if the PTI chief did not appear before the court on the next hearing then the bail will be considered rejected. Imran Khan's counsel told the court that he is appearing before Lahore High Court today and he could not appear before IHC because of security reasons.





## Eid prayer arrangements begins at Polo Ground

KARACHI (PPI): The largest Eid-ul-Fitr prayer gathering in the city administered by KMC will be held at Gulshan Jinnah (Polo Ground) for which arrangements have been started. According to a statement of Ali Hassan Sajid, spokesperson of KM on Tuesday, a large-scale arrangements have been made for Eid-ul-Fitr prayer this year. It is expected that Sindh Governor, Administrator of Karachi, diplomats of various Islamic countries, current and former federal and provincial ministers, members of National and Provincial Assembly, Municipal Commissioner Karachi, Provincial Secretaries, leaders of various political and social organizations and dignitaries of the city besides a large number of people will offer Eid prayers at the Polo Ground.

On this occasion, flags of Islamic countries will be hoisted in the Eid Gah, ablutions will be arranged for the citizens offering prayer, perfumes will be sprayed and special arrangements will be made for cleanliness and security.

The coloring of the premises of the Eid Gah located in the Polo Ground has been started, while the trees and greenery around the premises are being trimmed, a gate decorated with flowers to welcome the citizens in front of the main entrance on the day of Eid will also be built. The gathering of Eid-ul-Fitr prayers has been organized since 1958 at the polo ground.

## 'Elephant is being given continuous medical care'

KARACHI (PPI): Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman said Tuesday that the Karachi Zoo elephant Noor Jahan is being given continuous medical care with the consultation and guidance of a 9-member committee of experts formed for the treatment and well-being of the zoo elephant. The zoo staff and experts using the prescribed medicines and doing all this as per instructions on the video link from international organization Four Paws.

He said that the local team of experts in Karachi Zoo is in full contact with Four Paws and constant information is being exchanged regarding the health of the elephant Noor Jahan. A 9-member committee has been constituted comprising of veterinary experts from Austria and Germany who are particularly qualified to treat elephants, Four Paws has been working for the welfare and care of the animals and this organization provides guidance.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Mah Rukh with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Zahoor Ul Islam citizen number 1610149833357 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.

1. Mah Rukh (Daughter)  
2. Naseem Akhtar (Spouse)  
3. Ibtisam Yousaf (Son)  
4. Mah Noor (Daughter)

On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.

PID (I) 6427/22  
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA RING ROAD-DSFU

# CM approves Rs1.6bn Sindh Toll Plaza Surveillance project

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presiding over a meeting at Chief Minister House approved a Rs1.6 billion Sindh Toll Plaza Surveillance Project to enhance security at entry points to Sindh through the installation of CCTV Cameras on 40 Toll-Plazas.

The meeting was attended by IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon, Home Secretary Saeed Mangnijo, PSCM Fayaz Jatoi, Adl IG (Investigation) Munir Shaikh, Secretary Finance Sajid Jamal Abro, and other concerned officers.

Sindh Chief Minister said that there was a dire need to enhance security at the entry points to the province. He added that the province has 40 Toll Plazas where high-definition CCTV cameras should be installed to ensure proper monitoring. IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon told the CM that his department has prepared a Rs1.56 billion Sindh Toll Plaza Surveillance Project.

He said that the CCTV Cameras would have Full-frame (FR) and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) capabilities with centralized monitoring and alert system for blacklisted vehicles and criminals. The CM after discussion approved the scheme and directed the IG police to launch the project at the earliest.

The meeting also discussed granting Investigation Allowance to Investigators.

The CM said that the plan was to incentivize the investigators so that they make proper investigations of the cases and win them in the court of law.

"I want to give an investigation allowance to the investigators, he said. At this, Home Secretary, Saeed Mangnijo said that the scheme was prepared and sent to the Finance department.

The chief minister directed the Secretary of Finance to dispose of the scheme and send him for approval.

IG Police said that with the approval of the chief minister, an Rs2.7 billion scheme

for the purchase of sophisticated field weapons and surveillance equipment was prepared and sent to the finance department through the Home department.

At this, the CM said that he has approved the scheme and wanted the police to eradicate the menace of dacoits in the Katcha area. This dacoit factor in the katcha area of the Sukkur and Larkana divisions has become a standing threat to the peace in the province and they operate within the katcha areas of three provinces- Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan.

"I want the police to purchase the necessary equipment and launch a joint operation with the police of Punjab and Balochistan to bring an end to the out-laws once and for all," he said. Another matter that came under discussion in the meeting was the expansion of the Rapid Response Force (RRF) and the establishment of the Crowd Management Unit. IG Police told the chief minister that work on the expansion of RRF and the establishment of the Crowd Management Unit was in progress.

He added that some posts of the police officers were required to be redesignated which have been sent to the finance department for approval.

The chief minister directed the finance department to speed up the redesignation of the posts so that necessary transfers/postings for the expansion of RRF and operationalization of the Crowd Management Unit could be made.

The IG police told the chief minister that 8000 residential quarters of Sindh police have been damaged by the recent heavy rains and floods. He also added that various training barracks have also been affected badly.

The chief minister approved Rs 4 billion for repairing and renovating the residential quarters and Rs 2 billion for repairing training barracks.

# Administrator Karachi reviews uplift work of roads

KARACHI (PPI): Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saif-ur-Rehman has said that in order to provide convenience to citizens using Sharah-e-Pakistan for travel in the city, patchworking and repairing of road has been started on immediate basis on the portion of road to and from Ayesha Manzil to Water Pump.

Every possible effort is being made to complete the road construction work as soon as possible without affecting the traffic on the Highway. The work of filling the potholes on other parts of Sharah-e-Pakistan and on other roads will be done also, he said this while reviewing the work of repairing and patchworking of roads coming and going from Water Pump to Ayesha Manzil.

Administrator Karachi Dr. Syed Saifur Rahman said that the KMC is carrying out road improvement and repair work with its own resources, in which dumpers and loaders are being used with manpower and the patchworking and carpeting process is taking place without any disruption to the flow of traffic in the surrounding area, after Eid-ul-Fitr, the maintenance and repair work of other roads and highways of the city will also be carried out on.

Administrator Karachi directed Chief Engineer District Central and Superintendent Engineer to speed up the work of patchworking and repairing the road on the Pakistan Highway by utilizing all available resources. Provision of municipal facilities is the

# Alkhidmat Foundation organizes Grand Iftar, Eid distribution ceremony

LAHORE (PPI): Alkhidmat Foundation Tuesday organized a Grand Iftar and Eid gift distribution ceremony for 2,000 orphans, widows, and elderly people living in old age homes, in collaboration with UMT. The event was aimed at raising awareness about the challenges faced by these vulnerable groups and sharing the joys of Ramadan and Eid with them. Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Ibrahim Hasan Murad addressed the ceremony.

Addressing the ceremony, Minister of Local Government Punjab, Ibrahim Hasan Murad said that orphans and homeless elderly are the attention-seeking section of our society. He said we need to take steps individually and collectively for this noble cause and play a role in development. The minister said that he was delighted to learn about amazing work of

Alkhdimat Foundation for humanity especially for orphan children. The minister emphasized the need for collective efforts to support these deserving sections of society.

Alkhdimat Foundation Pakistan Secretary General Syed Waqas Jafri shared how the Foundation is sponsoring over 22,000 orphans and organizing shopping and gift cere-

monies for them during Ramadan and Eid. Vice-President AKFP, Dr Mushtaq Mangat highlighted the importance of sharing the joy of Eid with orphans and helpless elderly people, which is a right that they deserve.

The orphans had a day filled with joy and entertainment as special activities were arranged for them.



LAHORE: An outer view of entrance gate of Masjid Wazir Khan at walled city.

# LG minister chairs 19th SSWMB board meeting

KARACHI (PPI): The Minister of Local Government of Sindh and Chairman of Sindh Solid Waste Management Board, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, chaired the 19th board meeting of SSWMB to day, in which it was decided to initiate a fresh procurement process for the Primary and Secondary Solid Waste Collection Management System for District South, and permission to start the procurement process for District East.

Moreover, approval was given for the assessment and analysis of the procurement of a new operational model for the Primary and Secondary Solid Waste Collection Management System of District Benazirabad and

Mirpurkhas.

On this occasion, the Minister of Local Govt. Nasir Hussain Shah said that apart from these cities, other big cities of Sindh such as Sanghar, Khairpur, Dadu, Sehven, and district headquarters should also be included so that solid waste management system can be provided for these cities as well, and the sanitation situation can be improved. Also, the Additional Chief Secretary Syed Najam Shah, Managing Director SSWMB Syed Imtiaz Ali Shah, Additional Commissioner I Syed Attaullah, Additional Secretary Finance Moazzam Ali Shah, Secretary Solid Waste Board Seemuddin, Executive Director

Operation Tariq Nizamani, Executive Director Finance Dadlo Zahrani, Private Member Mustafa Mumtaz, Chief Internal Auditor Finance Department Syed Sameer, and other participants were present in the meeting.

Furthermore, the board approved the initiation of a fresh Middle-End Collection procurement process in District South, East, Malir, and West including the Operation and Maintenance of Landfill Sites of Jam Chakro and Gond Pass. In the additional agenda in the meeting, the board approved hiring an external audit firm. Also, it was directed to take immediate steps to provide land for study at the landfill site to the con-

cerned company for the project Waste to Energy. Apart from this, the board directed the HR committee to submit recommendations soon to increase the salaries of contractual employees. In compliance with the last board meeting approval, 20 non-Muslim employees were sent on pilgrimage.

The company has started phased operations in Hyderabad and Sukkur after the approval in the last Board meeting. Also, the private front-end collection companies will recruit staff for sanitation work as per the contract, so the sanitary workers and supervisors of DMCs will be sent back to their respective departments. So that staff shortage can be fulfilled in DMCs.

# Ayaz sadiq holds farewell meeting for Ali Hosseini

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, held a farewell meeting for the outgoing Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan, Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini.

During the meeting, the minister expressed his gratitude to Ambassador Hosseini for his dedicated service to strengthening the economic ties between Pakistan and Iran, said a press release issued here. He noted that under the Ambassador's leadership, the bilateral trade between the two countries had increased significantly, and several joint projects had been initiated in various sectors, including energy, agriculture, and

infrastructure.

The minister also praised the Ambassador for his proactive and focused role in facilitating the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, which is a significant milestone in the economic cooperation between the two countries. "Pakistan values reciprocal and congenial relations with its very important neighbouring country - Iran. Pakistan is looking forward to exploring the true potential of bilateral cooperation with Iran," The Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq

added. Ambassador Hosseini expressed his appreciation for the warm hospitality and support he had received during his tenure in Pakistan. He reiterated Iran's commitment to further enhancing the economic relations between the two countries and expressed confidence that his successor would continue the positive momentum. "Despite facing pressure, we have strong resolve in all areas," said Ambassador Hosseini. He apprised the minister that for the first time in the history of Pak-Iran eco-

nom relations, the volume of bilateral trade exceeded \$2 billion.

The Ambassador further appreciated the efforts of the Ministry of Economic Affairs for successfully conducting the 21st Session of Pakistan-Iran Joint Economic Commission (JEC). He highlighted that the bilateral negotiations between Pakistan and Iran, on transportation, customs and commerce, are reaching to conclusion in near future. Iran is inaugurating numerous projects including electricity transmission project.

### DHO/MMM TEACHING HOSPITAL DIKHAN

#### Medical Teaching Institution (MTI)

#### "TENDER NOTICE"

#### INVITATION OF BIDS

(Available at <http://www.kpra.org.pk/>)

Sealed Bids are invited from Companies / Authorized Distributors/Wholesaler for the following items for MTI Dera-Ismael Khan. Tender should reach to the office of the undersigned on 11-05-2023 or before Tender Opening Dates Mentioned Against Each Item at 12:00 Hours which will be opened on the same day at 12:30 Hours in presence of bidders or their representatives. The Bid security shall be submitted from the account of the firm/bidder/contractor who submits the bid in favor of Hospital Director, MTI DHQ DIKHAN.

Tender no.	Description	Bidding Procedure	Quantity	Tender Cost for Each Item	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening of Bids	Date & Time of Opening of Financial Bids
1.	Provision of supply of IT equipment						
2.	Provision of supply and installation of Reverse Osmosis Drinking System with UF & UV (Capacity 1000/liters HR)	Single Stage one envelope	As per tender documents	Rs.1000/-	May11,2023 At 12:00 PM	May11,2023 At 12:30 PM	May11,2023 At 12:30 PM
3.	Provision of supply of Crockery Items						
4.	Provision of conversion of Suzuki Ravi Bolan to multi tipper Garbage with Dumper						
5.	Provision of conversion of non						
6.	Provision of Supply of buses Tyres						

#### TERMS AND CONDITION:

Only typed tender on original prescribed form letter pad, sealed & signed should be submitted, the quoted Price must be printed and hand-written quoted price is not acceptable. The tenders must be according to hospital specifications; double rates for one item will not be accepted. Separate bid should be submitted for each item mentioned in the list. No additional documents will be accepted after tender opening. The tender must be according to Bid Solicitation Documents (BSDs) and Hospital specifications. The Income Tax, stamp duty, Professional Tax and KPRA tax or any other Government tax will be charged as per rules. A detailed Bid Solicitation Documents (BSDs) can be obtained from Procurement Cell DHQ MTI DIKHAN against Rs: 1000/- for each item. The bidders are required to submit bid security @ 2% of Total Bid Value in the name of Hospital Director MTI DIKHAN. The bid security in the shape of Pay order (PO) and CDR will be accepted Only. The competent authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids under Rule 47 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KPRA) Procurement Rules 2014 after giving valid reason(s).

Imran Khalig  
Procurement Manager

0303-6463466  
Email: [imrankhaligpm@gmcdikhan.edu.pk](mailto:imrankhaligpm@gmcdikhan.edu.pk)

INF(P)948/23



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**ATTENTION  
ATM CUSTOMERS**

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ATMs will be available 24/7  
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# CJ PHC pays pre-Eid visit to Peshawar Prison

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Musarrat Hilali visited Central Prison in Peshawar along with Ashfaq Taj, the District and Sessions Judge of Peshawar, on Tuesday.

According to details, Senior civil judge Admin and one Judicial Magistrate also were present on the occasion. The visit was made on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr and the purpose was to assess the living conditions of the jail inmates, including juvenile offenders and female accused.

During the visit, the Chief Justice inspected the video link cabins where under trial prisoners were attending hearings in various criminal courts of the district. She also visited the cells of terrorists/Militants, juveniles, and females, and checked the quality of food in the kitchen.

Superintendent Jail briefed the Chief Justice on



the situation and problems of the inmates, and Eid gifts were distributed among 62 juvenile offenders, 27 female accused, and 6 kids. The Chief Justice also listened to the problems of the inmates and issued directions for their redressal.

On the Chief Justice's directions, 21 accused who were incarcerated in petty nature cases were released by District and Sessions Judge. the Senior Civil Judge (Admin) Peshawar and Judicial Magistrate Daulat Khan according to

their respective jurisdictions, so that they could celebrate Eid with their loved ones.

During the Chief Justice's last visit, the juveniles were found to be in a miserable condition, so they were provided with new clothes and soaps to improve their hygiene. Additionally, 26 foreigners, including 3 juveniles, were deported on the Chief Justice's directions.

The Chief Justice directed the Superintendent Jail to make the jail an infir-

mary for new offenders by educating them and imparting religious and social knowledge.

She was of the view that the jail inmates are in jail as courts had sent them to jail. As such it is our duty to take proper care of them. She also suggested installing the latest CCTV cameras in juvenile barracks to maintain peace and tranquility in the jail and to safeguard the minors from abuse and torture. The District and Sessions Judge Peshawar recommended segregating of rival groups by adopting the "silver bullet policy" as is done in developed countries.

The Chief Justice emphasized that her main focus would be on courts and jails, and even though the jails were overcrowded, the Superintendent Jail must show exemplary conduct towards the inmates. She also announced that she would regularly make surprise visits to jails in the future for the betterment of the accused.



PESHAWAR: Special Assistant on Social Welfare Salma Begum meeting with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan.

## UoP teachers end 43-day strike for demands

PESHAWAR (INP): The teachers' union at Peshawar University declared Tuesday an end to the 43-day strike after the authorities assured that their demands would be met.

During a meeting with the Governor KP, Higher Education and other relevant officials, the President of the Peshawar University Teachers Association, Dr Uzair, presented demands. After receiving assurance from the governor, chief secretary, and higher education department officials that their demands would be met, the association announced the end of the strike.

The university administration has promised to call a meeting of the syndicate to address the teachers' concerns and conduct a judicial inquiry into the murder of the security supervisor.

The administration also assured the teachers that their problems would be resolved in the meeting of the syndicate and the senate. In addition, an inquiry will be made against the vice-chancellor, and action will be taken after the investigation.

It should be noted that academic activities and administrative affairs were suspended at Peshawar University for over a month due to the teachers' strike, which was initiated following the killing of the security supervisor by teachers and other employees.

## FCAA hails abolishing of regulatory duty

PESHAWAR (APP): President Frontier Custom Agents Association (FCAA), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi has welcomed the decision taken by the government of abolishing 100 percent duty on the import of used cars and some other items.

In a press statement issued on Tuesday, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said the decision would provide a big relief to price hike-stricken consumers and businessmen of the country.

The federal government, he added, had taken the decision in November 2022 of enforcing 100 percent duty to discourage the import of used cars and to benefit local manufacturers of cars, but the decision did not yield fruitful results.

President FCAA said according to estimates the decision regarding abolishing 100 percent regulatory duty would bring a reduction in prices of cars from Rs. one million to 20 million.

Zia Sarhadi who also holds the designation of Director Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) said the decision of imposing 100% regulatory duty only generated Rs. 400 million dollars in revenue.

# Excise raids Rehab Center without search warrant

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Justice Syed Arshad Ali of Peshawar High Court (PHC) granted bail to owner of Drug-addict Rehabilitation Center arrested by Excise during raid without search warrant, on Tuesday.

According to prosecution, Excise department has recovered Ice-drug and heroin during raid on Rehabilitation Center Jamal Gahri area Hari

Chand while owner Arif was booked under the law.

The counsel Irfan You-safzai Advocate argued that Excise Department Mardan has raided the Drug-addict Rehabilitation Center against the law while failed to produce search warrant in this regard.

He argued that Excise has also shown recovery of Kalashnikov and pistol but didn't record statement from independent witness or dozens of patients avail-

able in the rehab center.

The counsel further argued that if Excise personnel are reaching to the spot then they must have complaint in this regard but it doesn't appear on the file nor approached local elders to make them witness on the alleged recovery.

PHC has ordered release of Arif on bail after conclusion of arguments from both parties.

## Muqam condoles on demise of Mufti Shakoor

PESHAWAR (APP): Adviser to Prime Minister Engr Amir Muqam here on Tuesday visited the residence of JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman to offer his heartfelt condolences on the sudden death of Minister for Religious Affairs, Mufti Abdul Shakoor.

The Adviser to Prime Minister expressed his deep grief and sympathy over the loss of such a prominent leader and offered Fateha for the departed soul, said a press release issued here.

Engr Amir Muqam paid tribute to Mufti Abdul Shakoor's services in religious, political and social spheres, calling him a sincere political leader. He said Mufti Abdul Shakoor's services in the fields of religion and politics would be remembered for a long.

Muqam prayed Allah Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to members of the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with patience.

## Cloudy weather with scattered rain predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Tuesday predicted that mainly partly cloudy to cloudy weather is expected over most districts of the province.

However, it said that widespread thunderstorm-rain and wind with isolated heavy falls/hailstorm is likely to occur over Chitral, Lower & Upper Dir, Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torghar, Mansehra and Abbottabad districts.

Scattered thunderstorm-rain and wind with isolated hailstorm is likely to occur over Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Hangu, Kurram, Karak and Kohat districts. During the last 24 hours, rain-thunderstorms with gusty winds occurred over most districts of the province.

Rain recorded (in mm): Kalam 51, Dir 36, Chitral 27, Pattan 23, Malam Jabba 18, Balakot 16, Parachinar, Timergara & Drosh (each) 15, Mirkhani, Kakul & D.I.Khan (each) 12, Saidu Sharif & Takht Bhai (each) 10, Risalpur 08, Peshawar (Airport 07 & City 06), Bunner & Bajaur (each) 07, Ghalani 06, Bannu 05, Kohat Air Base, Mamad Gut & Landikotal (each) 04 and Cherat 01.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of KP were Peshawar City 32/19, Chitral 24/11, Timergara 31/15, Dir 26/10, Mirkhani 23/07, Kalam 18/02, Drosh 22/11, Saidu Sharif 31/15, Pattan 28/15, Malam Jabba 17/06, Takht Bhai 33/17, Kakul 31/13, Balakot 32/13, Parachinar 25/08, Bannu 34/18, Cherat 27/14, D.I. Khan 35/20.

The highest temperature recorded in the province was 35°C in DI Khan.

# Minister announces austerity steps in TEVTA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries and Commerce Mohammad Adnan Jalil on Tuesday while stressing on adoption of austerity measures, directed for reducing the monthly unnecessary expenditures in Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) that would save around Rs 42 lacs per month.

In view of the mentioned austerity measures, decided by the caretaker provincial minister, the initiative will benefit the government treasury to about Rs50 million per annum saving.

This decision was taken at a high-level meeting regarding reform initiatives and rationalization in TEVTA, under the chairmanship of caretaker provincial minister for Technical Education Industry and Commerce Muhammad Adnan Jalil, wherein all senior officers of the department participated.

During the meeting, it was decided that for the preparation of skilled manpower in the province, the technical education sector will be restructured according to the requirements of the present day global market demands.

It was also decided that TEVTA administrative structure will also be restructured as per the requirements, and few sectors in organogram will be merged for better service delivery and strengthening of training colleges, institutions by provision of additional staff. In this regard, final approval will be taken in the upcoming board meeting of TEVTA accordingly.

The caretaker provincial minister took an exemplary initiative by voluntarily

reducing his 10 percent POL authorized expenses as chairman of TEVTA Board and also other officers of the institution decided to follow this decision accordingly.

It is worth mentioning that the same reduction will be an additional cut on authorized POL than the already 35% cut made by the finance department on oil expenditures.

This step will save Rs. 50,000 per month to the public exchequer, said the minister. On the instructions of the provincial minister, Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) officers decided to reduce their traveling allowance expenses by 10%, which will save 50,000 per month.

Similarly, after the expiry of the period of the emergent staff hired for the current partial period, it was decided to take these services from the existing permanent staff, which will save 21 lac rupees per month in TEVTA expenses, said the official sources of TEVTA

Moreover, the provincial minister also issued orders to transfer TEVTAs central office from a rented building to department's owned building at Hayatabad, Peshawar, which will save 1.3 lac and 55 thousand rupees on a monthly basis.

During the meeting, it was decided that through the rationalization and restructuring of TEVTA, the staff in its head office will be kept as per the requirement and the additional staff services will be transferred to the training institutes of the authority, which will not only improve the training performance of these educational institutes but rather, this initiative will save about 2 lac and 85 thousand rupees per month in finan-

cial expenses.

Furthermore, the process of hiring people from the market for temporary teaching purposes in technical education institutions will no longer be adopted and these services will be taken from the permanent staff of the colleges as more staff will be provided to the colleges in rationalization. Rs.3 lac and 58 thousand rupees per month will be saved by this initiative taken by the minister.

It was further decided in the meeting that the powers of Class IV employees recruitment will be devolved from TEVTA to the heads of technical educational institutions where-in, necessary legislation will also be made accordingly, the minister told.

Meanwhile, the minister issued instructions to authority's high ups for repairing the dysfunctional grounded vehicles in the central office of the authority and other educational institutions across the province so as to make them functional, which will save millions of rupees instead of purchase of new vehicles.

Addressing the meeting, the caretaker minister said that the agenda of bringing reforms in TEVTA in accordance with the needs of the market because in the context of global economic conditions, the preparation of a manpower force equipped with technical training capabilities was the only way to reduce unemployment in our province and it can be an important tool for the elimination of poverty, Mr. Jalil expressed.

He further said that TEVTA's training institutes were being strengthened to prepare manpower according to the demand of the international market.

## AKF distributes Ramadan Food Packages

PESHAWAR (APP): Al-Khidmat Foundation (AKF) with the assistance of Southern Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL) Ramadan food packages among 350 widows. The food packages are consist of flour, ghee, pulses, rice, tea leaf and other essential food items. The food packages were distributed during a ceremony held here on Tuesday.

Addressing the ceremony, president AKF Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Khalid Waqas Chamkani said that the foundation with the assistance of its donors arranged food packages for poor and deserving people during Ramadan to include them in the happiness of the holy month.

He said that the foundation distributes Ramadan Food Package each year, for which the people of the provincial metropolis are paying tributes to it. He pledged that the foundation will continue the process in future too.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries and Commerce Mohammad Adnan Jalil presiding over a meeting.



PESHAWAR: Traffic police warden removing wrongly parked vehicle with help of fork lifter at Cantt Bazaar.

# Drug rise in Peshawar educational institutions

Najibullah Khan

PESHAWAR: The growing trend of drugs addiction among students in educational institutions has become a serious issue for the Heads of educational institutions and for the concerns authorities. The use of drugs destroying the lives of students and it badly impacts their studies and health, and embarrassment for their parents in society.

Apart from hundreds of male students, now there are scores of female students, who have become addicted to ice, heroin, hashish and various other drugs in Peshawar educational institutions. Some of the students are also using pills and injections, which are provided by other male students.

The number of addicted students seen in hostels in

Peshawar is alarmingly high. Parents send their children to educational institutions to get a good education but due to mismanagement in educational institutions, they become addicted to drugs and forget the basic purpose of education. They not just wasted their money but also their health and after that, they are involved in illegal or criminal activities to make money.

A female student Nida from the Frontier girls college says she became addicted to drugs when she was 'advised' by her friends to start the use of drugs which may help her in her studies. She says when she started using drugs, it was a sedating exercise, but gradually the effect of drugs became lesser and lesser. Initially, her family remained unaware

about it and then she starting sniff heroin through her nose, as advised by drug providers. It proved harmful to her health as pimples appeared on her face, her body developed weakness and eventually her parents came to know about this. The parents were extremely disturbed and then they took her to rehabilitation centre where her treatment is still continuing, but somehow I feel much better after treatment.

The government and the educational institutions need to introduce a special policy to the drugs addictions also to create awareness among the youth and other people about the harms of ice and other drugs said her parents. However, the main task is still cutting the supply route to educational institutions.





## In brief

### Murder charges against SHO Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: District and Session (D&SJ) Nowshera Muhammad Asif ordered to frame murder charges against Station House Officer (SHO) Risalpur Ayub Khan, Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Baser Khan and constable namely Hazart Ali, on Tuesday. The counsel for petitioner Mian Arshad Jan Advocate argued that police has raided the residence without search warrant and lady policemen in a woman was killed due to heart attack after serve torture by SHO Risalpur Ayub Khan. He argued that petitioner has approached District Police Officer against illegal action of policemen but to no veil then he knocked door of court for justice. D&SJ Muhammad Asif ordered District Police Officer (DPO) Nowshera to frame charges against SHO Ayub Khan, ASI Baser Khan and Constable Hazart of murder during illegal raid while also directed to investigate the matter.

### CS inspects rescue operation F.P. Report

TORKHAM: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry on Tuesday visited the landslide hit site at Torkham and directed the relief and rescue organizations to expedite the operation. The Chief Secretary was informed that heavy machinery was brought from Peshawar and Nowshera districts to clear the landslide and rocks. The Chief Secretary also visited Landi Kotal tehsil hospital and inquired after the health of the injured. He directed the hospital administration to provide best medical facilities to the injured. Commissioner Peshawar and Deputy Commissioner Khyber accompanied with the Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### Larkana woman hold protest

LARKANA (PPI): A poor Naib Qasid widow, Afroz Begum, widow of Ghulam Hussain Manghar, resident of Ayob Colony, held a protest demonstration at Jinnah Bagh here on Tuesday against the high-handedness of a money-lender woman demanding justice. She told newsmen that she is posted to work at Government Girls School, Gajanpur. She said that she obtained Rs200,000 from Bashiran wife of retired policeman Muhammad Nawaz Soomro on interest to solemnise marriage of my daughter and have so far refunded Rs700,000 but she is still being blackmailed on the basis of one old cheque by the same money-lender woman through her husband and sons Aamir and Saleem Soomro. She further alleged that on 12th March the same woman lodged a fake and fabricated FIR against me at Market police station and police arrested and shifted me to Sukkur jail. She said that she is on bail now and is regularly attending court hearings. She said even then she is being threatened for life and of dire consequences by these money lenders which is forbidden under the law. She appealed to Sindh High Court Chief Justice to take notice of the issue and do justice with her after investigating the matter and provide protection to her from the habitual money-lenders. It must be mentioned here that the menace of money-lending has increased to an unprecedented alarming level which needs to be curbed with iron hands of law in Sindh or else innocent people will lose their lives and all other valuables at the hands of money-lender criminals.

# Traders to resist shifting of fruits, vegetable market

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Timergara fruits' mandi traders on Tuesday threatened to stage protest rallies against the district administration if the mandi was forcibly shifted to somewhere else in the city. An emergency meeting of the fruits and vegetable dealers association was held with their president Habib Khan in the chair.

The association vice president Fazal Razaq, general secretary Muhammad Ibrahim and others complained that the local administration wanted to shift the fruits and vegetable market from the city to the Khungi area that is situated some 10 kilometers away from Timergara.

The traders' representatives said that they had been told by the TMA officials to vacate the market. They said the decision had been made without their consent while some of their unselected colleagues had been taken into confidence before making the decision. The traders' representatives said that they were ready to provide the administration an alternate spot at Mian Banda but would never let the TMA shift the market to the Khungi area. They said that it was comfortable for the traders to reach the fruits and vegetables' market. The meeting announced that the traders' related to fruits and vegetables marketing would strongly resist the possible shifting of the market from the city to somewhere else and the

administration would be responsible if anything went wrong.

**GHS Balambat marches for Pakistan's stability:** Government High School, Balambat, students and their staff took out a rally regarding the stability of Pakistan and held an event.

In this regard, Principal Abdul Saleem Khan, Dr. Riaz-ul-Haq, Fazlur Rehman and others addressed the event held at Government high school Balambat, and said that the anti-national elements against Pakistan and Pakistan Army on social media they are spreading propaganda and misleading the youth, but these conspiracies will be foiled and the students will stand by the Pakistan Army for the stability of the country.

And beware of the negative propaganda against the Pakistan Army and do not be fooled by anti-national elements. He said that Pakistan is a nuclear power and the enemy cannot see Pakistan with the naked eye. They said we proud of Pakistan Army. They expressed their determination to support Pakistan Army for the stability and development of the country. They said that ice and other drugs have destroyed the young generation.

**Traffic police directed to avoid challan of tourist:** During Eid, no traffic challan will be given to the tourists going to Lower Dir. 158 traffic officials will be on duty during Eid to guide the traffic and guide the tourists. It is said that to keep the traffic

flowing during Eid-ul-Fitr, to guide and serve the tourists traveling towards Lower Dir, District Police Officer Tariq Iqbal has issued a regular traffic plan, according to which 158 traffic officers will be on duty during the days of Eid.

DSP Headquarters Lower Dir Fakhr Alam Khan says that all the ticketing officers have been strictly instructed that no traffic challan will be given to the tourists during Eid, but they should show good manners and good behavior with them so that they come here with good memories. He has also requested the tourists to visit the tourist spots of Lower Dir and Upper Dir without fear and enjoy the beautiful natural scenery here.

DSP said that the tourists should respect the traffic rules while traveling. And avoid speeding, he said that if the tourists face any problems during their journey, they should immediately contact the control room of the Lower Dir police on telephone number 09459250048 or traffic in-charge Chakdara on contact number 03453970443 or traffic in-charge Timergara on contact number 03453490896. Get timely police services, he said that the Lower Dir police are trying to promote tourism and all possible measures will be taken to protect the property and life of tourists and in this regard police vehicles will be on the main highway of Lower Dir during Eid. Special patrolling will be done.



QUETTA: People selecting and purchasing shoes from a shop ahead of Eid.

## YCDO signs MoU with police F.P. Report

MULTAN: Youth Community Development Organization (YCDO) and Civil Society for Making Police Protection Center Multan more active and providing facilities to all other vulnerable and subjugated sections including transgender community, deaf and dumb special persons, mentally and physically challenged persons.

City Police Officer Multan Mansoor Ul Haq Rana signed the MoU with the heads of both agencies during a ceremony at his office. Deputy Commissioner Multan Umar Jahangir was with him. According to the agreement, the deserving persons coming through the Police Protection Center will be given free treatment in YCDO's 12 hospitals. Apart from this, YCDO has its own Vocational Training Institute where such persons will be given free vocational training.

Free clothes will also be provided by the same institution. While according to the agreement with Society for Special Persons Multan, they will provide skill development training to disabled persons, will also provide wheelchairs, besides providing loan facility to such persons from various institutions. Youth Community Development Organization (YCDO) President Akhlaq Ahmed and Society for Special Persons Multan President Zahida Qureshi signed the MoU with CPO Multan Mansoorul Haq Rana.

CPO Multan said that the Police Protection Center provides protection to all vulnerable and subjugated sections of the society, including the transgender community, deaf and dumb special persons, mentally and physically challenged persons, homeless and destitute children, and minors trapped in addiction and social evils. Working for the rehabilitation, protection and redressal of children. For which they are working together with all the concerned institutions and will make such people important members of the society.

## 8 members of Kokani, Lathani gangs arrested

RAHIM YAR KHAN (INP): The Punjab Police arrested eight members of the Kokani and Lathani gangs and destroyed and burnt several hideouts of the robbers in the Katcha area.

A spokesperson for the Punjab Police said the forces made some important achievements on the ninth day of the grand operation launched under the supervision of Rahim Yar Khan District Police Officer Rizwan Umar Gondal. He said the police used modern technology, heavy weapons and armored personnel carriers (APCs) against criminals and arrested the key members of the Kokani and Lathani gangs after an intense exchange of fire. He said that the forces also moved ahead and carried out a major operation, destroyed the hideouts of the Farida Kokani Gang

and arrested one gang member.

They said the gang was involved in kidnapping of a young child from the Jhuk family. Several Kalashnikovs, hundreds of bullets and other weapons were recovered from the arrested gangsters. The police cordoned off the hideout of another hardened gangster, namely Qabil Sikhani. When the police surrounded his hideout, the criminal escaped and the forces were pursuing him in the riverine areas.

DPO Rizwan Umar Gondal said the morale of all the police officers and personnel taking part in the mega operation in Kacha was high. According to the spokesperson of Punjab Police, during the operation, the number of arrested suspects has reached 18 while 3 robbers have been killed, various types of

heavy weapons have been recovered from the possession of the arrested suspects, including launchers, rockets, LMGs, hand grenades, Includes dozens of Kalashnikovs and thousands of different bore bullets.

The spokesman said that the police have traced and surrounded the secret hideouts of the dangerous armed criminal Qal Sukhani where the exchange of fire between the armed gangs and the police continues despite of the riverine region most difficult like peninsula. Police progress against criminals continues. He further said that during the operation snipers have been started to hit the target. The police have established two more camps at the hideouts of the robbers in the no-go area. The police operation will soon bring all the criminals in the grip of the law.

## Women's rights restricted in Afghanistan

Fatima Safyan Khan

**UNDER the Taliban regime, women in Afghanistan have seen their rights and freedoms stripped away. The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996 and imposed a strict interpretation of Sharia law on the country. Women were not allowed to work or attend school, they were forced to wear the burqa and were not allowed to leave their homes without a male guardian.**

The Taliban's treatment of women has been widely criticized by the international community. In 2001, after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, a US-led coalition toppled the Taliban government and establish a democratic government. This gave Afghan women hope for a better future. However, with the recent return of the Taliban regime, many women in Afghanistan fear that they will once again lose their rights and freedoms. The Taliban have pledged to respect women's rights, but their track record in the past suggests otherwise.

Under Taliban rule, women are banned from

working outside the home. They are also not allowed to attend school or university. The Taliban claimed that this is to protect women's modesty and prevent them from being corrupted by Western influences. Nigar lives in Kabul, Afghanistan. She used to work as a journalist before the Taliban's government now deprived her of her rights like other women in Afghanistan. She said that the Taliban government has brought a positive change in Afghanistan, like the municipality is quite active, and roads and other security changes have made civilians compliant. On the other hand, the worst part of Taliban's government is to keep deprive women of their rights. They are limited only to their domestic duties. Women are not allowed to get an education, to go outside to the parks or any public gatherings also they are banned to do any job.

She added, the Taliban also enforced strict dress codes for women. They are required to wear a burqa, a full-body veil that covered them from head to toe and are not allowed to wear

any makeup or jewellery. In the Taliban's view, women are seen as inferior to men and not allowed to participate in public life. Women are not allowed to vote or hold political office and also prohibit to attend public gatherings.

The Taliban's treatment of women has been widely criticized by human rights organizations and governments around the world. However, the Taliban have shown no signs of changing their views on women's rights. As Afghanistan once again falls under Taliban rule, the future of women's rights in the country is uncertain. Many fear that the gains made by women in the past two decades will be lost, and they will once again be forced to live in oppression and discrimination.

It is up to the international community to continue to pressure the Taliban to respect women's rights and freedoms. The Taliban must be held accountable for any human rights abuses, including their treatment of women. Only when women in Afghanistan are allowed to live free and equal lives the country truly move forward.

## Governor reviews uplift projects of South Punjab

BAHAWALPUR (INP): Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman has expressed his satisfaction with the effectiveness and performance of the South Punjab Secretariat and urged to take more steps to accelerate the process of development in the region.

He said that the establishment of the endowment fund in colleges of South Punjab and the law of compulsory teaching of the Holy Quran in private schools should be strictly implemented. He said this while presiding over a meeting in South Punjab Secretariat Bahawalpur.

Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab Capt (ret'd) Saqib Zafar briefed the Governor of Punjab about the performance of the South Punjab Secretariat. Administrative Secretaries of South Punjab were also present in the meeting. Punjab Governor asked the Secretary of Primary and Secondary

Health Care South Punjab to report within two days about the functioning of dialysis machines in all hospitals.

Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman directed the staff of all Union Councils of South Punjab to provide better facilities to the citizens. He issued instructions to complete the Motorway Jhangara Link Road by June 30 this year and said the will personally talk to the Punjab government about the lack of funds.

He said the issues of blockage of sewage lines in Bahawalpur City must be resolved permanently. The Governor of Punjab praised the management of Bahawalpur Waste Management Company for its excellent performance. Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab Capt (ret'd) Saqib Zafar, in his briefing, said that the establishment of the South Punjab Secretariat has accelerated the process of development

in the region and it was a matter of pride that unique projects have been started in various fields.

He said, in the budget of the new financial year, the South Punjab Secretariat is expected to get more financial autonomy, which will enable the administrative secretaries to issue budgets to the subordinate institutions. This step will make the monitoring system more effective, he concluded.

### Two killed

SUKKUR (PPI): At least two people were killed and 17 others were injured when two passenger coaches collided with each other near Sukkur, police said Tuesday.

The deadly mishap occurred near Rohri and Sukkur, where two passenger coaches collided with each other. As a result, two people died on the spot, while 17 were critically injured.

## Residents demand reconstruction of Mastoj bridge

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: Mastuj Bridge, which is very important for land connecting with Upper Chitral district, is in a very dilapidated condition. Last year, a portion of this bridge was damaged due to flood, the foundation of this bridge, pillars, were badly damaged, besides, it due to the diversion of the river, the water flowed in the middle of the two parts of the bridge. Last year road to Mastuj as well as Gilgal, Brughal, Yarkhun was also closed.

This bridge was built during the regime of the former President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, and this road was also brought from the east side of the river to the west side. He also had announced and approved construction of Shandor road as work order issued and coal tar also brought by contractor which are no damaging without using.

National Highway Authority had started work on Boni Mastooj road last year, but now it was left unfinished. Due to the bad condition and roughness of the road, when a vehicle passes on it, due to mud and dust, not only the residents who living on road side suffering a lot, but

passers-by also suffer from various diseases due to this dust. Chitral Development Moment CDM, comprising on volunteers organization raising voice for the construction of roads in Chitral, has been raising the issue from time to time for the construction of these roads. It should be built as soon as possible.

According to Inayatullah Aseer, a senior member of CDM, this road is very important. If a road is built beyond Mastuj to the Central Asian states, it will not only bring us closer to these states which will connectivity be restored, but it will also change the fate of this backward region by promoting tourism and culture. He said that Gwadar route is 1800 km while Brughal route is only 200 km from Chitral to Tajikistan. As it was a silk route in past using by merchandise.

Liaquat Ali, vice president of Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that the people of the area are very disappointed because of the unfinished work on the Mastuj road. He expressed great regret that a Chinese company had done a very good quality and strong blacktopping on Booni road, but the NHA contractor had made

the paved road unpaved by raking the coal tar, but still on this unpaved road. No more blacktopping work done yet. Now, the dust and dirt created by the vehicles passing on this road has made miserable life of the people of the area.

Mohammad Ashraf who is a driver by profession says that he often has to pass through this road. Earlier it was the best metal road on which a Chinese company laid the best coal tar, but the National Highway Authority contractor removed it from this road. The blacktop road was turned into ruins and now it is known that the contractor has also taken his machinery from here. He said that when the construction of this road was started, it was not surveyed in view of modern requirements. went, but started the work of widening of road and construction on the same road when it was a road for mules, horses and donkeys some 50 years ago. If they construct bridges where water flowing on road It would also be safe and easy to travel.

Syed Burhan Shah Advocate is also a senior member of CDM. He was standing on the same road which NHA has converted it in a dirt road from a metal one.

Due to this, people suffer from tension and various diseases. He further said that there are not only 200 villages living beyond Mastooj Bridge which is in a very bad condition but it connect Chitral to Brughal and Gilgit Baltistan, as well as the road also goes to Wakhan and Tajikistan through this bridge. He said that hundreds of vehicles pass on this bridge every day, but last year this bridge was badly harmed due to flood. He said that the concern department not repair it in time only for to keep their pockets warm, but when this bridge breaks down, they will have to rebuild a new bridge here, which will cost million of. But now it can be repaired with a few lakhs of rupees. He said that the road from Chitral to Booni and Mastuj has been done very poorly and we will soon approach the court against this contractor and the department. He said that company that works on this road did not have any plan but they get a lot of money for digging out of blacktopping portion and to collect their money they dug coal tar but did not blacktopped it again. We will definitely go to court so that we get our right.

Rafiq Ahmed CDM is a general secretary. He said that we had the best road to Booni but

the company turned it into ruins and left it incomplete due to which people are suffering from lung diseases and people cannot breathe due to dust and dirt. The condition of the road from here to Chitral University is also very bad and the students have to face a lot of difficulties in traveling. He expressed great concern over the poor condition of the Mastuj Bridge that if this bridge fell down as Upper Chitral will be destroyed. The connection will be completely disconnected, now the water level in the river is also rising, before that it is very important to repair this bridge.

Syed Jamaluddin Shah is also a social worker and an honorary member of CDM. He said that due to the collapse of the Mastuj bridge, not only will be caused of land disconnection of the people be cut off, but there will also be no festival of Shandur and no one will be able to attend Jashan Brughal. He said that Mastooj and Booni road was not only left incomplete but also The work that has been done is very poor and substandard quality. He said that it is our fundamental right to be given us a good condition road. He said that the government should not take wrong advantage of our

honor. This road has been paved and now the construction work on this road is also closed. People pass through the same road and Mastooj Bridge to see world's highest polo ground Shandur Mela.

CDM members and the political and social circle of Chitral have also expressed outrage over the shoddy and substandard work on the Boni Mastooj road, unfortunately the consultant who was monitoring the road was a sick and ailing person, and never left his office. That is why the construction company has done a very poor work in the protective walls and culverts, in which a cement wall has been built on the outside but the inside is filled with stones and garbage, but no one has asked them for such substandard work. They demanded from the Federal Government as well as the Supreme Court of Pakistan to direct the National Highway Authority to resume construction work on this road and to appoint an honest consultant to check the work of the construction company so that quality work can be done on this important highway which is causing hardship to the people. By starting work on this road in the present condition, the problems of the people have increased and the work has also suspended.





## North Ireland peace brokers urge unionists to return to power-sharing

LONDON (AFP): The leaders who brokered peace in Northern Ireland urged today's main pro-UK party to forge compromise anew and unlock power-sharing, 25 years on from their historic deal. The UK's former prime minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart at the time, Bertie Ahern, pressed the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to emulate the vision of the territory's feuding leaders in 1998.

"The only thing I would say to today's leaders is I think when you stand back and you reflect, you know in your heart of hearts what the right thing to do is, and you should just get on and do it," Blair said. Ahern added: "I just really plead and deeply hope that the Democratic Unionist Party will pay the reward (of peace) back to us all, to stay the road with us. "Because the people of Northern Ireland need them, and I think the people on this island need them. We all want to work together," the former Taoiseach (prime minister) said.

"The alternatives are not good. Don't even think about them," Blair and Ahern were addressing a 25th anniversary conference at Queen's University Belfast joined by former US president Bill Clinton, Clinton's peace envoy George Mitchell and other leaders from 1998. The pro-UK DUP has for more than a year been boycotting the power-sharing government at Stormont in

Belfast, in protest at post-Brexit trading arrangements agreed by London and the European Union.

After meeting Clinton at the conference, DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson said he had "underscored our commitment to restoring the NI Assembly on a basis that unionists as well as nationalists can support". "Quick fixes without solid foundations will do a disservice to those trying to make the institutions work," Donaldson said. But Gerry Adams, whose Sinn Fein party was once the political wing of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, said at the conference that the DUP had to recognise new realities.

"I think that unionism needs to give itself a shake, generally speaking," he said. "Get into the institutions and then argue it out, revise, review, whatever you want, but in the first place go to where you were sent by the electorate."

Twenty-five years on, calls have been growing from moderates in Northern Ireland for an overhaul of the Good Friday peace agreement so that neither the DUP nor Sinn Fein can exercise a veto over the devolved government at Stormont. Meanwhile, after winning local elections for the first time last year, Sinn Fein is stepping up demands for preparations to start on both sides of the border for a referendum aimed at the reunification of Ireland. "We will

undoubtedly have a referendum," Adams said. "I think we're into a phase, given all we've been through, of gentle persuasion." For now, though, the DUP needs strong persuasion that a recent overhaul of the Brexit deal works for Northern Ireland, after accusing London of betraying the interests of unionists.

The three-day anniversary conference ends with speeches from UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Clinton, and EU leaders Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen. Blair and Ahern reminisced about the agonising process leading up to the final agreement adopted at Easter 1998, aimed at ending three decades of "The Troubles", a bloody sectarian conflict against UK rule. Mitchell reflected on the insults hurled across the negotiating room and frequent walkouts before the deal was clinched after all-night sessions in the final week, helped by Clinton manning the phones from Washington. "When you approved the agreement, you were also talking to Israelis and Palestinians, to Colombians, to Africans, to Asians, to Americans," Mitchell told the audience. "In fact, you were talking to the world. This is an agreement for peace and for the future, not just here, but everywhere," he said. "We need people who believe, who know, that the possible does exist within the impossible. Don't let it slip away."

## 2 held for setting up Chinese ‘police station’ in New York

NEW YORK (Reuters): US federal agents arrested two New York residents for allegedly operating a Chinese "secret police station" in the Chinatown district of Manhattan in what prosecutors said was part of a crackdown on Beijing's alleged targeting of dissidents. Lu Jianwang, 61, and Chen Jinping, 59, face charges of conspiring to act as agents of China's government without informing US authorities and obstruction of justice. They were released on bond following an initial appearance in Brooklyn federal court.

A 2022 investigation published by Spain-based advocacy group Safeguard Defenders reported that China had set up overseas "service stations," including in New York, that illegally worked with Chinese police to pressure fugitives to return to China. The Chinese government has said there are centers outside China run by local volunteers, not Chinese police officers, that aim to help Chinese citizens renew documents and offer other services. The Department of Justice has been ramping up probes into what it calls "transnational repression" by US adversaries such as China and Iran to intimidate political opponents living in the United States.

"We cannot and will not tolerate the Chinese gov-

ernment's persecution of pro-democracy activists who have sought refuge in this country," Breon Peace, the top federal prosecutor in Brooklyn, told reporters. Prosecutors unveiled charges against 34 Chinese officials for allegedly operating a "troll farm" and harassing dissidents online, including by disrupting their meetings on US technology platforms. They also added eight Chinese government officials as defendants in a case announced in 2020 charging a former China-based executive of Zoom Video Communications Inc with disrupting video meetings commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

The officials charged are all at large. "By initiating prosecution against Chinese citizens under the pretext of 'transnational repression', the US side is exercising long-arm jurisdiction based on fabricated charges. This is sheer political manipulation, and the purpose is to smear China's image," said Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in the US. Lu and Chen are both US citizens who lead a non-profit organization that lists its mission as providing a social gathering place for people from China's Fujian province, prosecutors said. Before it closed in the fall of 2022, the men's New York operation occupied a

full floor in a nondescript building in Chinatown near the Manhattan Bridge.

Peace said the site was being used "at the very least" for government services like helping some Chinese citizens renew their drivers licenses' - activity that should have been disclosed to US authorities. But he said it was also used for more "sinister" activities. In 2022, Lu helped open the so-called police station and was asked by China's government to locate an individual living in California who was considered a pro-democracy activist, they added. In 2018, Lu had sought to persuade an individual considered a fugitive by China to return home, prosecutors said. Prosecutors said Lu and Chen admitted to the FBI that they deleted their communications with a Chinese government official. FBI Director Christopher Wray told a US Senate committee in November that he was "very concerned" about the presence of such stations in US cities. Prosecutors previously charged more than a dozen Chinese nationals and others with waging surveillance and harassment campaigns against dissidents living in the United States, including by trying to forcibly repatriate people whom China considered fugitives.

## Tunisian leader Ghannouchi detained amid tensions

TUNIS (AP): Influential Tunisian Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi was detained after a police search, according to his lawyer, in a move denounced by his supporters as a stepped-up effort by the president to quash Tunisia's opposition. The move against the 81-year-old former parliament speaker comes amid growing social tensions and deepening economic troubles in Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring pro-democracy movement more than a decade ago.

Ghannouchi, head of the Ennahdha party, is the most prominent critic of Tunisian President Kais Saïed. While he has been detained for questioning in the past and released, his supporters described action as a more serious step. Police entered his house for a lengthy

search and brought him to the El Aouina jail in the east of the capital, his lawyer Nejib Chebbi told The Associated Press. Ennahdha called for his release, saying in a statement that it it "condemns this very dangerous development."

Tunisia's official TAP news agency reported that he was detained on a warrant by counterterrorism prosecutors as part of an investigation into recent "provocative" comments. It did not elaborate. Other Tunisian media reported that Ghannouchi was to be questioned over a video circulating online in which he purportedly says that the president's perceived efforts to "eradicate" Islamist opposition threaten to unleash civil war. Ghannouchi has been detained before for questioning on suspicion of

money laundering and terrorism financing through a charity.

He has denied wrongdoing and his party says the accusations are politically driven. His daughter Yusra said her father had cooperated with police during past detentions, and lamented that the president "ordered a raid on his house and his arrest after sundown during the most holy night of Ramadan." Islamist lawyer Ines Harrath questioned why he wasn't summoned for questioning during normal working hours. "We are no longer living in a state of law," she said. "The current situation cannot last forever." Saïed shut down the Ennahdha-led parliament in 2021 and has since moved to consolidate power amid growing public disillusionment with Tunisia's democracy.

## ‘Parliament will be dissolved again’

DUBAI (AP): Kuwait's crown prince has said its parliament again will be dissolved and new elections planned for the country after a court decision reinstated lawmakers from 2020. Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmed Al Jaber made the announcement in an address to the nation as the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan draws to an end this week. He called the decision the will of the Kuwaiti people, according to the state-run KUNA news agency.

Sheikh Meshal cited a Kuwaiti law allowing its Emir to dissolve parliament, though it was him making the speech in the place of the country's 85-year-old ruler, Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah.

In March, Kuwait's Constitutional Court threw out a 2022 election for parliament, citing "discrepancies" in the decree dissolving the 2020 parliament for its ruling. That briefly reinstated the former lawmakers. It wasn't immediately clear if the order took effect immediately, though analysts had expected parliament to be dissolved. Elections were to be scheduled within the next two months, the 82-year-old Sheikh Meshal said.

Kuwait has the freest and most active assembly among the Gulf Arab states, but political power is still largely concentrated in the hands of the ruling Al Sabah family, which appoints the prime minister and Cabinet, and can dissolve the assembly at any time. Meanwhile, political squabbling has affected the country's economy, stopping it from passing a law allowing Kuwait to borrow money, Kuwait, which borders Saudi Arabia and Iraq, has the world's sixth-largest known oil reserves and hosts some thousands of American troops.

## Putin hails Russian navy’s performance

MOSCOW (AP): Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed the military's performance during massive naval drills that have involved the entire Russian Pacific Fleet - a show of force amid the tensions with the West over the fighting in Ukraine. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reported to Putin that the exercise that began involves 167 warships, including 12 submarines, 89 aircraft and 25,000 troops.

As part of the drills, Russia's nuclear-capable long-range strategic bombers will "fly over the central part of the Pacific Ocean to imitate strikes against groups of enemy ships," Shoigu said. Speaking during meeting with Shoigu, Putin praised the navy's "high level" performance and said that similar drills should be held in other areas. The Defense Ministry has declared that sectors in the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk, the Peter the Great Bay of the Sea of Japan and the Avacha Bay on the southeastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula would be closed to sea and air traffic for the duration of practice torpedo and missile launches and artillery exercises. The ministry said that the drills were intended to "test the Pacific Fleet's readiness to repel aggression." The ministry described the briefing as a show of Russia's "voluntary transparency."

The Russian military has concentrated the bulk of its forces on the front lines in Ukraine, but has also continued conducting regular drills across Russia to train its forces and demonstrate their readiness. The Pacific Fleet drills started just before China's Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu arrived in Russia and met with Putin, who hailed close ties between Moscow and Beijing. Li's talks with Shoigu would focus on "prospects of bilateral defense cooperation and acute issues of global and regional security," the Russian Defense Ministry said. Shoigu noted that the scenario for the maneuvers envisages a response to an adversary's attempt to make a landing on Sakhalin Island and the southern Kuril Islands. Japan asserts territorial rights to the Kuril Islands, which it calls the Northern Territories.

## US, allies conduct more drills in face of North Korean threat

SEOUL (AP): The United States, South Korea and Japan conducted a joint missile defense exercise in waters near the Korean Peninsula as they expand military training to counter the growing threats of North Korea's nuclear-capable missiles. Last week, North Korea conducted one of its most provocative weapons demonstrations in years by flight-testing for the first time an intercontinental ballistic missile powered by solid propellants, as it pursues a weapon that's more responsive, harder to detect and could directly target the continental United States.

North Korea's unprecedented run of weapons tests has so far involved more than 100 missiles of various ranges fired into the sea since the start of 2022 as the country attempts to build a viable nuclear arsenal that could threaten its rival neighbors and the United States. The South Korea-US-Japan training could trigger a beligerent response from North Korea, which condemns the United States' military drills with its Asian allies as invasion rehearsals. The North has used those drills as a pretext to accelerate its own weapons development, creating a cycle of tit-for-tat that has raised tensions in recent months. South Korea's navy said Three-way naval drills took place in international waters off the country's eastern coast and focused on mastering the procedures for detecting, tracking and sharing information on incoming North Korean ballistic missiles. The one-day naval exercise involved an Aegis destroyer from each country.

"The drills' goal is to improve our response capabilities against ballistic missiles and strengthen our ability to conduct joint operations as North Korea's nuclear and missile threats continue to escalate," Jang Do-young, a spokesperson of South Korea's navy, said in a news briefing. Japan's Joint Staff in a statement stressed the need to strengthen trilateral cooperation as the "security environment surrounding Japan increasingly becomes severe" because of North Korean missile activities. The United States and South Korea also launched drills involving some 110 warplanes, including advanced F-35 fighter jets, that will continue through April 28. The US-South Korean aerial drills are designed to enhance combined airpower execution and train aircrews to successfully respond in combat scenarios involving robust surface-to-air and air-to-air threats, according to the



militaries. The training events "reaffirm the US's ironclad commitment to the ROK," the US Seventh Air Force said in a statement, using the initials of South Korea's formal name, the Republic of Korea. Also, South Korea and Japan resumed a security meeting of senior diplomats and defense officials following a five-year hiatus. The meeting is one of many recent events that show ties between Seoul and Tokyo are improving in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear threats after years of disputes over history and trade.

During meeting, South Korea's Defense Ministry said Seoul and Tokyo discussed North Korea's nuclear program and a trilateral cooperation with the United States. The United States and South Korea conducted their biggest filed exercises in years in March and have also held separate naval and aerial drills involving a US aircraft carrier battle group and nuclear-capable B-52 bombers. The North responded by dialing up its own testing activity. Marks 11 straight days that North Korea has not responded to South Korean checkup calls on a set of cross-border inter-Korean hotlines, South Korean officials say, raising concerns about potential kinetic provocations. Communications on those channels are meant to prevent accidental clashes along the rivals' sea borders. A South Korean naval vessel fired warning shots to repel a North Korean patrol vessel that temporarily crossed the countries' disputed western sea boundary while chasing a Chinese fishing boat. There were no exchanges of fire between the North and South Korean vessels.

While the South's military strengthened monitoring and readi-

ness after the intrusion, it didn't immediately detect any unusual activity from the North Korean military, Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Jun said. North Korea's aggressive nuclear push under ruler Kim Jong Un is aimed at forcing the United States to accept the idea of the North as a legitimate nuclear power and negotiating economic concessions from a position of strength, many experts say. Nuclear talks between Washington and Pyongyang have remained derailed since 2019. However, there are also signs that the costs of Kim's campaign is piling up as North Korea apparently grapples with food insecurity and other domestic problems worsened by pandemic-related border restrictions that disrupted trade with China, its main ally and economic lifeline. Chasing tangible economic achievements, Kim's government has prioritized construction and agricultural projects. The North's official Korean Central News Agency said that Kim attended an event over the weekend celebrating the building of 10,000 new homes at a district in Pyongyang. The project is part of broader plans to supply 50,000 new homes in the capital under a five-year national development plan that runs through 2025. During event, Kim called the housing project a "long-cherished plan" aimed at providing his people with "more stable and civilized living conditions," KCNA said. Experts say North Korea has severe shortages in quality housing that deepened over decades of economic decay. But living conditions are much better in Pyongyang, where Kim in past years has pushed huge development projects that upgraded housing for elites and changed the city's skyline.

## Chinese minister’s on closer ties with Russia

MOSCOW (AP): China's defense minister toured the top Russian military academy on a visit to the Russian capital that underscored the increasingly close ties between Moscow and Beijing amid the fighting in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted Gen. Li Shangfu in the Kremlin, noting that his trip follows a "very productive" three-day state visit to Moscow by Chinese leader Xi Jinping last month.

Putin emphasized that defense cooperation, including joint military drills, has helped "strengthen the trust-based strategic relationship" between the two countries. Li told Putin that "relations between our armed forces are growing stronger with every passing day," adding that "your personal friendship with the president of China plays a major role in this process, and everyone in China knows this." Li visited the military academy of the Russian General Staff, the

elite institution for training senior military officers. The Russian Defense Ministry noted in a statement issued after his visit that the academy would welcome more than 20 senior military officers from China for a training course in the fall. Li's trip to Moscow reflects China's strengthening engagement with Russia, with which it has closely aligned its foreign policy in an attempt to reshape the world order to diminish the influence of the United States and its Western allies. China has refused to criticize Russia's actions in Ukraine and blamed the US and NATO for provoking Moscow. Xi's three-day visit to Russia last month gave a strong political boost to Putin, sending a powerful message to Western leaders that their efforts to isolate Moscow have fallen short.

After the talks, Putin and Xi issued joint declarations pledging to further bolster their "strategic cooperation,"

## Merkel decorated with honour

BERLIN (AP): Former Chancellor Angela Merkel was decorated with Germany's highest possible honor in recognition of her near-record 16 years at the helm of the country. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier bestowed the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit for special achievement on the four-term chancellor, who became only the third ex-leader to receive that level of distinction. The other two were Konrad Adenauer, West Germany's first leader, and Helmut Kohl, who led Germany to reunification.

"For 16 years, you served Germany - with ambition, with wisdom, with passion," Steinmeier told Merkel and a group of guests - hand-picked by Merkel herself - in his laudatory speech at the president's residence, Bellevue Palace, in Berlin. "For 16 long years, you worked for freedom and democracy, for our country and the well-being of its people. Tirelessly and sometimes to the limits of your physical strength," Steinmeier added. Merkel, 68, was the first woman to lead Germany and the first chancellor who grew up behind the Iron Curtain in communist East Germany. "You were not only the first woman in the chancellery," the president said. "With your chancellorship, you ensured that a woman at the head of government, that female power too, will forever be a matter of course in our country." Merkel stepped down in December 2021 with a well-regarded record of leading Europe's biggest economy through a series of crises, including the global financial crisis, the eurozone debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. She didn't seek a fifth term and ended her tenure as post-World War II Germany's second-longest serving leader, 10 days short of one-time mentor Kohl's record.

Steinmeier praised Merkel for "three outstanding skills." "First, your insistence on facts and your willingness to cut through the facts. Second, your art of negotiation and your ability to compromise. And third, your firmness, your unwaveringness, with which you upheld very fundamental principles of our state," Steinmeier said.

## Ukraine rejects Iraqi offer to mediate talks with Russia

BAGHDAD (AP): Iraq offered to mediate between Ukraine and Russia to try and find an end to the war in Europe, but Ukraine's top diplomat rejected the offer during a rare visit to Baghdad. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba reiterated his country's position that it would not engage in any peace talks unless Russia withdraws from all Ukrainian territory.

The Kremlin wants Kyiv to acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, which Moscow took over in 2014, and to also recognize September's annexation of the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. Ukraine has rejected those demands and insists it won't hold talks with Russia until Moscow's troops pull back from all occupied territories. In Iraq, Kuleba met with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein. It was the first visit by a Ukrainian official to Baghdad since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

and the first visit by a Ukrainian foreign minister in 11 years. Hussein pointed to Iraq's years of experience with war and conflict, as well as with hosting negotiations between hostile parties - such as the recent Saudi-Iran talks.

Baghdad had hosted several rounds of the talks between Riyadh and Tehran before the negotiations broke down. They later resumed with China as mediator, resulting in last month's announcement that the two regional rivals would restore diplomatic relations. Baghdad "has experience in communication with countries that have tension between them" and "is ready to be in service of peace," Hussein said in a press conference. "The continuation of the war will be dangerous not only to the two countries but to the world." Iraq, like much of the Middle East, historically relies heavily on grain imported from Ukraine, and consumers have suffered from rising food prices since the beginning of the war.

Kuleba said that while Ukraine sees "Iraq as a country that is capable of building bridges..." Russia is on the offensive ... and this is the biggest hurdle on the way to peace." "We need Russia to agree with a very simple fact that it has to stop the war and withdraw," Kuleba added. The current Iraqi government is seen as close to Iran, which the US has accused of supplying drones to Russia for its war in Ukraine. Iran has acknowledged sending drones to Russia but says it was before the war. Iraq also maintains close ties with the United States, which has a strong influence over its financial sector. Iraq's foreign currency reserves have been housed at the US Federal Reserve since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. While rejecting Baghdad's offer of mediation, Kuleba said Ukraine hopes to strengthen ties with Iraq and that his visit was part of an effort to "reinvent Ukrainian-Iraqi relations."



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# Iran-Saudi detente, challenges and prospects

**I**RAN'S Foreign Ministry's Spokesman told the media that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has officially sent an invitation to His Highness, King Sulman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia to visit the country, in return for an invitation by Riyadh for him while the response of the Kingdom in this regard is pending so far.

Iran and Saudi Arabia kicked off an extreme level of diplomatic and trade engagements to repair their fractured ties after two decades of pause and hostility. After the landmark Chinese brokered deal in Beijing, both nations are vigorously reducing their gap, overcoming challenges, and cementing their relations through kinetic diplomacy and uninterrupted engagement between them. There had been multiple high-level contacts between Riyadh and Tehran over the past weeks, both counties are preparing to reopen their embassies and consulates in each other nations to encourage travel and tourism and boost bilateral trade and investment. At the same time, delegation-level talks between the two states are underway to expand their cooperation, resume flights, establish businesses to businesses mechanisms, and promote people-to-people contacts to make their rapprochement more comprehensive and equally beneficial.

Apparently, the Saudi-Iran reunion would have far-reaching effects on regional geopolitical landscapes as positive momentum has already taken place in the diplomatic and security affairs because close Gulf allies of Saudi Arabia including the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and other states have started normalizing their bilateral ties with Tehran while the warring Yemeni groups are negotiating a truce to bring peace in the conflict-hit country. The Saudi-Iran deal has increased the scope for a negotiated peace in Syria and the settlement of Arab-Bashr-ul-Asad ties. At the same time, the current wave of Muslim brotherhood, tolerance, and affinity would have a constructive and healing impact on the post-Arab Spring Libya, and Lebanon and is likely to act as a source of confidence and hope for unarmed Palestinians, who are facing brutal Israeli hostility in occupied West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

Historically, the Muslim world had paid a heavy price for the Saudi-Iran rivalry, as a majority of Muslim nations from East Asia to Western Africa remained victims of sectarian violence and foreign proxies over the past decades, while sectarian polarization badly hurt the economic and security interests of Muslim countries in most parts of the world. Presently, the Riyadh-Tehran rapprochement has opened up new avenues of cooperation between the two countries. Riyadh might feel some relief in the face of enhanced security threats from Tehran-backed Houthis while both countries can easily forge a win-win mechanism in other contested regions in the broader Middle East and North African region. Both countries face tremendous challenges regarding Iran's nuclear program and global economic sanctions against Tehran that pose great hurdles to bilateral trade and cooperation in a post-reunion period of long-time contenders.

Amid applause from across Asia and stern criticism from the West, both muscular Muslim nations are all set to receive each other heads of state to lay the foundation of a historic era of friendship, durable peace, trade, and economic partnership between them. Pakistan is one of the several other Muslim countries, that desired to take credit for making up such an ideal and long-awaited movement but failed due to internal chaos and instability over the past year. In the current scenario, the leadership of Saudi Arabia and Iran needs to exercise extreme caution to foil anti-Muslim conspiracies and avoid getting derailed from their track, so their relations move in an upward trajectory and lead to a new era of peace, development, and cooperation among the Muslim world in the future.

**W**HEN Israel launched a war against the Gaza Strip in August 2022, it declared that its target was the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group only. Indeed, neither Hamas nor the other Gaza-based groups engaged directly in the fighting. The war raised more questions than answers. Israel rarely distinguishes between Palestinian groups. For Tel Aviv, any kind of Palestinian resistance is a form of terrorism or, at best, incitement. Targeting one group and excluding other supposedly "terrorist" organizations exposes a degree of Israeli fear in fighting all Palestinian factions in Gaza at once.

For Israel, wars in Gaza have become progressively harder with time. For example, Israel's so-called Operation Protective Edge in 2014 was very costly in terms of loss of life among the invading troops. The May 2021 flare-up was an even bigger flop. That war unified the Palestinians and served as a strategic blow to Israel, without considerably advancing Israeli military interests. Though other Gazan groups provided Palestinian Islamic Jihad with logistical support in August 2022, they refrained from directly engaging in the fight. For some Palestinians, this was unexpected and was interpreted by some as indicative of weakness, disunity and even political opportunism.

Less than a year later, another war loomed following the release of harrowing footage of Israeli police senselessly beating up peaceful Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque on Ramadan 14. Like in May 2021, Palestinians rose up in unison. This time, it was resistance groups in Gaza and,

eventually, Lebanon and Syria that fired rockets at Israel. Though Israel hit back at various targets, it was obvious that Tel Aviv was disinterested in a multi-front war with Palestinians in order to avoid a repeat of the 2021 fiasco. The violent and repeated Israeli military raids at Al-Aqsa - and limited, though deadly, attacks on Jenin, Nablus and other parts of the West Bank - were meant to achieve political capital for the

**Ramzy Baroud**

as it empowered the Palestinian resistance and denied Israel its so-called deterrence capabilities. The political discourse emanating from Israel recently is quite unprecedented. Following a security briefing with Netanyahu on April 9, opposition leader Yair Lapid left with ominous words. "I arrived worried and I left even more worried," he said. "What our enemies see in front of

for political gain further highlights the deterioration of Tel Aviv's political front. But more dangerous for Israel is the loss of deterrence.

In an article published in The Jerusalem Post on April 11, Yonah Jeremy Bob highlighted another truth: "Israel no longer decides when wars are fought." He wrote: "One could have concluded this from the 2014 and May

into a war between 2014 and 2021, it has not been able to control the duration or the political discourse around these wars. Though thousands of Palestinians were killed in what seemed like one-sided Israeli military campaigns, these conflicts almost always resulted in a public relations disaster for Tel Aviv abroad and further destabilized an already shaky home front.

This explains, at least in part, why Palestinians were keen not to expand the

predicated on unhindered military, logistical and financial support from its Western allies, along with the disunity of its Arab enemies. This has allowed Israel to win wars on multiple fronts in the past, with the 1967 war serving as the main, and possibly last, example.

Since then, especially following the considerable Arab resistance in the 1973 war, Israel has shifted to different types of military conflicts - strengthening its occupation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, while launching massive wars on singular fronts, such as Lebanon in 1982. The Israeli retreat from Lebanon in 2000 - and the utter failure to reinvade parts of the country in 2006 - brought Israel's military ambitions in Lebanon to a complete halt. Then, Israel turned to Gaza, launching one devastating war after another, starting in 2008, only to discover that its military options in the besieged Strip are now as limited as in Lebanon.

For Lapid and other Israelis, the future of Israel's deterrence is now facing an unprecedented challenge. If the Israeli military is unable to operate at ease and at the time of its choosing, Tel Aviv would lose its "military edge" - a vulnerability that it has rarely faced before.

While Israeli politicians and military strategists are openly fighting over who has cost Israel its precious deterrence, very few seem willing to consider that the country's best chance of survival is peacefully coexisting with Palestinians according to the international principles of justice and equality. This obvious fact continues to elude Israel despite its violent birth and decades of troubled existence.

*Arab News*

***This time, it was resistance groups in Gaza and, eventually, Lebanon and Syria that fired rockets at Israel. Though Israel hit back at various targets, it was obvious that Tel Aviv was disinterested in a multifront war with Palestinians in order to avoid a repeat of the 2021 fiasco. The violent and repeated Israeli military raids at Al-Aqsa - and limited, though deadly, attacks on Jenin, Nablus and other parts of the West Bank - were meant to achieve political capital for the embattled government of Benjamin Netanyahu. But this strategy could only succeed if Israel managed to keep the violence confined to specific, isolated regions. Large-scale and protracted military operations have proven useless for Israel in recent years. It has repeatedly failed in Gaza, as it did before in South Lebanon. The unavoidable change of strategy was also costly from the Israeli viewpoint, as it empowered the Palestinian resistance and denied Israel its so-called deterrence capabilities. The political discourse emanating from Israel recently is quite unprecedented. Following a security briefing with Netanyahu on April 9, opposition leader Yair Lapid left with ominous words. "I arrived worried and I left even more worried," he said.***

embattled government of Benjamin Netanyahu. But this strategy could only succeed if Israel managed to keep the violence confined to specific, isolated regions.

Large-scale and protracted military operations have proven useless for Israel in recent years. It has repeatedly failed in Gaza, as it did before in South Lebanon. The unavoidable change of strategy was also costly from the Israeli viewpoint,

them, in all arenas, is an incompetent government." He added that Israel is losing US support and its deterrence capabilities.

Though Israeli politics is inherently divisive, the country's politicians have always managed to unify around the subject of security. During wars, Israelis often exhibit unity and ideological divides seem largely irrelevant. The fact that Lapid would publicly expose Israel's weaknesses

2021 Gaza wars that Israel stumbled into and which Hamas used to score various public relations points ... but now Hamas learned in a more systematic way ... how to instigate its own ring of fire around Jerusalem." The writer's hyped language aside, he is not wrong. The battle between Israel and Palestinian resistance groups has been largely centered on timing. Though Israel did not "stumble"

August 2022 war, which was entirely initiated by Israel, while this month taking the initiative by firing rockets at Israel, starting on April 5. The latest Palestinian action forced Israel to engage militarily on several fronts - Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and, arguably, the West Bank. Throughout its 75 years of military conflict with Palestinians and Arabs, Israel's success on the battlefield has been largely

## International community does have options on Palestine

**Chris Doyle**

**A**BSENT massive and major action, the Israeli coalition will escalate its occupation and war crimes against the Palestinians. Such an intensified assault will see more Palestinian attacks on Israelis, including civilians. What has been witnessed in the past few weeks has every indication of just getting worse.

Neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian leaderships have the willingness or, in the case of the latter, the wherewithal to prevent this or even temper the worst aspects. The Israeli settler movement is on the warpath. It will demand results from an Israeli coalition it helped elect. Benjamin Netanyahu needs their votes and will not alienate them. Expect a raft of further settlement announcements. Itamar Ben-Gvir, not Netanyahu, controls the temperature in East Jerusalem. The national security minister is hell-bent on seeing the mercury rise, not least through an extraordinary surge in the number of demolitions of Palestinian homes.

The Palestinian Authority loses more and more control and influence every day. Young Palestinian men see no hope of viable negotiations or a path to redress through

legal routes, which states like the US and the UK bar to them. Young, unemployed and with little to look forward to in the future, they are prepared to take up arms and attack their occupiers no matter how futile this might appear. Quite what this will achieve for the Palestinian cause is hugely debatable, but it will mean more bloodshed. Killing Israeli civilians will, as ever, only put the Palestinian quest for freedom in reverse. In theory, when a major international conflict becomes so intractable and so perilous, the international community should step in. It is vital as the consequences of escalation could ricochet across the region. This conflict, like Ukraine, involves issues of international law and responsibility for those who are on the UN Security Council and high contracting parties to the Geneva Convention. The relative silence is damning.

What are the options available? The lack of unity at the UNSC on nearly everything since the Ukraine crisis does not help. Yet, if the US and its European allies were prepared to hold Israel to account, the council should find the sort of consensus vital to doing just that. Much depends on the US. If the Biden administration is

prepared to cast aside the US' historic blanket diplomatic protection for Israeli crimes, many options are available. President Joe Biden is clearly unhappy with Netanyahu. He has refused, on camera, to invite him to the White House - an unprecedented rebuff. But a lot of this discord is as a result of Iran and internal Israeli domestic issues, not how Israel treats the Palestinians. That said, US officials are far from happy at the way in which Netanyahu has reneged on promises to pause settlement building, which he made at the Aqaba summit and at Sharm El-Sheikh.

The US has many tools at its disposal. Firstly, it could revoke its pledge to veto UNSC resolutions critical of Israel. No state should have such a get out of jail free card. Secondly, it could put jail on the table by supporting the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court over war crimes by all parties in Palestine. Thirdly, it could back the UN General Assembly's referral to the International Court of Justice on the issue of the legality of Israel's occupation. This would bring the US in line with some of its legal obligations. But it

could do far more. Why should the US taxpayer keep funding billions of dollars in aid to Israel, a state which has a very successful and dynamic economy? This is not a developing nation languishing at the lowest levels of the global poverty rankings. Biden could cut those funds and deploy them more effectively elsewhere. He could attach greater conditionality to US military aid, including that it must not be used for the oppression of Palestinians.

Israeli leaders always count on the US to do nothing. It actually just augments American weakness, as its support is treated as a given. The few times that the US has taken Israel to task, Tel Aviv has shifted. When President George H.W. Bush withheld loan guarantees over settlements, it helped bring a reluctant Yitzhak Shamir to the Madrid peace conference. Biden could adopt a tough love approach to all parties.

The European actors also have options, if perhaps not as potent. They could all support the international legal options with more vigor. The EU can also be firmer with Israel on the issue of international law. It can link future

research cooperation, which Israel so values, to Israeli compliance. The EU association agreement has a human rights clause that should have been invoked long ago and certainly could be now. The UK could also join in. It has a free trade agreement with Israel in the pipeline and should insist on conditionality with that, including that the agreement does not cover occupied territory.

More constructively, the international community could and should internationalize this conflict once again. It is too serious to be allowed to be left to the warring parties to sort out and the asymmetry between Israel and the PA does not allow for constructive negotiations. It requires the major powers to clearly outline the future contours of a deal.

If their preferred option is a two-state solution, then this must be given teeth. Few have much confidence it is still achievable, but unless the international community concocts a new framework, this will have to be the way forward. The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 must be the essential core basis of this. Israel must leave occupied territory for the sake of peace. Land swaps can be considered. Jerusalem should have a shared future for two

states and two peoples. A solution for the Palestinian refugees must also be engaged. This Palestinian state has to be viable, independent, sovereign and contiguous.

The Palestinian side has signed up to this. For years, the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to two states. For sure, the Palestinian leaders have obligations to meet. The Palestinian political domain has to be reordered and a fresh, legitimate and single governing authority elected in a free and fair election. Not since the days of Ehud Olmert has an Israeli prime minister been even close to supporting this model. International leaders should call Israel out. Netanyahu, the Palestinian side agrees to two states, when will you?

If, as is likely, Netanyahu refuses, then this must lead to consequences. If Israel does not agree to a proper two-state solution, then will it agree to one single state with equal rights for all? The answer to that will also be no. The international response at this stage should be forthright. The only alternative to such solutions is the crime of apartheid. This should be called out and not allowed to continue without repercussions one day longer.

## US decline in Middle East and China's new soft power

**Dr. Mohammed Al-Sulami**

**F**OLLOWING William Burns' visit to Saudi Arabia this month, one has to wonder if the US is aware of the state of Middle Eastern affairs beyond its own lens. During his visit, the CIA director reportedly told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that the US felt "blindsided" by Riyadh's rapprochement with Iran and Syria - Washington's regional rivals. These remarks can be interpreted as quite ironic, given Burns' role in the Obama administration and its shaping of the new US policy toward Iran, correcting the neoconservative policies that led to Washington making mistakes in Iraq (since 2003) and Afghanistan (2001-2021).

In 2009, Burns explained that, in recognizing that Iran is a significant regional player, "our basic goal should be to seek a long-term basis for coexisting with Iranian influence while limiting Iranian

excesses; to change Iran's behavior but not its regime." This policy approach advocated by Burns 14 years ago is very close to the Saudi approach to Iran in 2023. The only difference is that the US was genuinely naive about its ability to change Iranian behavior through a policy of engagement without any external constraints. Today, the Saudi approach toward Iran assumes that China's influence on Iran's decision-making process is strong enough to open the ground for a policy of engagement. Nevertheless, the Saudi approach is not solely based on the hope that engagement will be sufficient to alter Iran's nuclear, military and regional policies.

Successful Democratic and Republican administrations have denied US credibility in the Middle East because of their frequent chopping and changing of policies toward Iran. The economic cost of the Ukrainian war, failure to resolve the Palestinian

issue, support for the so-called Arab Spring and domestic polarization have further dented US credibility among regional countries.

In comparison, one has to consider the Chinese investments in different countries that have paved the way for Beijing to shift from soft power to geopolitics and geopolitics.

China's rise in the Middle East has to be understood through the lens of Beijing's economic partnerships with all regional countries. This economic approach is very different from the US policy of projecting military power against weak regional adversaries, such as the Taliban in 2001 and the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003. As Robert F. Kennedy Jr. explained on Twitter: "China has displaced the American Empire by deftly projecting, instead, economic power. Over the past decade, our country has spent trillions bombing

roads, ports, bridges, and airports. China spent the equivalent building the same across the developing world."

Moreover, since the Obama era (2009-2017), the reactive dimension of US policy in the Middle East has provoked confusion among Washington's regional partners. The lack of US support for its regional allies during the so-called Arab Spring and the idea of rapprochement with Tehran at a time of social turmoil in the region pushed the majority of its Gulf allies to seek a new foreign policy based on autonomy and diversification. Both the neoconservative failure to change the region through wars and the Democratic approach of promoting US influence while not prioritizing its allies and partners in the region have been factors accelerating its regional decline.

Moreover, Barack Obama's regional policy

based on a critical view of Gulf states, as well as the regional wars under the neocon-backed George W. Bush administration, led to a US credibility gap in the Middle East. Beyond the warmongering and a sense of American moral superiority, one has to consider the devastating impact of US internal debates on the country's prestige worldwide, especially in the Middle East.

Since the Obama policy review on Iran, there has not been any consensus between Washington and its regional allies on Iranian issues. Thus, in the region, there is now a fear that the Democrats' regional policy will be determined by their desire to do the opposite of what Donald Trump did. In this US domestic context, the positive atmosphere of Saudi-US relations under the Trump administration turned colder and more tense at the beginning of the Biden administration.

This partisanship reinforces the regional perception that America's Middle

East policy reflects domestic polarization more than any real desire to address regional issues and concerns. This US-centric approach is no longer acceptable for the region's countries. On the contrary, given past US mistakes in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Biden administration should seek advice and insights from its regional partners to improve US influence and regain some of the prestige lost since the neoconservative wars. It therefore seems more essential than ever for Iranian hawks and Democratic doves to emerge from their sterile internal debates to devise a new regional policy that is in line with the region's sociocultural transformation. It should favor political stability and an economic win-win approach, rather than the short-term internal interests of political factions in Washington. If not, China's rise will continue in terms of both geopolitics and soft power.



# There is much danger in the Sudan crisis but also an opportunity

THE eruption of fighting in the Sudanese capital on Saturday brought to Khartoum's seven million people the realities of Sudan's multiple conflicts. Many of its residents are themselves displaced by war and perhaps had hoped they had left those nightmares behind in the states they hail from. The packed metropolis is on the verge of a colossal humanitarian disaster, especially as its already weakened health system is coming to a standstill, water and electricity are cut, and food is increasingly hard to come by. This crisis is the culmination of a process of state disintegration that intensified in the last years of former President Omar al-Bashir's regime and worsened during the chaos that followed his 2019 ouster.

Since independence, Sudan has faced a series of rebellions and civil wars, during which the state and society began to disintegrate. Conflicts escalated tribal and ethnic tensions as political leaders took the road of least resistance, projecting political differences into tribal polarisation, militarising competition over resources, and awakening old feuds and rivalries. Meanwhile, militias allied with Khartoum proliferated. This anomaly in the state's military affairs culminated in the creation of the so-called Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a predatory "family business" that has become a major player in national and even regional politics.

The RSF's roots go back to 2003 when its current leader, Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, was recruited by his kinsman Musa Hilal as a commander in a tribal militia enlisted by al-Bashir's regime to fight the rebellion in Darfur. He distinguished himself as a ruthless commander and became a rival to his benefactor, Hilal. When the latter broke up with the regime in 2013, al-Bashir issued a decree, forming the RSF from the tribal militias that fought in Darfur and appointing Hemedti as its leader.

In 2015, the RSF made up the largest contingent within the Sudanese forces that joined Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen. The liaison officer who coordinated these forces was a certain General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who had been working closely with Hemedti in Darfur for years and who today is the chief of staff of the Sudanese army. The two men became close to Saudi and Emirati leaders, and Hemedti made a fortune from his militias fighting in Yemen. In 2017, a law was passed making the RSF a formal component of the military but under the direct command of the president. Al-Bashir also gave the force bases in Khartoum since he had become mistrustful of the military, where dissent against his corrupt policies was on the rise. From then on, Hemedti began to amass more

power and wealth, becoming by many counts the richest man in Sudan.

This integration of a notorious militia into the higher echelons of power compromised the integrity of the state itself, exacerbating the destabilisation dynamics that have buffeted the state for decades. This in turn solidified the prominence of non-state military actors who challenged and diluted state authority. If one were to espouse German sociologist Max Weber's definition of the state as an entity that successfully "claims the monopoly of

ness of the RSF, its foreign alliances and its internal machinations. A plan put forth by the Forces of Freedom and Change, a broad political coalition of civilian and rebel groups, to restructure the armed forces was another red flag. It exempted the RSF from any reform or subordination to the civilian government, leaving it as it is - a tribal, semi-private militia run by the Dagalo family that doubles as a business, an economic predator and a protection racket. There was no question of integrating it into the armed forces, let alone dis-

*With the existence of multiple military outfits, especially when some of them are private and patrimonial, it would be meaningless to speak of civil control of the military, let alone of democracy. If the militias have a genocidal history and current predatory practices and are steeped in corruption, one cannot even talk of the proverbial "good governance" euphemism adopted by international agencies to denote "acceptable despotism". In its current form, the Sudanese military has many problems. It has an authoritarian heritage, and many of its commanders have been implicated in abuses.*

the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory", then the Sudanese state appears to have had a perennial deficit in stateness. The fall of al-Bashir exacerbated the problem rather than eased it. The mistrust between the civilian revolutionary forces of the military led many to bank on the RSF and its slippery commander as an ally.

The Draft Constitutional Declaration of August 2019 created the Transitional Sovereignty Council, which took over ruling the country. Hemedti was appointed its deputy head, thus assuming powers equivalent to a vice president's. This only further fed his ambitions. Hemedti started pushing the RSF further towards parity (and rivalry) with the army. As a result, the militia grew to nearly 100,000 heavily armed troops (from 5,000 in 2013) with multiple bases all over Khartoum and a presence in 17 states. His last fatal move, the attempt to take over Merowe airport and turn it into an airbase was the next step in his plan. For years, Hemedti has been manoeuvring to duplicate the arsenal of the army. He has been sending pilots to train abroad, and seeking to acquire fighter jets. He also needed an airfield. For the Sudanese Armed Forces, that was the last straw.

For months, the top military brass kept sounding the alarm about the growth and aggressive-

mantling it. It boggles the mind how the international diplomats presiding over the so-called "transition process" imagined that a democracy could be guided by a militia, which - in alliance with isolated civilian parties - was supposed to oversee judicial, military and civil service reform, produce a constitution and an electoral law, and lead the country to democracy through free and fair elections.

This paradox has its roots in a vision promoted by some political groups that political and military reform (including the subordination of the military to civilian rule) should precede democracy. Common wisdom in all such cases tends to go the other way. A democratic government, or at least a consensual governance scheme, is supposed to precede such reforms since it gives the government the popular legitimacy needed to impose norms and make the required major changes. Democratisation also presupposes a unified, coherent and hierarchically disciplined military. The two elements underline the principle of the legitimate monopoly of physical power. With the existence of multiple military outfits, especially when some of them are private and patrimonial, it would be meaningless to speak of civil control of the military, let alone of democracy.

If the militias have a genocidal history and current predatory prac-

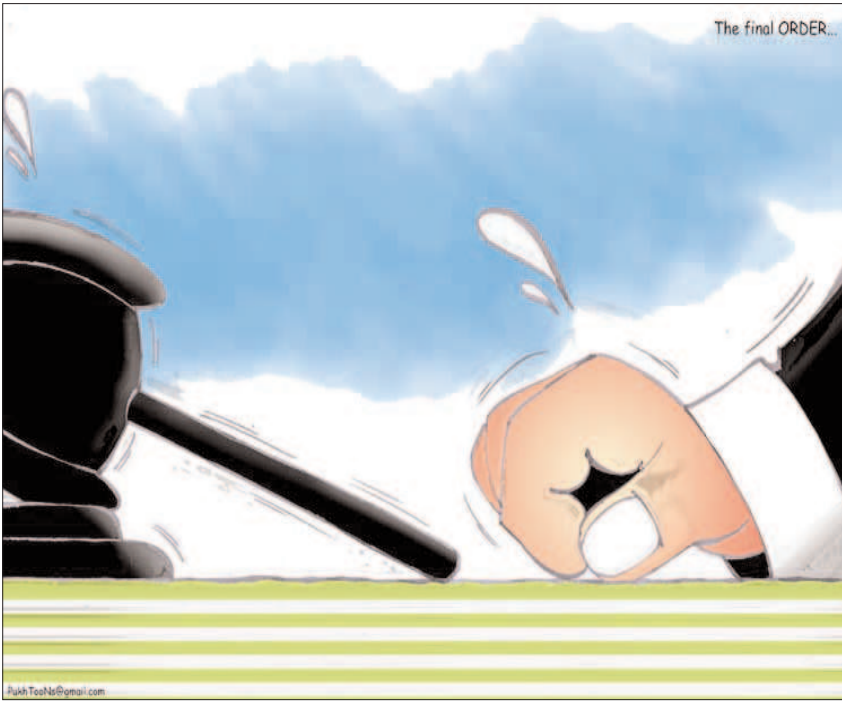
tices and are steeped in corruption, one cannot even talk of the proverbial "good governance" euphemism adopted by international agencies to denote "acceptable despotism". In its current form, the Sudanese military has many problems. It has an authoritarian heritage, and many of its commanders have been implicated in abuses. However, it remains a professional outfit, and its officers go through rigorous education and training. The military as a body was opposed to al-Bashir's authoritarianism, and there were even a few attempts to overthrow him.

The army as a whole endorsed the removal of al-Bashir and supported the civilian transition. Al-Burhan's October 2021 coup had more support from Hemedti and his breakaway Freedom and Change allies than from the military itself. By contrast, the RSF militia has a long history of direct engagement in atrocities. While it was embraced as an ally by some civilian actors, it still played the leading role in a June 3, 2019, massacre of peaceful protesters.

Its conduct in the recent conflict is revealing in the cavalier way in which it has targeted civilians and its indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. The illusions that a genocidal militia can be the force to usher in democratic change should not have been entertained in the first place and must now be abandoned. The current clashes can pose a grave danger but also an opportunity for Sudan. The danger is that the RSF could win, or the fighting could end in a stalemate that would permit the militia to negotiate itself back into a position of power. The opportunity is that the RSF could be removed from the political scene for good, a task that could never have been achieved through negotiations, especially not by a weak and isolated "civilian" government dependent on the militia for its survival. A unified and coherent military force could more easily be depoliticised, placed under civilian control and made into a guardian of peace and democracy.

More important, however, is the unity and coherence of the civilian democratic forces. The existence of rival military outfits tempts civilian actors to eschew the necessary compromises needed to achieve a broader consensus with rivals in the hope of an alliance with a military partner to impose their agenda. By the same token, severe polarisation among the main civilian political actors tempts the military to play one against the other. If military unity is achieved, this could encourage civilian unity and make it easier to negotiate a transition in good faith. Regional and international mediators must not make restoring the status quo ante as their objective but must aim to remove the RSF from Khartoum and the political process. That is the minimum that the Sudanese people deserve for their sacrifices.

Aljazeera



## Freedom needs to be better supplied than tyranny

Simon McDonald, Christoph Heusgen, Stéphane Abrial, Jim Jones & Stefano Stefanini

WHEN Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, he flagrantly violated international law and committed a breach of the UN charter. Denying Ukraine's right to exist, he used massive force to try to erase it from the map of Europe, leaving an ever-increasing trail of gross human rights abuses and war crimes in the process. One year later, Putin has not given up his objective of taking over Ukraine; he believes he has more staying power than Ukraine and the international coalition that supports it.

If he succeeded, Putin would no doubt set his eyes on Moldova and possibly the Baltic states, increasing the risk of a direct confrontation between Russia and Nato. A Russian victory in Ukraine would undermine the rules-based international order and fundamental principles of territorial integrity and national sovereignty, setting a dangerous precedent for territorial conquest elsewhere. However, if the countries supporting Ukraine adopt the right strategy and remain steadfast in its execution, Putin will fail; he underestimates - totally - the power of freedom.

Putin faces brave opposition from pro-democratic forces: in Ukraine, of course, but also in Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia and even in his own country. Nato is united and stronger than before the conflict, as is the EU. Russian allies such as Iran and North Korea are politically and militarily weaker; China is not willing to provide full support for Putin's war aims. Freedom exerts a stronger external appeal than tyranny.

Victory is not preordained. Freedom needs to be defended; the Ukrainian freedom fighters need to be supported by all means - including military. At this year's Munich security conference, transatlantic leaders affirmed that Ukraine "must win this war". But a declaration of unwavering support is not enough, and actions still fail to match the rhetoric. Current levels of incremental and halting military support will only produce a stalemate on the battlefield. Putin miscalculated every aspect of the war before launching the full-scale invasion last year. He thought his army was strong. China a solid partner, the west divided and Ukraine contemptible. He could not have been more wrong. Now, his only hope is that his determination is greater than his opponents', and he can win a war of attrition. We must prove him wrong once more.

We have to go "all in" in our support for Ukraine. The coalition of states supporting Ukraine has delivered an impressive performance, but this is no time for complacency. We have to provide the weapons and ammunition Ukraine needs to fight, and defeat Putin's war of aggression. The faster Putin understands that he will not achieve his objectives in Ukraine, the earlier peace can be achieved, and the sooner the suffering of the Ukrainian people will end.

Ukraine needs the combined force of tanks, longer-range missiles and aircraft to conduct a successful campaign against the major economies like Germany which will have to do their fair share. It is no longer acceptable that

*To compete successfully in this new era of rising geopolitical tensions, we need to reform our foreign ministries as well as development aid and trade agencies, and better align their efforts. If the world's democracies are going to deter and, if necessary, defend themselves against Russia and China, major economies like Germany will have to do their fair share. It is no longer acceptable that Germany and Italy do not spend 2% of their GDP on defence; the 2024 budget will be a litmus test. With regard to France, the move by the defence industry to a "war economy", as called for by the French government, needs to be genuinely pursued.*

successful counterattack, paving the way to Ukrainian victory and peace negotiations on acceptable terms. When speaking about possible peace negotiations, we should be wary of China's role in this conflict. Beijing is already helping Putin's war efforts, supplying non-lethal aid and permitting North Korea to transfer weapons to Russia. John McCain's 2014 prediction that Russia would serve as China's "gas station" is increasingly true; during Xi Jinping's recent visit to Moscow, Russia looked content to play the part of China's junior partner. But we should have no illusions: wary of democracy and Russia becoming an open society, China has every interest in keeping Putin in power.

In order to counter Moscow and Beijing, we have to be much more active outside the transatlantic community. In many parts of the world, China and Russia are successful in convincing governments and publics of their narratives, blaming Nato for the war in Ukraine and accusing US and European allies of neocolonial practices and double standards in their foreign policies. One-off actions will not suffice. Instead, we need to shine a spotlight on Russia's and China's malign activity and work on our partnerships with countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia - by constantly engaging with them, continuing to address past failings, and fulfilling the promises we have made, including on climate finance and more inclusive international institutions. After the end of the cold war, many government bodies became non-strategic. To compete successfully in this new era of rising geopolitical tensions, we need to reform our foreign ministries as well as development aid and trade agencies, and better align their efforts. If the world's democracies are going to deter and, if necessary, defend themselves against Russia and China,

Germany and Italy do not spend 2% of their GDP on defence; the 2024 budget will be a litmus test. With regard to France, the move by the defence industry to a "war economy", as called for by the French government, needs to be genuinely pursued. In similar vein, Europe needs to live up to its decades-old promises of strengthening European defence capabilities. Recent steps such as the EU's Strategic Compass or the EU's joint military support of Ukraine point in the right direction, but more needs to follow. This stronger European contribution is also necessary to help preserve bipartisan US support for Ukraine. Putin counts on "Ukraine fatigue" in the US; he needs to be proven wrong.

On the economic front, the EU, the US and international partners implemented stinging sanctions with unprecedented speed; they significantly degraded Russia's military capabilities and weakened its economic prospects. But, as a global financial centre, the UK has more work to do on sanctions implementation, since the current sanctions regime still has too many holes. By boosting reverse south-north gas flows from suppliers across the Mediterranean, Italy can help strengthen European energy security and mitigate the ripple effects of Russian energy warfare. Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in the erroneous belief that Ukraine would be defeated within a few weeks. More than a year later, Ukraine's unity and resilience in the face of Russia's aggression have shown the country's remarkable strength. Instead of ruling an empire, Putin has become an international outcast, facing an arrest warrant for his war crimes, issued by the international criminal court. To continue its fight for freedom and defeat Putin, however, Ukraine needs more support. Ukraine's partners have to step up; when freedom is better equipped than tyranny, its victory is assured.

## Kenya: The making of a political crisis that never was

FOR all their faults, or perhaps because of them, Kenyan politicians have always heeded the advice never to let a good crisis go to waste. In a country that has seemingly perfected the art of management by disaster, lurching from one potential calamity to the next, the political elite does not even need to wait for a crisis because it can just as easily manufacture one. And the last few weeks have provided an object lesson in how this is done.

Before delving into the current crisis, providing some background is in order. In 2010, Kenya adopted a new constitution, the culmination of over a quarter-century of struggle to tame its voraciously parasitic and corrupt political class. Influenced largely by the bloodletting that followed the disputed 2007 presidential election, the constitution sought to overhaul the country's systems and create a straitjacket to restrain their psychopathic instincts in the hope of forestalling future disasters. But it has achieved mixed results. Every presidential election since the constitution was promulgated has been disputed. In 2013, the Supreme Court, whose primary mandate is to adjudicate disputes around presidential elections, gave a widely panned judgement legitimising what many saw as yet another stolen election. However, though unhappy with the verdict, the losing candidate, Raila Odinga, nonetheless accepted it. Thanks to the constitution's introduction of this mechanism for settling the dispute, Kenya avoided a 2008-style meltdown.

But by 2017, it was clear that the political class was gnawing at the constitutional restraints. Following another controversial win for the incumbent, Uhuru Kenyatta, Odinga was initially reluctant to turn to the Supreme Court for redress. He eventually joined in a case filed by civil society activists challenging the outcome and the court ruled in their favour. It was the first court judgement on the African continent to overturn the re-election of a sitting president. Kenyans saw it as proof of the constitution's efficacy. This moment of constitutional supremacy did not last, however. Kenyatta

launched an attack on the court, demonising the judges and warning of a coming "revisit" ahead of a repeat of the presidential election. The rerun was held a month later, but, with Odinga boycotting, it was seen as a sham and the vote once again challenged in court.

Following an incident in which the then-Deputy Chief Justice Philomena Mwili's bodyguard was shot, the Supreme Court was unable to raise a quorum to hear a petition demanding the cancellation of the election results. A later Supreme Court ruling that upheld that election was quickly rejected by the losing coalition and the country entered a period of political instability, violence and uncertainty which ended with the "Handshake" of March 2018, a power-sharing deal in all but name.

The "Handshake" and everything that led up to it essentially loosened constitutional restraints and legitimised political arrangements outside the constitution's vision of clean and transparent electoral contests with clear winners taking up power and losers gracefully conceding. That vision had once again run up against Kenya's much messier reality and this time, it had lost. Today, much like in 2017, Kenya is in the messy aftermath of an election. This time, however, the vote is widely seen as the most transparent the country has had, a real contrast to the shady processes of six years ago.

Again, Odinga was defeated, this time against Kenyatta's estranged deputy, William Ruto, another casualty of the Handshake. Again Odinga challenged the outcome in the Supreme Court. Again he lost. But having freed itself from the constitutional straitjacket, the political class was not about to let a Supreme Court determination stand in the way of its politics. The lunatics were once again running the asylum. Despite a dearth of evidence to support his case and a lack of public support, Odinga launched a programme of weekly public protests with nebulous and ever-changing demands. The aim was to bait the Ruto administration into an overreaction.

The obtuse and heavy-handed response from the government was as stupid and shortsighted as it was predictable. The police were sent to beat up and tear gas protesters, which led to three deaths and 400 injured, while thugs attacked Odinga's company and invaded a farm belonging to his ally Kenyatta. The violent scenes in the capital and a few towns in the west were enough to convince many that a political crisis indeed existed and it required a negotiated solution. The pressure led to an offer for talks from the Ruto administration which was quickly accepted by the Odinga team. Yet there is little clarity about what that crisis actually is, and what the talks would be about. Perhaps due to the absence of an agreed agenda, the talks have already run into trouble. While both sides have picked negotiating teams, an insistence by Ruto that the talks be confined to parliament (which he controls) has seen Odinga threaten a return to the streets after the end of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, the country faces a very real economic and humanitarian crisis, with ballooning public debt, the rising cost of food, the government being unable to pay its workers, and up to six million Kenyans facing starvation. While Odinga has paid lip service to the skyrocketing cost of living, demanding that the Ruto government he does not recognise work with him to lower it, it is clear that both sides are far more fixated on the contestation of power than on the increasingly miserable lives of their countrymen. And if history is our guide, it is far from certain that even a political deal will see them act to ease that suffering. In 2008, faced with a worsening food crisis, the Government of National Unity, formed to stem the violence that followed the 2007 election, instituted a novel maize subsidy scheme.

Imported maize as well as stocks from the country's strategic reserve were to be sold to millers at a discounted price in an effort to lower the prices of flour. However, the scheme was widely abused by politicians and government officials who, pretending to be millers, pocketed the subsidy and then sold

the maize on to the real millers, further inflating its cost. By the time they had finished, 10 million Kenyans were starving. So brazen was the looting that it prompted PricewaterhouseCoopers, which audited the scheme, to question whether the programme "was from the outset designed to fail and to provide a means for considerable financial exploitation at the expense of the state". Ruto, who was the agriculture minister at the time, was accused of profiteering from the scheme and so were family members and associates of Odinga, who was the prime minister. With this in mind, the hope that either side of the political divide would prioritise easing the suffering of Kenyans above its narrow interests is rather dim.

The real political crisis Kenya faces today is the same one it has had since independence. Its political elite was forged in the fires of colonial plunder and from its birth, the country has had to bear them as an affliction, as the cost of stability. Some, like Charles Onyango-Obbo, one of East Africa's most insightful commentators, see them as the reason why the country has avoided following many of its neighbours into anarchy and civil conflict. "Its corrupt and amoral politics [are] a high form of pragmatism and political common sense," he wrote recently. "Every deal is possible. No betrayal is unthinkable. It is pagan, transactional politics at its worst - and best." But this is exactly the situation Kenyans had sought to extract themselves from with the 2010 constitution. The truth is, it is the "pagan, transactional politics" where "every deal is possible" that incentivise politicians to see their followers as fodder, and violence and mayhem as mere negotiating tactics.

It is what keeps Kenya always on the brink of disaster, its constantly starving and brutalised people taught to accept plunder and misery as the price of avoiding their neighbours' fate. Kenyans are ultimately faced with a choice: whether to lower their expectations and resign themselves to Kenya's debased politics, or to continue along the frustrating road of trying to force Kenyan politicians into a new mould.

### Important Notice

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# PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 201.38 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bullish trend on Tuesday, gaining 201.38 points, with a positive change of 0.50 per cent, closing at 40,448.05 against 40,246.67 points on the previous day.

A total of 67,536,928 shares were traded during the day as compared to 94,781,630 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 2.275 billion against Rs 3.056 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 330 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 163 of them recorded gains and 145 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 22 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric

Ltd. with 3,534,931 shares at Rs 1.98 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 3,323,854 shares at Rs 1.16 per share, and Hascol Petrol with 2,759,500 shares at Rs 5.55 per share.

Nestle Pakistan XD witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 100.00 per share price, closing at Rs 5350.00, whereas the runner-up was Sapphire Fiber with a Rs 71.75 rise in its per share price to Rs 1040.63.

Unilever Foods witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 246.00 per share closing at Rs 18054.00, followed by Khyber Textile with a Rs 51.75 decline to close at Rs 638.25.

**Rupee gains 80 paisas against dollar**

Pakistan rupee gained 80 paisas against the Dollar in the interbank trading on Tuesday and closed at Rs

283.90 against the previous day's closing of Rs 284.70.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 287 and Rs 289.5, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 1.94 to close at Rs 311.15 against the last day's closing of Rs 313.09, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen declined by 01 paisas and stood at Rs 2.11; whereas a drop of Rs 1.23 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs352.49 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs353.72.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal dipped by 21 paisas each to close at Rs 77.31

and Rs 75.69, respectively.

**Gold prices increase by Rs 300 to 217,400 per tola**

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 300 and was sold at Rs 217,400 on Tuesday against its sale at Rs 217,100 the previous day, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also increased by Rs 257 to Rs 186,385 from Rs 186,128, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold went up to Rs 170,853 from Rs 170,618.

The price of per tola silver and that of ten-gram silver remained unchanged at Rs 2,530 and Rs 2,170 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market dipped by US\$ 03 to \$2005 against its sale at \$2008, the Association reported.



PESHAWAR: Women choosing and buying jewelry in preparation for upcoming Eid ul Fitr festival.

## Eight vessels carrying 400,000 MT wheat arrive at Gwadar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Around eight vessels carrying 400,000 Metric Ton (MT) of wheat from different countries have so far anchored at the Gwadar seaport in line with the special directives of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to operationalise the newly-built facility, starting from March 3, 2023.

Under this initiative, the government would import overall 450,000 MT of wheat which is scheduled to complete on April 26 with the arrival of the last shipment of 50,000 MT of wheat, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives said in a news release on Tuesday.

"The last consecutive vessel MV Advance will call at Gwadar port on 26th April 2023," it said, adding "Import of wheat through Gwadar has marked the beginning of a new era of business, trade and commercial activities at Gwadar Port."

People of Balochistan especially Gwadar and Makran would be among the main beneficiaries of the increased business activities at the Gwadar port.

"All the contractors, workforce, customs clearing agents, shipping agents, labour contractors, food suppliers etc. engaged in the operation of Gwadar port relating to imports by TCP (Trading Corporation of Pakistan) are 100% from local population... and it will definitely help uplift living standards of the people of Balochistan."

## Volkswagen says it will invest 1 billion euro

SHANGHAI (AFP/APP): German carmaker Volkswagen said Tuesday it would invest one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) in a new development centre for electric vehicles in China, as the EV market proved a key battlefield for brands at the Shanghai Auto Show.

"The company is investing around EUR 1 billion in a new state-of-the-art development, innovation, and procurement centre for fully connected intelligent electric vehicles in the southern Chinese city of Hefei," the group said in a news release.

EVs now make up one out of four car sales in China, the world's largest car market, and dozens of new models from domestic and Western brands were unveiled at the auto show, the first since the end of China's Covid restrictions.

Local brands command 81 percent of the EV market in China, according to analysts at Counterpoint Research, and industry titans like Volkswagen are racing to catch up.

Executive Ralf Brandstatter said the move was a key step of the group's "in China, for China" strategy.

The new venture, called "100%TechCo", will be launched in 2024, and will be made up of more than 2,000 employees working in procurement and research and development.

## Over \$12b textile products exported in nine months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Textile exports reached \$12,476.459 million during the first nine months of the current fiscal year (2022-23), the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

Textile exports showed a decline of 12.40 percent from \$14,242.613 million during the same period of last year (July-March 2021-22).

The export of raw cotton witnessed positive growth during July-March (2022-23) of 97.46 percent from \$6.577 million (last fiscal year) to \$12.987 million, and that of tents, canvas and tarpaulin went up by 25.10 percent from \$82.145 million to \$102.766 million.

Similarly, the export of cotton yarn showed negative growth by 36.92 percent from \$908.487 million

to \$573.084 million.

Likewise, the export of cotton cloth decreased by 14.34 percent from \$1,795.487 million to \$1,538.031 million; cotton (carded or combed) by 38.99 per cent from \$1.631 million to \$0.995 million, yarn (other than cotton yarn) by 31.69 per cent from \$48.188 million to \$32.918 million, knit-wear by 9.10 per cent from \$3,729.682 million to \$3,390.335 million, bed wear by 17.03 percent from \$2,448.860 million to \$2,031.741 million and towels by 9.07 percent, from \$819.589 million to \$745.288 million.

The export of ready-made garments also declined by 7.20 percent from \$2,863.567 million to \$2,657.265 million; art,

silk and synthetic textile by 9.94 percent from \$343.591 million to \$309.432 million; made-up articles (excluding towels, bedwear) by 14.71 per cent from \$627.006 million to \$534.761 million, and all other textile materials by 3.69 percent from \$567.834 million to \$546.856 million.

On a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the textile goods' exports declined by 22.61 percent in March 2023 to \$1,257.804 million against \$1,625.242 million in March 2022.

On a month-on-month (MoM) basis, the textile goods' exports however increased by 6.55 percent in March 2023 against \$180.450 million in February 2023, according to the PBS data.

## Stocks rise, dollar drops as China posts bumper growth

LONDON (AFP/APP): Major stock markets rose and the dollar dropped Tuesday as data showed China's economy grew far more than expected in the first quarter, when activity resumed following three years of painful zero-Covid measures.

The blockbuster 4.5-percent expansion, helped by above-forecast retail sales last month, revived optimism for an economic recovery in the world's second biggest economy after its worst performance in decades seen in 2022.

The figures are the first snapshot since 2019 of a Chinese economy unencumbered by public health restrictions that included city-wide lockdowns lasting months.

Below-forecast readings on industrial output and fixed asset investment suggested weaknesses remained in the economy and the recovery could be uneven.

"We expect to see higher GDP growth rate in upcoming quarters as a result of the low base from last year, and the annual growth target of five percent should be achievable," said Chaoping Zhu, at JP Morgan

Asset Management.

"That said, some challenges still exist in the economy."

The Chinese economy remains beset by a series of problems including a debt-laden property sector, global inflation and the threat of recession elsewhere.

"It's not just the pandemic that the country is bouncing back from, confidence in the property market has been severely undermined and it will take time to recover," noted Craig Erlam, senior analyst at OANDA trading group.

Investors also continue to fret over Federal Reserve plans to hike interest rates as officials try to rein in US inflation, with top policymakers seeming to be split over how many more increases are needed.

Wall Street's three main indexes ended slightly higher Monday in muted trade as investors there awaited the release of fresh earnings following broadly positive results from banking giants including JPMorgan and Citigroup.

A surprise jump in a closely watched index tracking New York state manufacturing added to the

buying sentiment, while the VIX Index of market volatility dipped below 17 to its lowest since the start of last year.

"The subtle yet positive data beat goes on after last week's highlight reel was almost uniformly hopeful, including progress on inflation, better growth than expected, the possibility of fewer rate hikes, and some constructive big bank earnings," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.

Focus turns to the release of fresh earnings this week from big-ticket names including Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, Johnson & Johnson, Netflix, Tesla, Ericsson and Nokia.

However, traders will still be nervously watching the reports from the financial sector following last month's banking turmoil that saw three regional US lenders go under and Credit Suisse taken over.

"The focus on the hundreds of regional banks reporting in coming days will be firmly on the extent of deposit outflows relative to street expectations," said Ray Attrill at National Australia Bank.

## Rate-hike fears keep stocks rangebound

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): European and US stocks moved little Monday as investors awaited more company earnings and worried that central banks may keep raising interest rates for longer than expected.

In Europe, London's FTSE 100 rose but the Paris CAC 40 ended lower after striking a fresh record-high at 7,552 points earlier in the day. On Wall Street, major indices finished a choppy session with modest gains ahead of a trove of earnings.

"Stocks have been left bereft this afternoon with little on the calendar today, and ahead of earnings tomorrow," said Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at online trading platform IG.

"Muted" is perhaps the best way to describe the session, though it will no doubt heat up tomorrow

once earnings start to come through thick and fast," he added.

The dollar firmed on prospects of more US rate-tightening and oil prices slipped.

While analysts say cooler inflation has eased some pressure on the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England, consumer prices remain elevated and many experts expect more actions.

"I don't think all of the rate hikes have worked their way through the system and it looks as though the Fed is going to continue to tighten," said Frances Stacy, at Optimal Capital Advisors.

"I don't think we're completely out of the woods yet," Stacy added.

Markets fear that the monetary tightening by central bankers will tip the economy into recession.

Forecast-beating earnings from US banking titans last week further helped ease some concerns about the sector.

While JPMorgan reported a surge in profits to \$12.6 billion last week, it also took additional reserves, citing "an increased probability of a moderate recession due to tightening financial conditions".

"That word -- recession -- is hanging over the market, not like a death sentence at this point but more so like a chronic illness, which is to say the market is having difficulty escaping from it," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Other major companies are releasing first-quarter results this week, including Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, Johnson & Johnson, Netflix, Tesla, Ericsson and Nokia.

## Uzbekistan shows interest to invest in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Aybek Arif Usmanov has expressed keen interest to enhance bilateral relations in trade, industry, and e-commerce and emphasized the need to take appropriate steps to expand trade volume up to \$1 billion between both countries.

He expressed these views in a meeting with Federal Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed Qamar here on Tuesday.

He said bilateral trade relations had shown a positive trend, and trade data for the fiscal year 2021-22 reflected a growth of \$91 million, whereas Pakistan's exports to Uzbekistan had doubled from \$36.56 million in July-March 2021-22 to \$73.12 million during July-March 2022-23.

He said that bilateral trade volume could increase to \$5 billion annually by removing unwanted barriers. He also acknowledged the minister's political reconciliation efforts to fulfil all parties on the negotiation table.

The two sides also agreed for working jointly to identify opportunities for cooperation in trade, investment, and other sectors.

During the meeting, the commerce minister acknowledged the enormous potential for trade between the two countries and said that there was a need to identify new sectors for cooperation and assured the ambassador of his full support and cooperation.

## UK economy shows no growth

LONDON (APP): Britain's economy failed to grow as expected in February, but a bounce in January was stronger than first thought, official data showed on Tuesday.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the economic output was flat in month-on-month terms in February.

A Reuters poll of economists had pointed to a growth of 0.1%. The ONS revised January's economic growth up to 0.4% from a previous estimate of 0.3%.

Output from the vast services sector contracted by 0.1% in February, hurt by strikes, but was offset by a surge in construction output, the ONS said.

## US stock edge higher

NEW YORK (APP): US stocks managed to end higher on Monday as the latest data and Fed official comments support investors' optimism.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 100.71 points, or 0.30 percent, to 33,987.18.

The S&P 500 added 13.68 points, or 0.33 percent, to 4,151.32.

The Nasdaq Composite Index increased 34.26 points, or 0.28 percent, to 12,157.72.

Eight of the 11 primary S&P 500 sectors ended in green with real estate and financials sectors leading the gainers rising 2.23 percent and 1.13 percent, respectively.

Meanwhile, energy and communication services sectors led the laggards both down 1.27 percent.

## Wheat output increases 1.6%, likely to achieve 26.81 mt production

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) was apprised that owing to the incentives introduced by the incumbent government to mitigate the adverse impact of catastrophic floods and torrential rains during the last moon soon season and to revive the local agriculture sector, the output of Rabi crops witnessed significant growth.

The FCA which met with Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research Zafar Hassan was told that wheat output during the Rabi season 2022-23 increased by 1.6 per cent as compared to the production of last year and total output was estimated at 26.81 million tons.

The high-power committee which, is mandated to oversee strategic measures for ensuring food security in the country was apprised that wheat crop was sown over 9.0 million hectares to fulfil the local staple food requirements as well as for keeping the strategic reserves.

While, the committee observed that the potato production during the season grew by 1.9% as compared to the output of last year, whereas the total production was recorded at 7.9 million tons. During the season the potatoes were cultivated on over 0.3 million hectares.

The tomato production for 2022-23 is estimated at 563.6 thousand tons from an area of 45.7 thousand hectares, there is an increase in production of 1.2% over the last year, whereas the gram production is estimated at 313

thousand tons from an area of 820.6 thousand hectares.

Due to rains and floods in July-September 2022, and other climatic changes, local onion production during Rabi 2022-23 reported a decrease over the last year. To overcome this shortage duty-free imports of onion and tomatoes were also allowed so that there is no shortage in the market and prices remain stable.

The FCA held detailed deliberations over the production targets for essential Kharif crops 2023-24 and fixed rice production targets at 9 million by sowing the crop on over 3.1 million hectares of land.

Meanwhile, the FCA also fixed maize production targets at 7.6 million tons by bringing over 1.3 million hectares of land under maize cultivation, whereas the sugarcane production targets were fixed at 78.6 million tons by growing it on over an area of 1.2 million hectares.

Pondering over the availability of agricultural inputs for Kharif crops (2023), the water availability in canals head will remain at 62.74 million acres feet (MAF) as against last year which was 43.27 MAF. At present all the provinces are getting their satisfactory supplies in the system.

The meteorological department informed us that slightly above-normal rains are expected in the next three months (April-June, 2023), particularly over the upper half of the country. Lesser rains are expected during June and the temperature may remain slightly above nor-

mal in most parts of the country.

A gradual temperature rise will accelerate the snow melt in the Northern Areas. The seasonal rainfall may provide water for crops in the main rain-fed areas while lower parts of the country will remain deficient during the season of Kharif.

The Committee was informed that the availability of rice and maize seed will remain as per requirement, whereas the representative from the State Bank of Pakistan informed that allocations of institutional credit for agriculture had substantially increased to Rs1,819 billion for 2022-23 and the disbursement up to February 2023 is Rs 1073.5 billion which is 59% of the overall annual target of 1819 billion which is 28.5% higher than the disbursement of 835.3 billion made during last year.

The FCA appreciated the positive impact of the fertilizer subsidy scheme which contributed to high yield and the representatives of Nation Fertilizer Development Company told that due to local production and available stocks, the supply position of Urea will remain comfortable subject to the operation of all Urea Plants at full gas pressure. DAP will also remain at a satisfactory level.

The committee expressed satisfaction with the food security situation in the country however, emphasized the need for research & development as well as better coordination to consolidate the gains and ensure further progress in the sector.

## OGDCL partners with TCF to promote education

ISLAMABAD (APP): Under its Corporate Social Responsibility Program, the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The Citizens Foundation (TCF) here to promote quality education for underprivileged children in Pakistan.

The MOU aims to construct and operationalize primary level schools in the OGDCL's operational areas in collaboration with TCF,

to empower local communities, according to a press release.

This initiative will enable out of school children to receive quality education at their doorstep, creating a positive impact in society and transforming the lives of families of these children.

It will be a long term partnership for the promotion of education in marginalized sections of society in years to come.

OGDCL is a socially conscious organization and

strongly believes in giving back to the communities to transform their lives.

This partnership with TCF is aligned with OGDCL's commitment to improving education outcomes in Pakistan and will make a significant contribution to the country's development.

The collaboration between OGDCL and TCF is a testament to the importance of public-private partnerships in improving education outcomes in Pakistan.

## China's economic growth jumps 4.5%

BEIJING (AFP/APP): China's economy grew a forecast-busting 4.5 percent in the first quarter as the country reopened after the end of zero-Covid measures late last year, official data showed Tuesday.

The figures were the first snapshot since 2019 of the world's second-largest economy unencumbered by the strict health measures that helped keep the coronavirus in check but battered businesses and supply chains.

A key driver of the standout reading was a bounce in retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, which surged 10.6 percent on-

year in March, the biggest increase since June 2021.

However, industrial production climbed 3.9 percent last month, an improvement from January-February but below analysts' expectations of 4.4 percent, according to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Tuesday's NBS report said in the first three months of the year China had faced a "grave and complex international environment as well as arduous tasks to advance reform, development and ensure stability at home".

Beijing's virus-containment policy -- an unstinting regime of strict quaran-

tines, mass testing and travel curbs -- strongly constrained normal economic activity before it was abruptly ditched in December.

The Chinese economy is also beset by a series of other crises, from a debt-laden property sector to flagging consumer confidence, global inflation, the threat of recession elsewhere, and geopolitical tensions with the United States.

Since the rapid dismantling of the suffocating zero-Covid policy, Chinese people have in recent months returned to restaurants and started to travel again, giving much-needed stimulus to services.





## In brief

## Wahab newborn son name

LAHORE (Web Desk): Test cricketer and Adviser to Punjab Chief Minister on Sports and Youth Affairs Wahab Riaz has named his newborn baby boy after his late father. Using his twitter handle, the cricketer said his son would be called 'Sikander' in memory of his beloved father. Riaz shared a photograph of his late father and wrote on the microblogging platform that Alhamdulillah Allah has blessed him with a baby boy. He said once again Sikandar was back in his life. "Sikandar has and will always be a part of me since I started. Love u Abu missing u the most," he said. The pacer's love for his father has always been a prominent feature of his life. Earlier, this month, he took to Instagram and shared his love for his late father on the latter's birth anniversary. Riaz stated: "My inspiration - mere pyare Abu. On his birthday, I'd like to thank him for whatever I've achieved so far, and what I'm today. It's all because of his prayers. I hope I can be a good son at least (he was the best) and make him proud up there. Miss you Abu jan, prayers requested!" Riaz already has two cute daughters Eshal and Hoorain. He frequently shares pictures of his daughters.

## Djokovic says elbow 'not in ideal condition'

LONDON (Agencies): World number one Novak Djokovic has said his right elbow is "not in an ideal condition" before the Srpska Open in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Djokovic, 35, had surgery on the joint in 2018 and wore strapping during his shock defeat by Lorenzo Musetti at the Monte Carlo Masters last week. The Srpska Open is the 22-time Grand Slam winner's final tournament before the French Open starts on 28 May. "I hope it will be fully ready for the first match," said Djokovic. "I'm super excited to be here because I think it's one of the best places for us Serbian tennis players and athletes in general to be able to perform where we have so much love and support from local people." "The people welcome me wholeheartedly with a great reception and so much love and support," Djokovic will begin his quest for an unprecedented 23rd Grand Slam title at the French Open against French 18-year-old Luca van Assche.

## UK climate activists arrested

SHEFFIELD (INP): Climate activists from the 'Just Stop Oil' group were arrested after disrupting the World Snooker Championship with one throwing orange powder on the table at the Crucible Theatre. Joe Perry's first-round match against Robert Milkins had to be stopped when a man jumped onto the table and emptied a bag of orange powder across the green baize. Stunned fans watched on as half of the table and many of the balls were covered in the cloud of powder, with the man kneeling on the baize for several seconds before a security guard dragged him away. The man was wearing a white t-shirt emblazoned with the slogan 'Just Stop Oil' on the back. On the other table at the Sheffield arena, the match between Mark Allen and Fan Zhengyi was interrupted when a woman, also wearing a 'Just Stop Oil' t-shirt, tried to get on the baize at the same time as the male protestor. She was dragged off by ref-

## Jayasuriya 10 wickets lead Sri Lanka to big win over Ireland

GALLE (AP): Sri Lanka defeated Ireland by an innings and 280 runs inside three days of the first test and recorded its biggest victory margin on Tuesday. Ireland lost 13 wickets on the day to be all out for 143 and 168 in reply to Sri Lanka's 591-6 declared.

Slow left-arm Prabath Jayasuriya led the Sri Lankans with a 10-wicket haul, taking the last wicket of the match when he trapped Ben White for 1 soon after tea. Jayasuriya took 3-56 in the second innings after a career-best 7-52 in the first.

Spin bowling partner Ramesh Mendis had the best figures in the second innings of 4-76 and a match haul of five wickets. Mendis equalled Dilruwan Perera in becoming the fastest Sri Lankan to 50 test wickets in 11 matches.

Seamer Vishwa Fernando took the other four Irish wickets, including opener Murray Commins for a pair. The win sur-

passed Sri Lanka's previous highest victory margin of an innings and 254 runs against Zimbabwe in 2004.

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne said the Irish had the bowling quality but their inexperience showed in their bowling lengths, and the field placings were more alike to limited-overs cricket, which made it easier for his batters to score.

The home innings was built on centuries by Karunaratne (179), Kusal Mendis (140), Dinesh Chandimal (102) and Sadeera Samarawickrama (104). Ireland began day three on 117-7 and lost its last three wickets all on 143. Lorcan Tucker made a team-high 45 when he tried to sweep Jayasuriya and missed. Mark Adair was stumped off Jayasuriya and Ramesh Mendis finished the innings.

Forced to follow on 448 runs in arrears, Ireland was 41-5 by lunch. While the bowlers were pinning down

Ireland, Nishan Madushka was also outstanding in the field. His sharp low grab at short leg removed Peter Moor minutes before lunch, and his anticipation of a paddle sweep ended the 60-run resistance between Curtis Campher and Harry Tector.

Tector was dismissed shortly after, run out for 42 after slipping while trying to return to his crease and losing his bat. Ireland was 108-7 and lasted 15 more overs.

Ireland played only its fifth test, and was involved in its first test series. The second and last test starts at the same venue on Monday.

"Sri Lanka at home are a daunting prospect for any team, never mind a team that haven't played a lot of test cricket," Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie said. "There are learnings. We've got to find a way to compete better and more consistently. "We had one test (in Bangladesh two weeks ago) which prepared us for this one, but it's still probably not enough preparation."

## Mickey Arthur arrives in Pakistan for brief visit before taking up new role

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former Pakistan head coach Mickey Arthur reached Islamabad on Tuesday to spend time with the national men's side ahead of his formal appointment as the team's consultant director.

Arthur will stay with the Green Shirts, who are currently engaged in five-game T20 series against New Zealand, till April 20 before departing England, where he serves as head coach of Derbyshire

County Cricket Club.

During his stay, the former head coach will meet the national team in Islamabad and discuss plans with captain Babar Azam and other players. Pakistan will play the last two T20Is against New Zealand in Rawalpindi on April 20 and 24.

The chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) management committee Najam Sethi while addressing a press conference last month hinted at

the possible return of Arthur, saying the decision regarding his appointment would be made soon.

"If there was any sort of compulsion to take Mickey on board then we would have done that already. It is getting delayed because I'm listening to your voices and conveying it to Mickey that our media is raising questions and you should answer them," Sethi had told the journalists.

## China basketball clubs disqualified for match-fixing

BEIJING (Agencies): Two clubs have been kicked out of China's basketball league amid suspicions of match-fixing.

The ruling came after the Chinese Basketball Association judged the Jiangsu Dragons and Shanghai Sharks engaged in unsportsmanlike conduct during a playoff series last week.

They were suspended from this year's regular season, fined the equivalent of \$5 million, and their managers and coaching staff barred from the league for up to five years.

Fan and media attention was drawn to a last-minute, come-from-behind win by Shanghai following a series of turnovers in the last of their three games to reach the quarterfinals.

In Friday's Game 3 of

the first round of the playoffs, the Jiangsu Dragons led the Shanghai Sharks 100-96 with 1 minute, 36 seconds left to play.

The Dragons committed five straight turnovers over the next minute, giving the Sharks a 10-point lead. The game ended in a 108-104 win for Shanghai and a 2-1 victory in the series, sending the Sharks into the quarters. The CBA, headed by NBA great Yao Ming, announced on Saturday it was investigating both teams' conduct during their series.

Shanghai's two American former NBA players, point guard Eric Bledsoe and forward Michael Beasley, went on social media to distance themselves from the scandal. "I was suspended and couldn't play," Bledsoe posted on Twitter. Beasley

wrote on Instagram: "I want to make it clear that I had no involvement in the recent allegations of game-fixing within the Shanghai Sharks organization."

Beasley was signed by Shanghai last year but never got to play because of injury, and said he's left the team by mutual consent.

The CBA investigation highlighted continuing suspicions about widespread corruption in Chinese professional sports, especially in football. Basketball remains enormously popular in China, mostly because of Yao's storied NBA career.

That's despite a year-long ban on NBA games being shown in the country after a team executive angered Beijing with remarks supporting Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

## Carlos Sainz: Ferrari have Australian GP penalty appeal rejected

PARIS (Agencies): Ferrari's attempt to overturn Carlos Sainz's penalty at the Australian Grand Prix has been rejected.

The race stewards reconvened on Tuesday to hear Ferrari's petition for a right of review of the penalty, which dropped Sainz from fourth place to 12th. They decided that "no significant and relevant new element" had been presented by Ferrari, so dismissed the petition.

Stewards said their view that Sainz was wholly to blame had not changed. Sainz was given a five-second penalty for colliding with Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin. It dropped him further than it would normally have done because the field was compressed after a series of race stoppages.

Ferrari claimed to have three new pieces of information that had not been considered by the stewards when they imposed the penalty, which was done

while the race was still officially running.

These were the telemetry data from Sainz's car, the driver's own witness statement and other drivers' statements, taken from post-race interviews.

One of these was with Alonso, who said he viewed the penalty as "harsh". Ferrari also cited an incident that happened at the Canadian Grand Prix in 2014 after which the Force India team was allowed a review because their driver Sergio Perez had not been spoken to by stewards before a decision had been made.

Stewards rejected that argument, saying the incident in question was "quite different", as the stewards at the time had been undecided on whether Perez or Williams' Felipe Massa was to blame and the drivers involved had been taken to hospital.

Perez was given a five-place grid penalty for the following race, which was upheld after Force India's

request for a review. On Ferrari's other arguments, they said they had already viewed the extensive telemetry to which the FIA had access before making their decision and that they did not feel the need to speak to Sainz to decide he was wholly to blame for the incident.

"Had we thought that this required a statement from Sainz for us to analyse the event, we would have summoned him after the race," the verdict said.

"We did not consider it necessary then to hear from him to decide that fact."

"His witness statement, in essence, states how poor the grip was and how the sun was in his eyes."

"But logic would dictate that the position of the sun would have equally impacted other drivers too. It is not a justifiable reason to avoid a penalty for a collision." They added that the other drivers' comments were "not significant or relevant".



GALLE: Sri Lanka walk back after a mammoth Test win against Ireland.

## PCB to play its part in reducing carbon emissions

LAHORE (PPI): The Pakistan Cricket Board will use its reach to create awareness about the need to reduce carbon emissions by joining hands with Minus2Degrees (M2D).

As part of its corporate social responsibility, the PCB will promote practices that encourage recycling during cricket events with the aim of achieving net zero carbon emission. The first step towards this cause will see the PCB and M2D plant as many as a thousand trees on Lahore's famous Canal road.

Over the course of the next two years, the PCB will benefit from the M2D's research on bringing down

the carbon emission and will adopt recommended practices for the betterment of environment that will help the sport and Pakistan cricket fans at large.

PCB Management Committee Chairperson Mr Najam Sethi: "The climate change is a real threat to our existence and it is extremely important that we play a role in create awareness about the need to reduce carbon emission."

"Cricket is the most loved and followed sport in the country and we have signed a MoU with Minus2Degrees to use the game's reach for a cause that will benefit this and the

future generations.

"The PCB has always been a supporter of eco-friendly campaigns and we will support M2D in this cause. Together, we can make changes and contribute to our society, making it a habit to use eco-friendly, recycled, and sustainable products to reduce pollution."

President M2D Mr Fawad Sarwar: "It is with the utmost honor and overflowing joy that I stand before you today to announce a momentous collaboration between my company Minus2Degrees (M2D) and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on

their remarkable Net Zero initiatives. Aligning ourselves with the PCB is akin to joining hands with the heart and soul of the Pakistani people, and we are humbled and privileged to be able to assist them in reaching their goals.

M2D's vision is to assist countries, industries, businesses, and sports organizations in adopting environmentally sustainable practices that are aligned with the United Nation's (UN) net-zero goals for 2030 and 2050. Through these efforts, M2D aims to protect the Earth from the disastrous effects of global climate change."



## NZ buoyant after clinching Lahore thriller, says Mitchell

LAHORE (Agencies): New Zealand eked out a thrilling four-run victory in the third Twenty20 International against Pakistan in Lahore to stay alive in the series and all-rounder Daryl Mitchell said the win would give them confidence for the last two matches in Rawalpindi.

New Zealand are without regular skipper Kane Williamson, who is set to miss the 50-overs World Cup in India later this year with a knee injury, while several others are playing in the Indian Premier League.

Starting at a series defeat after back-to-back losses, the touring side put up a competitive 163-5 at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on Monday on the back of Tom Latham's 49-ball 64.

Pakistan slumped to 88-7 in reply but Iftikhar Ahmed's 24-ball 60 injected drama into the contest.

Pakistan needed five runs off the last three balls but Jimmy Neesham removed Iftikhar, followed that with a dot ball, and then dismissed Haris Rauf to thwart the hosts.

"It was obviously a hell of a game of cricket and awesome for the boys to get across the line," Mitchell, who made 33, said on Tuesday.

"It gives the guys a lot of confidence heading into the rest of the series and you never know what will happen over the next few games."

Mitchell was proud how New Zealand had fought their way back into the series but said they would need to adapt quickly in Rawalpindi, which hosts the last two matches on Thursday and next Monday.

"It's obviously a new ground, a new challenge and a new surface. So we'll be pretty clear on how we want to play on that surface."

"We'll adapt as quickly as we can. Hopefully we win a few little moments and we'll see what happens."

## Man City submit £300m plan to increase capacity to 60,000

MANCHESTER (Agencies): Manchester City have submitted a planning application for a £300m expansion of Etihad Stadium.

The club want to increase the current capacity of 53,400 to 60,000 by expanding the North Stand. Proposals include a sky bar overlooking the pitch and a stadium roof walk experience.

A 3,000-capacity fan zone, new club shop and museum, and 400-bed hotel have also been proposed in the application to Manchester City Council.

The club say the project, which would take three years to complete, would create a "best-in-class fan experience and year-round

entertainment and leisure destination". The planning application follows a consultation with fans and the local community.

City say the proposals represent more than £300m investment into east Manchester, and could create 2,600 jobs, with priority for people from Greater Manchester.

There are also plans for new office spaces for businesses that want to work in collaboration with the club and their partners.

In August, City announced discussions were in a primary phase to expand the two-tier North Stand to three tiers, but their planning application proposes to expand the single upper tier above the

existing lower tier.

"As with all Club developments, ensuring our local community benefit is a key priority and we believe these proposals will deliver long-term economic and social opportunities, building on the regeneration work delivered in east Manchester by City Football Group since 2008," said Danny Wilson, managing director of Manchester City Operations.

The Etihad was built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games and has been home to the Premier League champions since 2003. An expansion in 2015 added 6,000 seats and the ground currently has the fifth-largest capacity of Premier League stadiums.

## PPC Ramazan Sports Gala ends

Ali Sheikh

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Press Club Ramazan Sports Gala ended with a glittering closing ceremony the other night.

IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur was the chief guest on the occasion.

Peshawar Press Club President Arshad Aziz Malik, former presidents M Riaz, Shamim Shahid, Pakistan Sports Writers Federation President Amjad Aziz Malik, Hope CEO Zubair Elahi, Peshawar Press Club Secretary Irfan Musazai and Chairman Sports Committee Zafar Iqbal and large number of journalists were also present on the occasion.

Around 150 journalists participated in five different sports including bad-

minton, table tennis, snooker, carom board and ludo. In the Badminton event team of Ali Sheikh and Irfan Musazai beat Zafar Iqbal and Abid in a tough contest. After losing the first game 9-15, Zafar and Abid bounced back to take the second game 15-13.

However, Irfan and Ali Sheikh proved too strong for their opponents winning the next games 15-10 to lift the badminton title.

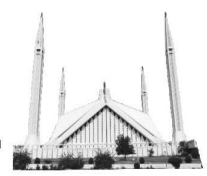
Snooker event saw a big upset when Tayyab Usman stunned tournament favourite Zeeshan Liaqat for their opponents winning the next games 15-10 to lift the badminton title. Unbeaten throughout the event as he did not lose any game. Meanwhile, in the table tennis event, Ali Sheikh beat Abid in straight sets by a score of 11-09, 11-06 and 11-05. Abid failed to play

his natural game and did more unforced errors which provided Ali Sheikh a chance to win the match.

In the carom board final Zulfiqar Chacha outclassed Safer Ahmad to lift the title. While in Ludo Irshad Maidani beat Nadir Khawaja to win the title. In women's carom board event, Anila Shaheen and Shaista Taslim won first position by defeating Salma Jahangir and Naila in the final. Similarly, Anila Shaheen won gold while Asma Basir won silver medal in Ludo event. In the final of senior badminton championship, Arshad Aziz Malik won the final by defeating Shahabuddin by 2-1. IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan Gandapur gave away the trophies and shields among the participants.







## In brief

### 3 bids to smuggle flour bags foiled

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police here on Tuesday foiled three bids to smuggle 2275 flour and 60 fine flour (maida) bags. According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the food department along with Potohar Division police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up three namely Noor ul Amin, Ghulam Naveed and Aminullah. He informed that the accused were trying to smuggle wheat flour bags out of Rawalpindi division. The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi were strictly monitoring all the exit points of Rawalpindi district to foil wheat and flour smuggling bids, he added.

### IRSA releases 110,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 110,500 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 102,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1434.37 feet and was 36.37 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow in the dam was recorded as 32,200 cusecs while the outflow as 35,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1106.30 feet, 56.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 32,600 cusecs and 38,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 39,600, 31,900, 25,500 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 21,700 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 7,900 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

### RDA issues notices to 3 marketing companies

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of Director General (DG) Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa on Tuesday issued notices to three marketing companies for advertising illegal housing projects. According to RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate RDA issued notices to Advice Associates, Lead Marketing, and Zameen.com for violating the rules and directed to stop advertising illegal housing schemes. The marketing companies had been directed that unless a project gets a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from RDA, it could not be declared as an approved or legal project. "The marketing companies are misleading the citizens and they are investing in illegal housing schemes. The marketing, and projection of such projects is giving the impression that the projects are approved and legal, he added. "The marketing companies have been directed to stop advertisements of illegal projects." He advised the citizens not to invest in illegal housing schemes and check their status before any investment on the RDA website [www.rda.gop.pk](http://www.rda.gop.pk). "The MP&TE Directorate of RDA can also be contacted to know the status of the housing societies," he informed.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker NA Raja Pervez Ashraf witnessing the Exhibition of rare Manuscripts of the Holy Quran in-connection with the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Constitution of Pakistan.

## Sanjrani meets Secretary General of Muslim World League

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani on Tuesday met Sheikh Dr Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, in Medina Munawarah, Saudi Arabia. The meeting was also attended by senators Dilawar Khan, Muhammad Abdul Qadir and Faisal Saleem Rehman, and Member of the Prime Minister's Inspection Commission Nauman Khan, a news release said. Sheikh Dr Mohammad welcomed the Senate chairman and his delegation to Saudi Arabia and congratulated them on performing Umrah. The Senate chairman expressed Pakistan's admiration for the Muslim World League's leadership in the fight against Islamophobia. He also commended the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's development under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz

and praised the vision of Saudi Prime Minister Prince Muhammed bin Salman for the betterment of the Saudi people.

He also expressed special gratitude to King Salman and Prince Mohammed for their recent financial assistance to Pakistan, which, he believed, would help alleviate the country's financial difficulties.

He also lauded Saudi Arabia's provision of ideal facilities for visitors and commended the efforts of the Muslim World League in removing misunderstandings about Islam in the West and spreading the peaceful and tolerant ideology of Islam in the non-Muslim world.

Sanjrani emphasized the commendable role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Muslim World League, and especially the Secretary General in solving the problems of the Islamic world. He also expressed

appreciation for Saudi Arabia's efforts for peace and development in the region. The Senate chairman highlighted the strong, longstanding brotherly relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which was deeply rooted in their common religion, values, and culture.

He stated that both countries had always stood by each other in all kinds of difficult situations, and Pakistan attached great importance to its relations with Saudi Arabia.

The Senate of Pakistan and the Arab World League agreed to further promote cooperation. The Arab World League was the representative forum of the Islamic world, its secretary general said.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both sides reaffirming their commitment to enhancing cooperation and strengthening the bond between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

## Upgradation of Old Bannu road project to improve connectivity

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highway Authority is progressing steadily on the dualization and upgradation project of the old Bannu Road, which is an important transport link between Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

An NHA official told APP on Tuesday that a lot of progress has been made on the old Bannu road which spans 84 km and has been divided into three packages. He said that the first package from Gandhi Chowk to Sarai Norang has been completed while work on the remaining two packages is in progress.

The official said that the project for the upgradation of Parana Bannu Road has been given to the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) and progress is being made at an impressive pace.

He said that the Old Bannu road is an essential route that connects several major cities in KP and the completion of this project will not only improve transportation infrastructure but also enhance connectivity for local communities.

## Police issue list of 100 Safe City E-Challan defaulters

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Police has issued a list of 100 defaulters of Safe City E-Challan, who have been found the most frequent violators of traffic rules.

"These individuals have been issued e-challan tickets for their violations but have failed to submit the required fines," said the spokesman of Islamabad Capital Police on Tuesday.

He said that the vehicles of the violators would be locked in police stations until the fines are paid, adding that the Safe City cameras are diligently monitoring vehicles violating the traffic rules.

The spokesman urged all citizens to comply with the city's traffic rules. The owners of these vehicles have been asked to submit the fines as soon as possible. The Islamabad Capital Police is making efforts for making an integrated traffic system to ensure safer roads for all citizens, he added.

## Kundi for 'political consensus' to make polls results acceptable

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Faisal Karim Kundi on Tuesday urged that all political parties need to sit together to resolve issues and introduce electoral reforms for making the election results acceptable across the political divide.

Talking to a state news channel, Kundi said that 'same date polls' [referring to holding elections simultaneously across the country] had now become a major bone of contention which needed to be addressed with the consultation of all parties. "The political parties should set aside their differences to

uphold democracy and protect its integrity through free, fair, and transparent elections," he added.

When asked about his proposal for the talks with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), he said the election should be held on the same day, adding, political parties including the PTI should develop a consensus on having elections across Pakistan on the same date.

Replying to a question, he said the PPP would fully participate in elections, saying the party was not shying away to contest the polls but the elections of provincial and national assemblies should be held simultaneously.

## ANF seizes over 6765 kg drugs worth \$ 355.112m

ISLAMABAD (APP): Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) seized 6765.499 kg drugs, worth US\$ 355.112 million and arrested 29 persons including one Woman and impounded 15 vehicles while conducting 36 counter narcotics operations throughout the country.

According to spokesperson of the ANF, the seized drugs comprised 3724.670 Kg Opium, 75.743 Kg Heroin, 1080.209 Kg Hashish, 88.355 Kg Methamphetamine (Ice), 16,700 Kg Amphetamine, 1720 Kg Ketamine, 58 Kg Volume Tabs (170000 x Tablets) and 1,822 Kg Diazepam Tabs (10040 x Tablets) and 120 x Liters Liquid Amphetamine.

ANF Balochistan recovered 4742.88 Kg Drugs in 7 operations while arrested 6 persons involved in drugs smuggling and impounded 4 vehicles. The seized

drugs comprised 3716.670 Kg Opium, 64 Kg Heroin, 878.510 Kg Hashish, 67 Kg Methamphetamine (Ice), 16,700 Kg Amphetamine, and 120 x Liters Liquid Amphetamine.

ANF Punjab recovered 1757.045 Kg Drugs in 8 operations while arrested 9 persons including 1 x woman involved in drugs smuggling and impounded 6 vehicles. The seized drugs comprised 3,600 Kg Opium, 9,075 Kg Heroin, 23,160 Kg Hashish, 1,210 Kg Methamphetamine (Ice) and 1720 Kg Ketamine.

ANF Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recovered 149,245 Kg Drugs in 9 operations while arrested 4 persons involved in drugs smuggling and impounded a vehicle. The seized drugs comprised 2,400 Kg Opium, 0,581 Kg Heroin, 128,764 Kg Hashish and 17,500

Kg Methamphetamine (Ice). ANF Sindh recovered 62,525 Kg Drugs in 4 operations while arrested 3 persons involved in drugs smuggling and impounded 3 vehicles. The seized drugs comprised 1,550 Kg Heroin, 2,975 Kg Hashish and 58 Kg Volume Tabs (170000 x Tablets).

ANF North recovered 53,804 Kg drugs in 8 operations, arrested 7 persons in drugs smuggling and impounded a vehicle. The seized drugs comprised 2 Kg Opium, 0,537 Kg Heroin, 46,800 Kg Hashish, 2,645 Kg Methamphetamine (Ice) and 1,822 Kg Diazepam Tabs (10040 x Tablets).

Cases have been registered at respective ANF Police Stations under CNS Act 1997 (Amended 2022) and further investigations are under process.

## Overseas ministry to establish protectorate of emigrant offices in all major cities: NA told

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentary Secretary of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Syed Agha Rafiullah on Tuesday informed the National Assembly that a summary has been moved to establish protectorate of emigrant offices in all the major cities.

Responding to a calling attention notice regarding non-availability of protectorate of emigrant offices in Sukkur, Bannu, Abbottabad and Gilgit-Baltistan, he said, "Keeping in view the importance, the Ministry has moved a summary to establish offices in all the major cities and minister himself would introduce it to the federal cabinet for the approval soon."

He informed the members that former Prime Minister Imran Khan has shifted Abbottabad protectorate of the emigrant office to Sawat on the request of the then

communication minister.

He said that the minister of Overseas Pakistan had carried out visits to various countries to explore more job opportunities for Pakistanis. "Agreements with various countries are in the pipeline and these would be finalized soon" he added.

He said that talks with Malta, Korea and Japan are also underway to accommodate more Pakistanis in these countries.

He said that all the information regarding availability of job opportunities abroad is for the information of the public.

Responding to another question, he claimed that during the previous regime Imran Khan's front man committed corruption in the overseas ministry. The Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervaiz Ashraf referred the matter to the concern committee for detailed discussion.

## NA organises exhibition of rare manuscripts of Holy Qur'an

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly Secretariat has organised the exhibition of rare manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an in collaboration with the Iranian Consulate and Iran-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies in connection with the golden jubilee celebration of the Constitution and the sacred day of 27th Ramadan. Parliamentarians, media representatives, students and a large number of the public witnessed the exhibition.

Inaugurating the exhibi-

tion of rare Manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an, National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf has said that the Holy Quran is the best guide for humanity and implementing its teaching in letter and spirit will lead all Muslim ummah out of current socio-economic challenges. He also expressed his gratitude to Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf for extending cooperation to hold this exhibition.

Later on, in response to a query by media representatives Raja Pervez Ashraf

said that improving ties between Iran and Saudia Arabia is pivotal for regional peace and progress.

Recent positive developments in relations between both Iran and Saudi Arabia are a good omen for the Muslim world. He also said that this exhibition would make the next generation familiar with rich Islamic values and traditions. He added, "Both Pakistan and Iran enjoy mutual ties based upon a shared culture of Islamic values and traditions."

## Digital platforms replaces culture of Eid cards

ISLAMABAD (APP): The culture of writing letters and sending Eid cards is fast diminishing in the present society where people especially youngsters were seen prefer to wish their near ones through electronic greetings and downloading Eid greeting apps ahead of the upcoming festival of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The nature of Eid greetings has drastically changed now as most citizens had turned to digital platforms to wish Eid greetings instead of sharing Eid cards, said a report aired by a Private news channel.

No doubt the days are gone when people used to send Eid cards to family and friends on a large scale, said an old age citizen, adding, at present people have switched over to the internet, mobile phones and social networks to express their feelings.

The particular trend has dwindled over the years, said a female teacher, adding, the practice of sending Eid cards was once routine for most families to spend time appropriately selecting, purchasing, writing and posting Eid

greeting cards to friends and families but now, it has become a rarity.

Talking about the declining trend of the cards, a social media user said our lifestyle has changed now.

"We are more mindful of our money now.

It's more convenient to download e-cards from the internet, which are free and one card can be sent to many friends with a single click."

The people are seen exchanging advance E cards with heartfelt messages among relatives, friends and loved ones through social media services such as Facebook and Whatsapp on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr, said a youngster.

The booksellers and gift owners said the trend of buying Eid cards had significantly declined due to social media. For any festivals, social media have designed many cards and animations, said a digital expert, adding, Whatsapp, Instagram and Facebook have become the new trend and now people use these instant social media networks to wish their loved ones, said internet user.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq holds Farewell Meeting for Outgoing Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Syed Mohammad Ali Hossen at Ministry of Economic Affairs.



### 114 prisoners released

FARAH (Agencies): Based on Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 114 prisoners released from a prison in Farah province. Lately, the Supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued an order based on 114 prisoners released from prison in Farah. Meanwhile, on Monday, 91 prisoners, including: 44 women and 47 men were released from Kabul and Ghor prisons ahead of Eid al-Fitr.

## The Frontier Post

# AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 28, 1444 — Wednesday, April 19, 2023

### Reporters traveled to Ghor

GHOR (Agencies): 3 BBC world reporters traveled to the Ghor to report on the living conditions of the people. The provincial, Head of Information and Culture, Mawlawi Abdul Hai Zaim said in a meeting with these reporters that the IEA supports the media. He asked the reporters to reflect the environmental challenges of the people, including the lack of basic roads and electricity, so that international organizations pay attention to the situation of people in that province.

## Taliban supreme leader issues Eid message

KABUL (Khaama Press): The de facto regime of Afghanistan's supreme leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada on Tuesday released an Eid-ul Fitr message and asked the people of Afghanistan to be thankful for "peace and Islamic Sharia System."

Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada said, "Significant reform measures have been taken in culture, education, economy, media and other fields, and the bad intellectual and moral effects of the 20-year occupation are about to finish."

He added, "Countrymen should consider these reform measures essential because living in the light of Sharia principles will lead to the well-being of

our world and the hereafter, as well as the eternal happiness, success and salvation of our society."

He further calls on "religious scholars" to work closely with the group's Ministry of Vice and Virtue "to inform the people of religion and reform their acts throughout the country."

"Remarkable corrective measures have been taken in the fields of culture, education, economy, media and other sectors, and the wrong intellectual and moral effects of the occupation are coming to an end," the statement said.

He also called upon everyone to participate in the country's development. "So now, all responsible or irresponsible Afghans,

we should make our country prosperous and stand on its feet."

Meanwhile, he said about providing education and training to all children.

"Extending education and training to the whole country and providing good training to all children is one of the responsibilities of the Islamic Emirate, and effective plans for further development are also worked on," he said.

However, since the de facto government took control of power in August 2021, girls were banned from education beyond primary school.

In addition, last year, in December, females were banned from going to university.

## Iran reiterates claim on shared water resources with Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press) Iran Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian tweeted that he discussed the disputed water resources with his Afghan counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi while they were both in Uzbekistan.

"In my recent talks with Mr. Muttaqi, acting Foreign Minister of the de facto government of Afghanistan in Samarkand city, we emphasized the issue of Iran's claim on the Helmand River in detail."

He continued by saying the Afghan side "also emphasized its commitment to Iran's water rights," and both sides "agreed to take immediate action" in this regard, he said in a tweet.

Both sides met on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan in the Samarkand city of Uzbekistan on the 13th of April.

Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Iran is said to have undertaken many rounds of negotiations with Taliban leaders, most recently in January 2022 with Muttaqi.

However, Taliban representatives have been in contact with Iran over the issue of sharing Water. They will probably use Water to persuade Tehran to accede to some of their demands. Of course, the top item on their list is that Iran grants the Taliban administration diplomatic recognition. Iran has decided against endorsing the Taliban government until it becomes inclusive.

According to Dr Glen Hearn, who worked as the previous government's transboundary water advisor between 2012 and 2014, Iran and Afghanistan signed a water-sharing agreement on the Helmand River in 1973, under which Afghanistan would provide Iran with 22 cubic meters of water per second with the option to purchase an additional four cubic meters per second for "goodwill and brotherly relations."

In other words, based on the agreement of 1973, Afghanistan committed to delivering an average of 820 million cubic meters of water to Iran annually. Iran has repeatedly criticized Afghanistan for not complying with the terms of the agreement.

However, four decades of political turmoil in the country prevented the treaty's implementation. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's turmoil allowed all its rivers to flow to the neighbouring countries, including Helmand River.

Currently, according to the data from the previous government, the Ministry of Water and Energy, Afghanistan only uses 20 per cent of water resources, and the rest of the surface water goes to the neighbouring countries, including Iran and Pakistan.

## Japan's envoy to Kabul meets Afghan Deputy PM



KABUL (Khaama Press): Japanese ambassador to Afghanistan, Takashi Okada, met with Deputy Prime Minister Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi on Tuesday to discuss Afghanistan's challenges.

During the meeting, Deputy Minister Hanafi emphasized the need for understanding and dialogue to solve the existing problems in the country.

Meanwhile, he said that pressure and restrictions

could not resolve Afghanistan's problems and that the interim government is determined to forge positive leadership with all nations based on cooperation and respect.

Additionally, he emphasized that there is only one approach to handling the current issues burdening the country's ordinary people: understanding and dialogue.

On the other hand, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa led a G-7

session on "Afghanistan and Central Asia" on Monday and spoke about his concern for the country's deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation.

Simultaneously, he recommended direct engagement between the international world and the Taliban-led administration.

"Emphasized the need to engage persistently and directly with the Taliban while continuing to assist the people of Afghanistan in

cooperation with the international community," Japan's FM said. Recently, the Taliban de facto government extended the ban on UN female aid workers in the country, facing massive condemnation globally.

Meanwhile, the UN reiterated that the ban on women aid workers would disrupt the humanitarian pace in the country since most of the nutrition and life-saving aid depends on female workers.

## Shopkeepers share mixed views on market condition ahead of Eid

KABUL (Pajhwok): Most shopkeepers in capital Kabul said people were less interested in Eid shopping due to financial issues while some were satisfied with the market condition and their daily income.

Muslims have two Eids in a year — Eid —Ul- Fitr and Eid —Ul- Adha — traditionally and historically, families in Afghanistan buy fresh and dried fruits every year before Eid and prepare them for their guests.

Now there are almost four days left until to Eid-Ul-Fitr, and the markets of Kabul have taken on a new color with the stalls of dry fruits and colorful clothes in the shops.

Mohammad Fahim, one of the dry fruit sellers in the Taimani area of Kabul, said public economic situation was not good this time comparing to past years and there was the reason behind dwindling market condition.

He also linked the problem with the high prices and added in the past we were unable to find free time when four or five days were left to Eid.

He said the prices of some dried fruits were stable while some jumped, adding if dried fruits are not exported to foreign nations their price remain stable in the local market.

Mohammad Nabi, one of the sweets sellers in the Mandavi area of Kabul, while referring to his business said: "It is fair, thanks, things are just moving."

He said comparing to

normal days their business bloomed in these days due to Eid-Ul-Fitr.

Mohammad Yousuf, one of the bakeries sellers in the Pul-i-Bagh Omumi area of Kabul, said due to inflation and lack of work people were less interested in Eid shopping. He said comparing to last year's Eid-Ul-Fitr this time their business was not good.

Mohammad Akram, a chips seller, said chips and dried pea was low and people were more interested to

purchase them while pistachio, almond and other nuts were expensive.

He said chips have different varieties, in the past one kilogram of chips were available for up to 200 afi while currently the price of chips declined to 120 afi.

Qand Agha, the owner of a bakery in 500-family area of Kabul, said comparing to the past their sale has increased now. "In the past we sole up to seven tonnes of bakery products while this time we have sole more

than 10 tonnes of bakery products," he said.

Abdul Malik Muradi, a shoes seller, in the Mandavi bazaar of Kabul said that he announced sale and every pair of sandal is 300 afi.

He also said the market condition was good and he was satisfied. It is pertinent to mention that recently tailors also complained against the dwindling market condition and told Pajhwok Afghan News that people were not interested in giving orders for new cloths.



## ‘Leaving Afghanistan would be heartbreaking’

KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations is ready to take the "heartbreaking" decision to pull out of Afghanistan in May if it can't persuade the Taliban to let local women work for the organization, the head of the UN Development Program said.

UN officials are negotiating with the Islamist government in the hope that it will make exceptions to an edict this month barring local women from working for the organization, UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner told The Associated Press. "It is fair to say that where we are right now is the entire UN system having to take a step back and reevaluating its ability to operate there," Steiner said. "But it's not about negotiating fundamental principles, human rights."

The Taliban have allowed Afghan women to engage in some work, Steiner said, and a UN report released Tuesday shows that the country desperately needs more women working, with its economy flailing.

The Taliban takeover has been accompanied by some very modest signs of economic recovery. There has been some increase in exports, some exchange rate stabilization and less than during their previous stint in power in the 1990s, the Taliban have imposed harsh measures since taking over the country in 2021 as US and NATO forces were

growth, meaning that per capita income will decline from \$359 in 2022 to \$345 in 2024, the report says.

Some of those economic problems are due to Taliban policies keeping most women out of the workplace, Steiner said. Those economic problems mean more need in the country, but the UN has decided that human rights are non-negotiable and it will leave in May if the Taliban do not relent. "I think there is no other way of putting it than heartbreaking," Steiner said. "I mean, if I were to imagine the UN family not being in Afghanistan today, I have before me these images of millions of young girls, young boys, fathers, mothers, who essentially will not have enough to eat."

A source of faint optimism is the Taliban's allowing women to work in specific circumstances in health, education and some small businesses. "In one sense, the de facto authorities have enabled the UN to roll out a significant humanitarian and also emergency development assistance set of activities," Steiner said. "But they also continuously are shifting the goalposts, issuing new edicts."

Despite initial promises of a more moderate rule than during their previous stint in power in the 1990s, the Taliban have imposed harsh measures since taking over the country in 2021 as US and NATO forces were

pulling out of Afghanistan after two decades of war.

This month the Taliban took a step further in the restrictive measures they have imposed on women and said that female Afghan staffers employed with the UN mission can no longer report for work.

"This is a very fundamental moment that we're approaching. And obviously our hope and expectation is that there will be some common sense prevailing," Steiner said. Afghanistan's deputy economy minister, Abdul Latif Nazari, did not respond to questions from the AP about the country's economic conditions. A spokesman for the Finance Ministry, Ahmad Wali Haqmal, was unavailable for comment.

Aid agencies have been providing food, education and health care support to Afghans since the Taliban takeover and the economic collapse that followed it. No country has recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, and the country's seat at the UN is held by the former government of President Ashraf Ghani.

The 3,300 Afghans employed by the UN — 2,700 men and 600 women — have stayed home since April 12 but continue to work and will be paid, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric has said. The UN's 600 international staff, including 200 women, is not affected by the Taliban ban.

## China helped Afghanistan by maintaining embassy



KABUL (TOLONews): Islamic Emirate spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid expressed gratitude for the continuous Chinese diplomatic presence in Kabul. He made the remarks during an interview with a Chinese media outlet.

"We are grateful for the Chinese government. They helped our nation by keeping their embassy open and active," Mujahid noted.

According to the Islamic Emirate spokesman, Kabul and Beijing are now in contact over a variety of sec-

tors, including the Mes Aynak project.

"We are still speaking with them about a number of issues, including the Qashgari project, which will be addressed, and the Mes Aynak project, which is also being resolved. Both Afghanistan and China need to invest and benefit. The way China sees investing in Afghanistan is admirable, and we both need it. China, on the other hand, needs a market for its investments in the region," Mujahid added.

However, some political analysts said that Kabul should pursue a balanced policy with all nations.

"The closer we get to China, the more things we lose. The only thing that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan can do in today's situation is to maintain the balance, if they do not maintain the balance, proxy wars will start in Afghanistan," said Salim Paigir, a political analyst.

"China can be recognized as a good and reliable partner in the field of Afghan mining if Afghanistan's economic interests are considered necessary, above any other political and economic goals," said Shakir Yaqoobi, an economist.

Even though the Islamic Emirate has embassies in Beijing, Tehran, Istanbul, Islamabad, Dubai, Moscow, and a number of Arab and African nations, no nation has yet formally recognized it.

## Classes stopped at private education centers

KANDAHAR/HELMAND (TOLONews): Wakil Ahmad Moutawakel, a spokesman for the Kandahar education department, said their office received a letter from the Ministry of Education ordering classes at all private local educational institutions in Kandahar to stop until further notice.

According to the letter, a delegation has been appointed by the Education Ministry to review the "projects and activities" of all educational institutions in Kandahar and Helmand, and for this purpose the educational departments of these provinces have been ordered to suspend activities of non-university private education, which includes private grade schools, private high schools and

private post-secondary education centers.

"There is nothing to be worried about. The negotiations are still continuing to solve the problems in this section. There is nothing to be worried about because it is around 450 to 500 educational classes," Mutawakel said.

"Our activities in the educational sectors for the children have been halted," said Fazal Sabiri, head of an educational center.

Sources told TOLONews that some NGOs have launched local educational classes for the girls and boys in remote areas of the country.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Economy (MoE) said that at least 178 organizations are active in the educational sector.

"There are 178 private--

118 domestic and 60 foreign-- organizations active in the educational sector in 34 provinces," said Abdul Rahman Habib, a spokesman for the Education Ministry.

It has been more than one and a half years since the Islamic Emirate banned female students above grade six from attending schools.

Sumaya, who is a student in grade eight, called on the Islamic Emirate to reopen their schools.

"We hope the doors of the schools are reopened as soon as possible because we need to study, and education causes us to improve," said Dina, a student.

Earlier, UNICEF said that it had launched more than 5,000 local classes for students, and girls comprise at least 50 percent of them.

## Health Ministry: More resources needed to counter haemophilia



KABUL (TOLONews): On World Haemophilia Day, the Ministry of Public Health, voiced concerns over the lack of sufficient facilities to treat patients

who are suffering from this disease.

The Deputy Minister of Administrative Affairs of the MoPH, Mohammad Ishaq Sahibzada, said that

the ministry is trying to establish new centers for patients who are suffering from Haemophilia.

"We will build centers to treat haemophilia in

other zones as well, to serve our poor nation," he said.

This comes as the head of the central blood bank, Mohammad Nasir Sadiq, said that more than 30,000 people are suffering from haemophilia across the country and that the bank provided over 2.1 million factors (clotting substances) to the patients.

He also voiced concern, saying that they lack enough facilities for the treatment of the patients.

"There is a lack of facilities and a lack of experts to treat haemophilia," Sadiq said.

This comes as the head of the curative medicine section of the MoPH, Ahmad Seyar Pawan, called on aid organizations to provide facilities for the treatment of Haemophilia.

"I call on the national and international charity

committees, private sector, World Health Organization and International Federation of Haemophilia to pay particular attention to haemophilia disease," he said.

The patients who are suffering from haemophilia also asked that their problems be addressed.

"They send factors to our zones. I came from Mazar-e-Sharif. You know that the people are struggling with economic problems. We have serious problems. We come here once a month and we are being provided with only one factor for a month-- while one is good for only one week," said Farhad, a patient.

April 17 marks World Haemophilia Day. The number of patients with Haemophilia in Afghanistan has not yet been determined.



# Strategy to be chalked out for revival of economic stability, says Gillani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) senior leader and former Prime Minister (PM) Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani on Tuesday expressed the hope that the political leaders in the coalition government would soon announce a strategy that would bring economic and political stability to the country.

Talking to media persons here after meeting Mutthidda Quami Movement (MQM) along with Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed Qamar, Adviser to Prime Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira said, "Politicians should play their role as a bridge not as a wall." "PPP wants to make a conducive environment for dialogue among the political parties as we believe all problems being faced by the county can only be addressed through the dialogue," he added.

Yousaf Raza Gillani said the eyes

of over 220 million masses were looking to the political parties in the current political and economic instability in the country. "Political stability is directly linked with economic stability and the masses could get relief from the government after this achievement," he added.

He said that PPP had signed the Charter of Democracy (CoD), under which constitutional amendments were made and then President Asif Ali Zardari under that legislation delegated all his powers to the Parliament Yousuf Raza Gillani said that all political forces direly needed join hands for the supremacy of the Parliament and to ensure that all institutions work in their domain. Responding to a query, he said that PPP would also approach Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (F) and finalized its dialogue process with allies of the government.

MQM leader Muhammad Abubakar appreciated the efforts of the PPP for engaging all political forces for strengthening democratic institutions and the supremacy of Parliament in the country. He said, "Keeping in view the prevailing political situation and making joint efforts for the economic and political stability of the country, the dialogue among political parties is the need of the hour."

He said, "The message of the delegation will be passed on to the MQM leadership and expressed the hope that these efforts of PPP will be helpful in starting a political discussion in the country." He said, "Elections will be held at the due time." He assured that the MQM would support any such move of allies with the objective to strengthen the democratic system of the country.



ISLAMABAD: Three members dialogue committee of PPP headed by Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani and leaders of MQM talking to media.

## PAC summons SC's registrar for skipping audit

ISLAMABAD (INP): Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the National Assembly has summoned the Supreme Court registrar for skipping the audit of the apex court for the last 10 years.

The meeting of the PAC was held in Islamabad here on Tuesday with Noor Alam Khan in the chair. The PAC chief took notice of not conducting an audit of the Supreme Court during last 10 years. No audit of the Supreme Court has been carried out in the last 10 years, Noor Alam Khan was quoted as saying in the meeting. The PAC chief summoned the Supreme Court registrar after Eidul Fitr holidays into the matter and said he is not afraid of anybody. Khan also scolded the CDA chairman over the failure to present details of the plots given to the judges, parliament members and cabinet members.

Last month, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) sought a record of the Supreme Court judges' salary, perks and privileges within a month. The meeting of the PAC was held with its chairman Noor Alam Khan in the chair in Islamabad. Noor Alam Khan asked why the Auditor General of Pakistan failed in presenting a report related to SC judges' salary, perks, and privileges. The report was to be submitted in today's meeting, Alam maintained.

## Efforts afoot to explore new markets: NA informed

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The National Assembly was informed on Tuesday that efforts were afoot to explore new markets for manpower export. Responding to a calling attention notice, Parliamentary Secretary for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Agha Rafiullah told the House that agreements with different countries were in the pipeline to enhance the manpower export.

The Parliamentary Secretary said the Protectorate of Emigrant Offices will also be established in all major cities including Sukkur, Bannu and Gilgit Baltistan. He said a summary in this regard has been moved by the Ministry of Overseas and Human Resource Development. Several bills were laid before the House on Tuesday. These included: Islamabad Capital Territory State Councils Remuneration Bill, the Drugs Amendment Bill, the Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Amendment Bill, The ICT Criminal Prosecution Service Bill, Pakistan Penal Code Amendment Bill, the Allied Health Professionals Council Amendment Bill and Pakistan Red Crescent Society Bill.

The chair referred the bills to the Standing Committees concerned. Taking the floor, Parliamentary Secretary for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Agha Rafiullah said a proper mechanism should be put in place to ensure appointment of judges on merit.

He said a reference should also be filed seeking clarification as if the Chief Ministers can dissolve assemblies without citing any reason at the whims of one person. Later, the House was adjourned to meet again tomorrow (Wednesday) at 12:00 pm.

## ANP invites MQM leaders to upcoming APC

ISLAMABAD (PPI): A delegation of the Awami National Party on Tuesday called on MQM leaders at the Parliament Lodges and invited them in an All Parties Conference. ANP delegation comprising Mian Iftikhar and Zahid Khan called on MQM parliamentarians Usama Qadri, Salahuddin and others. The ANP leaders invited MQM to attend the APC being hosted by it.

"We will decide on the invitation after consultation with the MQM Rabita Committee," MQM members replied. Mian Iftikhar said that the situation worsening in the country, and it is upon the politicians to take initiative for improvement. "It is our thinking that political parties should take initiative for correction," he said. "Life has become difficult owing to worsening law and order, political class being failed and non-political elements getting successful," he said.

"We have to resolve all problems with understanding and reconciliation," he said.

MNA Muhammad Abubakar said that the ANP has summoned the APC on May 03 and invited the MQM in the moot. The APC being summoned to steer the country out of the political, economic and other crises, MQM MNA added. Earlier, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Awami National Party (ANP) emphasised the need for dialogue among political parties to tackle the ongoing constitutional and political crises in the country.

A PPP delegation led by Senator Yousuf Raza Gillani approached ANP for dialogue among political parties to tackle the crisis. Talking to journalists, Yousuf Raza Gillani said the basic purpose of the Constitution was that all institutions should exercise their powers within their

constitutional domain. "The PPP wants to make a conducive environment for dialogue among the political parties as all the problems being faced by the county will be addressed through the dialogue process," he added.

ANP Secretary General Mian Iftikhar Hussain said, "It was a good step by the PPP as the country could no longer afford unrest and chaos." He said the ANP was going to hold an APC in the Federal Capital on May 3, while the PPP had decided to build consensus among the coalition parties prior to holding dialogue with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf which was a positive step. The PTI and all other political parties would be invited to attend the APC, he added. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has also announced to convene an APC after Eidul Fitr on one-point agenda to hold simultaneous elections across the country.

## Minister appoints nephew on nepotism: PHC told

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) issued notice Director General (DG) Provincial Housing Authority (PHA) as well as recruited employees at BPS-17 on favoritism and nepotism to submit reply against their appointment against the procedure, on Tuesday.

The counsel Shah Faisal Ilyas argued that recent recruitment in PHA has made against law and procedure while claimed that

high-ups had benefitted their friends and family. He argued that Acting DG PHA has recruited his brother at the authority in BPS-17 against the procedure.

The counsel further argued that Minister has appointed his maternal nephew while Secretary PHA had also recruited his brother at BPS-17 in the authority which is against Personal Interest Conflict Act and violation of procedure while claimed that

The head of department can't appoint/recruit his relative directly but other persons should be nominated for the process, the counsel argued.

The divisional bench of PHC comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Waqar Ahmad issued notices to DG PHA, recruited employees in BPS-17 along with other respondents to submit reply after initial arguments while adjourned further hearing.

## China offers to mediate between Israel, Palestine

BEIJING (Agencies): China's foreign minister told his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts his country is ready to help facilitate peace talks, Xinhua reported. The separate phone calls between Qin Gang and the Israeli and Palestinian top diplomats comes amid recent moves by Beijing to position itself as a regional mediator.

Qin encouraged "steps to resume peace talks," and said that "China is ready to provide convenience for this," in a Monday phone call with Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen. In his conversation with Palestinian foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki, Qin is reported to have said that Beijing supports the resumption of talks as soon as possible. In both calls he emphasised China's push for peace talks on the basis

of implementing a "two-state solution," Xinhua said.

The talks come at a time of rising tensions in Israel. Clashes at the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem earlier this month, in which at least 400 Palestinians were arrested by raiding Israeli police, drew condemnation from Arab countries across the region. Saudi Arabia, with whom Israel hopes to normalise ties, said Israel's "storming" of al-Aqsa undermined peace efforts. This year's overlap of Ramadan and Passover increases the possibility of friction as the city hosts an unusually large influx of pilgrims.

Qin is reported to have told his Israeli counterpart that China is "concerned about the current tension between Israel and Palestine, and the current top priority is to bring the situation under control and

prevent the conflict from escalating or even getting out of control." China has been on a recent diplomatic offensive, brokering the restoration of ties in March between Iran and Saudi Arabia — rivals in a region where the United States for decades has been the main diplomatic powerbroker.

"Saudi Arabia and Iran recently restored diplomatic relations through dialogue, setting a good example of overcoming differences through dialogue," Qin said. That deal is likely to have major ramifications on the Yemen Civil War, where both sides are locked in a proxy war. In February, Beijing produced a peace plan for Ukraine after talks between President Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin of Russia. It urged all parties to avoid nuclear escalation but did not suggest Russia withdraw its forces.

## Eid shopping getting momentum in twin-cities

ISLAMABAD (INP): Despite of rising inflation in Pakistan, the people are making arrangements to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr with full religious zeal. Eid shopping is getting momentum in the twin cities Rawalpindi and Islamabad as buyers swarm markets and shopping malls all over the city during the last Ashra of Ramazan without being worried about the early closure of shops.

This time the relaxation of the business hours will not only facilitate customers but also help traders to sell out the stock they have booked for Eid. Several local brands have begun displaying their latest Eid edi-

tions of dresses, shoes, and other essential accessories to attract buyers and gain maximum profits.

Families come out for shopping soon after iftar and are 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. A colourful variety of stalls have been set up displaying earrings, glittering bangles, embroidered clothes, and jewellery in markets as Aabpara market, Sitara markets, Super market, Jinnah super, Karachi company and F-10 in Islamabad and in different

parts of Rawalpindi as Sadar, Committee chowk, Raja Bazar, Commercial Market and Muree road.

A bangle seller in Aabpara Market said "The number of customers is gradually picking up and hopefully it will go further up as Eid ul fitr approaches." A customer said in Sadar Rawalpindi, "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 in Raja Bazar, said another citizen.

## Govt taken every step to avoid polls, says Aitzaz

LAHORE (PPI): Noted lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan said on Tuesday that whoever disobeyed the Supreme Court order to hold elections on May 14 would be disqualified.

Speaking to media outside the Lahore High Court, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Aitzaz said it was argued that the elections must be held in the whole country the same day. If so, then dissolve the National Assembly, he added.

The incumbent rulers have taken every step to avoid elections. They registered 140 cases against Imran Khan after regime change, he continued. Criticising the rulers, he said if you want to make someone invincible, register cases against him. They have made him [Imran] a deity, he maintained. Aitzaz said there's nothing to be afraid of Imran. He had to contest elections. "I know he will commit mistakes. He's not so strong, but they are making him strong," he quipped.

They are increasing the political stature of Imran by registering cases against him. He is not invincible, they are making him invincible. He said doctrine of necessity had ruined Pakistan. We have to discard this doctrine. On one side is the doctrine of necessity, and on the other is Umar Atta Bandial. The senior lawyer said if the argument of delaying election beyond 90 days is accepted, no one would allow elections to be held in the country.

## Court grants Gandapur bail in audio case

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): A district and sessions court in Islamabad granted post-arrest bail to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) fire-brand leader Ali Amin Gandapur on Tuesday in a case related to an audiotape in which he purportedly threatened authorities and the police against arresting party chairman Imran Khan.

In the audio, Gandapur had reportedly threatened to lay siege to Islamabad if the former prime minister was arrested. A case related to the audio was registered against Gandapur at the Golra police station in the federal capital. The PTI leader was arrested from Dera Ismail Khan on April 6.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Sikandar Khan heard Gandapur's bail petition on Tuesday. During the hearing, the investigation officer submitted a report and informed the court that the audiotape, purportedly featuring Gandapur, was sent to the Cyber Crime Wing to determine its authenticity.

The forensic report would reveal whether the voice in the audiotape was Gandapur's, he added. The judge asked the investigation officer whether the manufacturer of the mobile phone and sim in use by the PTI leader had been determined, to which he replied that a request for data of call recordings had been submitted.

The judge also asked what Gandapur's stance on the audiotape was. The investigation officer replied that the PTI leader claimed it was fake. Subsequently, the court granted Gandapur post-arrest bail and directed him to submit two surety bonds of Rs300,000 each.

## Saudi FM meets Syria's Assad on trip to Damascus

DAMASCUS (Agencies): Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Saudi Arabia's top diplomat in Damascus on Tuesday, state media reported, ending more than a decade of diplomatic deep-freeze between the two countries.

"President Bashar al-Assad meets Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan," Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

The Saudi prince arrived in Damascus on Tuesday afternoon on the first visit to Syria's capital by a Saudi official since the start of the country's civil war in 2011. Assad has been politically isolated in the region since the conflict began, but a flurry of diplomatic activity has been underway in the past week as regional relations shift following a decision by Saudi Arabia and Damascus's ally Iran to resume ties.

The trip comes less than a week after Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad visited Saudi Arabia, also on the first such visit since the conflict began. Last week, diplomats from nine Arab countries met in the Saudi city of Jeddah to discuss ending Syria's long spell in the diplomatic wilderness and its possible return to the 22-member Arab League after Damascus was suspended in 2011.

The diplomats stressed the "importance of having an Arab leadership role in

efforts to end the crisis" in Syria, according to a statement by the Saudi foreign ministry. Saudi Arabia severed ties with Assad's government in 2012 and Riyadh had long openly championed Assad's ouster, backing Syrian rebels in earlier stages of the war. Several other Arab countries also cut ties with Syria as some powers bet on Assad's demise.

But regional capitals have gradually been warming to Assad as he has clawed back most of the territory lost to rivals, with crucial backing from Russia and Iran. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which re-established ties in late 2018, has been leading the charge to reintegrate Damascus into the Arab fold. A February 6 earthquake that wreaked devastation in Turkey and Syria sparked Arab outreach to Assad's government, and the surprise rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran was announced the following month.

Assad himself has visited both Oman and the UAE since the quake. Syria's foreign minister visited this month Algeria and Tunisia on the heels of trips to Saudi Arabia and Egypt in a diplomatic push. Syria is to reopen its diplomatic mission in Tunisia and appoint an ambassador there, following a similar move announced by Tunis.

Prince Faisal had said in

February that a consensus was building in the Arab world that a new approach to Syria requiring negotiations with Damascus would be needed to address humanitarian crises. Riyadh sent aid to both rebel-held and government-controlled parts of Syria, but the effort did not involve direct contact with Assad's government. In March, Saudi state media had said that Riyadh and Damascus were in talks on resuming consular services.

Regional rivals Shia Muslim Iran and Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia have supported opposing sides in several regional conflict zones including Yemen, and also vie for influence in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. During a trip to Moscow last month, Assad told broadcaster Russia Today that "Syria is no longer a scene of Saudi-Iran conflict". Syria's war has killed more than half a million people, while around half of the country's pre-war population has been forced from their homes.

Assad is hoping normalisation with wealthy Gulf states could bring economic relief and money for reconstruction, as broader international funding remains elusive without a United Nations-backed political settlement to the conflict. Analysts say sanctions on Syria will likely continue to deter investment.

## Sherry urges SCO to prioritize Climate Action

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman represented Pakistan at the 4th Meeting of the Heads of the Ministers and Agencies of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states responsible for Environmental Protection organized virtually by India.

During the meeting, Minister Rehman emphasized the critical role that the SCO could play at the regional level in achieving shared goals related to environmental sustainability and climate resilience. She also highlighted the value of the SCO as a forum for member states to share their perspectives on this existential crisis that is now redefining global, regional and national priorities and responses in the 21st century.

Minister Rehman said, "The sustainability of life on earth and the overall socio-economic development of current and future generations are now under threat. We all agree that constructive cooperation on bold climate and environmental issues is critical to actively move the needle and bridge the gap between the pledges and pipelines that we all make multilaterally, as well as the gap between ambitions and actions." Minister Rehman drew attention to Pakistan's unique position as one of the ten most vulnerable countries to climate change, despite contributing less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

"We are on the front lines of climate change, braving disastrous floods, unlivable heatwaves, and fast-melting glaciers," said the Minister. She highlighted the catastrophic floods that occurred in Pakistan in 2022, which inundated one-third of the country, impact-

ed 33 million people, and caused over US\$30 billion in economic losses and damages.

Minister Rehman also said that for Pakistan climate change has become a high priority on all ministerial agendas, and both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan are actively working to address climate change at the national and global levels. "We have intensified our efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and implement large-scale nature-based interventions, as well as combat pollution."

Despite the fact that our policies are aligned with SCO goals as well as by commitments made in the Paris Agreement, implementation of our collective plans fall short as the climate clock is ticking faster than we imagined," the Minister said. She shared details about Pakistan's recent policies and programs, such as the National Clean Air Policy, National Hazardous Waste Management Policy, Clean Green Pakistan, Living Indus Initiative, the creation of new national parks and expansion of protected areas, and federal-level regulations on plastics.

In her address, Minister Rehman proposed several specific actions for the forum to consider, such as establishing a technical working group to exchange information and best practices on common issues, exploring opportunities for capacity building and knowledge sharing, and developing regional mechanisms for climate financing and carbon markets. She also emphasized that SCO members could consider building a united voice in advocating for reforming the international financial architecture to transform access pathways that

remain blocked for climate finance delivery to developing countries, especially those on the frontlines of accelerated climate stress.

The Minister emphasized that the SCO is a crucial multilateral forum for cooperation and collaboration, and Pakistan remains committed to engaging with it to create momentum in climate action. She also mentioned that Pakistan has championed the cause for climate justice multilateralism at COP27 by leading the negotiations on establishing the Loss & Damage Fund as the Chair of G77+ China, which is a demonstration of goals successfully achieved when countries collaborate for joint public goals.

Additionally, she expressed her belief that SCO members can contribute to future dialogues on capitalizing the Loss & Damage Fund under the UNFCCC's umbrella. The Minister concluded, "Climate Change knows no borders. The need for effective utilization of this forum by leveraging our respective comparative advantages and sharing experiences and working towards our common goal of mitigating and adapting to climate change is the need of the hour. We must act now to ensure a sustainable future for generations to come."

The meeting was led by a ministerial delegation from the SCO member states of China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Russia, and Uzbekistan. In a joint statement, the SCO members emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in the field of information exchange, conservation of biological resources, adaptation to climate change, and mitigation of its consequences.