

Senate offers Fateha

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Senate on Wednesday offered Fateha for the departed soul of former Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Mufti Abdul Shakoor, who lost his life in a tragic traffic accident in Islamabad. Senator Haji Hidayatullah led Fateha on the request of Senate Chairman Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani.



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PM for fast-track implementation of solarization project

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed for fast implementation of solarization project in the country by immediately removing all the impediments in the import of solar panels and other parts.

The prime minister said that a developing country like Pakistan could not afford to generate power by importing costly fuels.

The prime minister expressed these views while chairing a high-level meeting to review progress on the solarization project initiated across the country, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The meeting was apprised that tenders had been floated for 17 government buildings for which bids were received and their technical examination was being carried out today. The prime minister observed that with the low-cost solar power generation, the consumers would get an inexpensive power supply, besides its generation would save precious foreign reserves spent on the import of expensive fuels. He also directed for import of

PM lauds Sherry Rehman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has lauded Federal Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman for effectively highlighting the challenges faced by the country in the wake of climate change.

"Incredible public service, Minister Sherry. The way you have presented Pakistan's case on climate change after the devastating floods last year is truly remarkable," he wrote on his Twitter handle.

PM Shehbaz expressed words of appreciation as the prestigious Times magazine placed Sherry Rehman on its list of 100 influential people of the year 2023. "It is a well-deserved honour," he said. Sherry Rehman, in a tweet, expressed gratitude to the prime minister for acknowledging her services in the field of climate change. "Thank you so much Prime Minister. Am truly humbled, and thank you for your support," she said.

solar panels through phased process and desired that solarization process of the government buildings should expeditiously be implemented.

It was further apprised that progress on 1200MW Layyah and 600 MW Jhang power projects was in the final stage.

After approval of benchmark tariff from NEPRA, the process for installation of solar on 11kv feeder would com-

mence, it was further added.

PM felicitates people, doctors over introduction of robotic surgery in PKLI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday congratulated the people as well as the doctors on the introduction of robotic surgery in the Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institute (PKLI).

"Alhamdulillah, the efforts for liver and kidney treatment in Pakistan are

coming to fruition," the prime minister remarked.

He said the purpose of establishing PKLI was to provide a modern facility for the treatment of kidney and liver disease within the country. At the PKLI, a world-class liver and kidney treatment facility has been made available in the country. PKLI will become the John Hopkins of Pakistan, he added. The prime minister said that the PKLI could have progressed more if former chief justice Saqib Nisar had not intervened just to get a salary raise for his brother.

ANP delegation calls on PM: A two-member delegation of Awami National Party (ANP) comprising Aimal Wali Khan and Jawad Khattak Wednesday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. During the meeting, Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain were also present, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.



ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

CJP warns of serious consequences if funds for elections not provided

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Umar Ata Bandial has warned of serious consequences if the federal government did not release funds remarking that it is the constitutional duty of the government to provide finances for conducting the elections.

These remarks were expressed by the chief justice when the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday started hearing the defence ministry's plea requesting the apex court to recall its order regarding holding elections in Punjab on May 14.

The Supreme Court was scheduled to begin the hearing at 11:30am today, but deferred it until 2:00 pm.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial and comprising Justice Munib Akhtar and Justice Ijazul Ahsan heard the case.

At the outset of the hearing, the attorney general for Pakistan came to the rostrum and started reading reply from the ministry of defence.

The chief justice of Pakistan remarked that this case has been prolonged so much. He said so many reports were submitted to the court, asking the AGP to tell the court whether the government has given the executive power to the parliament or not. The CJP wondered if the cabinet sends the matter to the National Assembly in the case of elections only. Justice Akhtar remarked that it is clear that the federal government could provide funds. He asked the

AGP to explain why the matter was sent to the National Assembly standing committee. As per the constitution, the federal government can provide funds for polls, he added.

He wondered how the assembly could refuse funds when the federal government is requesting it.

The AGP said that keeping in view the current situation, it was dangerous for the government to allocate funds apart from the budget.

Justice Akhtar asked the AGP how it could be dangerous to give funds for elections. He said the court asked several times from the finance ministry which reiterated that the funds could be provided from the supplementary grants.

The judge further asked the AGP to tell the court what would be consequences of the non-provision of fund. He wondered if the government has lost the majority in the assembly. He said that the prime minister should have the trust of the assembly members. "There can be serious consequences of the reply of the finance ministry," Justice Akhtar remarked.

The court found the defence ministry's reply seeking withdrawal of its order "unsatisfactory".

Justice Bandial said that the court reviewed the proceedings of the National Assembly. "It's the constitutional duty to provide funds for the elections," the CJP remarked.

The top judge observed, "Rejection of the bill seeking provision of funds for the polls is against

the parliament". He asked the government to review its decision.

CJP Bandial again sought a reply from the federal government on the matter of the provision of funds for elections. The chief justice warned of serious consequences if the government did not provide funds for elections. The attorney general informed the judges that the political parties are holding talks with the PTI and hopefully there will be a positive outcome. Upon which the CJP said it is welcome sign that the parties are talking to each other for finding a solution to the issue. The chief justice hoped that the government would give a positive response on the issue of funds provision. He said that the court was apprised of security situation. He wondered why the Election Commission of Pakistan thinks that the current situation is worse than the security situation in the past.

"Elections were held when terrorism still was raging in the country," the CJP observed, adding that elections were held in the year when Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was martyred. Rejecting the reply from the defence ministry, the CJP wondered who would guarantee that the circumstances would remain peaceful on October 8. The attorney general insisted that elections be held across the country simultaneously. He said it is the opinion of all security institutions that simultaneous polls should be held in the country.

Imran sees country in throes of fascism

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan claimed on Wednesday that the entire country was in the throes of fascism.

Taking to Twitter, the deposed premier lamented, "The way we have descended into becoming a banana republic where there is no rule of law and only the law of the jungle. It is clear that this reign of terror is not controlled by PDM puppets but by another force that sees itself totally above the law. Our people are abducted, and afterwards sham FIRs are registered." Ruing the cases lodged against him, Mr Khan said, "As bail in one FIR is granted, another FIR pops up. I have over 145 FIRs filed against me. Its a circus of FIRs. My Bani Gala caretaker, my Zaman Park cook, our social media's Mashwani, Waqas, and my security incharge, Ghumman, - all abducted and tortured to try and update their software."

Speaking about the arrest of PTI stalwart Ali Amin Gandapur, Mr Khan said, "Ali Amin got bail in one sham case, and another FIR popped up. Now another one with the police taking him to Lahore."

"Despite falling ill on the way and being taken to the hospital, Ali Amin was removed from the hospital before he had stabilised", Mr Khan maintained.

On Monday, Mr Khan said the constitution could not prevail in the country if the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) did not release funds for the Punjab Assembly elections. Speaking to media outside the courtroom, the deposed premier said, Despite the fact that the constitution states that negotiations are not needed, we are doing negotiations for the sake of elections. The possibility of holding the election-safer 90 days does not exist. There are constitutional limits on holding the elections over more than

90 days."

Mr Khan was of the view that the interim setup should be replaced with the administrator, who should perform the task of holding the elections in the province. He alleged that the interim government was indulging in a political vendetta.

Mr Khan said, "Who is talking that the interim should be replaced with the administrator, who should perform the task of holding the elections in the province. He alleged that the interim government was indulging in a political vendetta. Mr Khan said, "Who is talking that the interim should be replaced with the administrator, who should perform the task of holding the elections in the province. He alleged that the interim government was indulging in a political vendetta. Mr Khan said, "Who is talking that the interim should be replaced with the administrator, who should perform the task of holding the elections in the province. He alleged that the interim government was indulging in a political vendetta."

Mr Khan maintained, "Already in the country, the fundamental human rights are being badly violated".

Amid edgy political atmosphere, Bilawal meets Maulana Fazl

D I KHAN (NNI): Amid an edgy atmosphere in the country's political spectrum, Foreign Minister and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called on Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam - Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

There is a disagreement within the ruling coalition regarding the idea of engaging in talks with the opposition to put an end to the present political and economic crises in the country. While the PPP favors this approach, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and JUI-F have declined to consider it. In a statement released on Friday, JUI-F leader Asad Mahmood declared that there will be no talks with Imran Khan, and he urged for Article 6 to be applied to him. Amid this discord, both political leaders met today. The meeting took place at Fazl's residence in Abdul Khail village of Dera Ismail Khan.

Imran can't conceal his incompetence, inefficiency & corruption by 'covering face with canister': Marriyum

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Wednesday said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan could not conceal his incompetence, inefficiency and corruption by "covering his face in public with a canister".

"It may be a bucket or a canister or a 'dustbin', but rest assured nothing can help Imran Khan cover up his four years misrule which was marred by corruption, loot and plunder," the minister said while addressing a news conference. Flanked by Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Economy and Energy Bilal Azhar Kayani, she said Imran Khan would have been visiting the public without any fear, had he not wreaked havoc with the economy. "Imran Khan could cover his face with a bucket, a canister or a dustbin before going to the public, but nothing can help him cover his evil deeds and corruption," the minister remarked.

Marriyum said a group of people was imposed on the country in an unconstitutional way in 2018, but the coalition parties had not only ousted them from power in a democratic way, but also cleared the economic mess created by them. "We have not only fixed the economy but also continued to make efforts to bring further improvement," she added.

Marriyum said Imran Khan had deprived the people of sugar and wheat, harmed Pakistan's diplomatic relations with other countries, traded off Kashmir for foreign funds, and

above all destroyed the economy which resulted in extreme inflation, poverty and unemployment.

She also played two video clips to substantiate her claim about the bad performance of Imran Khan's government by comparing it with the one year of the present coalition government. She said the videos gave a comparative analysis of the two governments' performances and highlighted the initiatives taken by the coalition government to undo the missteps of the PTI's regime.

"When the coalition parties came to power, everybody said that the country would soon default, but Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has a vision and roadmap for development, with the national economy on top priority," she noted. She said that during first eight months of the present coalition regime, the fiscal deficit in terms of GDP fell from 3.4 to 2.8 percent whereas the current account deficit reduced by 74 percent and trade deficit by 36 percent. The minister said the coalition government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had transformed the "journey of economic disaster in the journey on path to prosperity". She said the government had been making all-out efforts to pass on relief to the masses in line with the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The historic Ramadan Package was rolled out on the PM's directives to provide subsidies to the masses on major staple food items including wheat flour, sugar and lentils. The BISP allocation, she said, had also been raised to Rs

400 billion to save the people from the effects of inflation. The distribution of BISP funds and petrol subsidy was planned in a transparent way, she added. The minister said the BISP data was used to distribute free flour and other subsidies for the poor segments of the society.

She said the prime minister announced the Rs 1,800 billion Kissan Package and subsidized every item they used for increasing the output of crops. Pakistan was devastated by floods last year, but PM Shehbaz led from the front and looked after the affectees in an unprecedented way, she said, adding the Federal Government had disbursed Rs 100 billion among the provinces for carrying out relief and rehabilitation efforts across the country.

She said the coalition government also fought Pakistan's case relating to climate change at international level in a proactive and effective manner and the support the country received from the international community after the floods, was unprecedented. On the other hand, she said, Imran Khan during his four-year rule had pushed the country into the economic quagmire by shutting down all the major projects in different sectors, including health, infrastructure and youth related projects. "When the Imran led gang was imposed in 2018, the country had 6.2 per cent economic growth ratio and CPEC was in full swing, the health card insurance scheme had just started and the youth programme was also paying its dividends.

President Alvi sends back CJP's power curtailing bill without signing it again

ISLAMABAD (NNI): President Arif Alvi Wednesday sent back the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill 2023 without signing it again. President Alvi said in a note regarding sending the bill back that the issue of legislative competency and validity of the said bill is pending before the highest judicial forum of the country.

The President also said that in respect of the matter being heard in the apex court so any further action on the bill is not appropriate.

The Supreme Court has stayed the implementation of the Supreme Court (Practice

and Procedure) Bill 2023 last Thursday. "The bill will not be implemented whether the president signs it or not," read the eight-page order written by CJP Umar Ata Bandial. It added: "A point was also raised regarding the independence of the judiciary. The independence of the judiciary has directly interfered." There is no option but to stay the implementation of the bill through an interim order. The court is concerned about institutional independence."

An eight-judge larger bench of the Supreme Court held the hearing on the petitions challenging

the bill, aimed at clipping the powers of the chief justice of Pakistan for initiating suo motu proceedings and constituting benches on his own. Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial had on Wednesday formed the larger bench to hear the four identical petitions, Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Ayesha Malik, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Shahid Waheed are the other members of the larger bench.

IHC dismisses ECP's decision of votes recounting

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday set aside the decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for recounting of votes in six union councils of Karachi and disposed of the petition.

Justice Sardar Ijaz Ishaq Khan announced the short verdict on a petition filed by the Jamaat-e-Islami against the ECP's recounting decision, declaring the court would mention the reasons to dismiss the Commission's order in the detailed judgment. The court had previously issued a stay order against the recounting and finally dismissed the decision.

SC rebuts reports on lack of audit

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a clarification and rebutted news items published in print media which alleged that the top court wasn't audited for the last 10 years and that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) summoned the court's registrar. According to clarification issued by SC PRO, reference news reports regarding audit of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, published widely in the print media on Wednesday, 19th April, 2023, wherein it has been alleged that the said audit has not been conducted for the last ten (10) years and that the Public Accounts Committee has summoned the Registrar Supreme Court accordingly.

KP Governor, Caretaker CM visit Torkham to review rescue operation

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali and Caretaker Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan visited the spot of the landslide incident at Torkham and reviewed the ongoing rescue operation.

Besides, officers of the district administration and authorities of the other concerned departments were also present on the occasion. The concerned authorities briefed the Governor and Chief Minister regarding human and financial losses that occurred due to the incident. Speaking on the occa-

sion, the Governor and Chief Minister directed the district administration to the speedy completion of the rescue operation and make arrangements for the required heavy machinery for the purpose. On this occasion, the local tribal elders of the area also met with the Governor and Chief Minister and requested them to accelerate the pace of rescue operations and recovery of bodies trapped under the debris.

The local tribal elders also demanded payment of compensation for both human and financial losses and the establishment of an

emergency point having arrangements for combating the emergency situation. The Governor and Chief Minister assured the resolution of all genuine demands and establishment of a state-of-the-art emergency point at Torkham. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa further assured the opening of an alternative route to retrieve the trapped cargo vehicles. The Caretaker Chief Minister said that the affectees of the accident are their brothers and they would be provided with all possible assistance.

as per law.

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Minister directs immediate repair of condemned vehicles

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Adnan Jalil has directed the Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) for immediate repairing and utilization of condemned vehicles parked in the offices of the authority and its training institutes.

In light of the directives of the caretaker minister, the first rehabilitated vehicle was handed over to Women Poly-Technical

Institute, Hayatabad on Wednesday. The provincial minister formally handed over the keys of the vehicle to the Principal of the Institute.

The provincial minister directed the authority for getting all condemned and obsolete vehicles parked at the colleges and offices of the technical department education repaired to utilize them instead of purchasing new vehicles.

The measure will not only help address the issue of the shortage of vehicles with the institutes, rather will also save millions of

rupees of the public exchequer, being spent on the purchase of new vehicles.

Managing Director (TEVTA), Abdul Ghaffar and teaching staff of the institute were also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the provincial minister said that all condemned and dumped vehicles available with the department are being turned usable after repair.

The step, he said, will fulfill the need of vehicles for the Technical Education Department with immediate effect.

Minister condoles with ACS on wife's death

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister Excise, Taxation and Anti-Narcotics Haji Manzoor Khan Afridi visited the house of Additional Chief Secretary Zubair Asghar Qureshi in Village Masri Khan Banda Akora Khattak of Nowshera District and expressed his condolence with him on the death of his wife who breathed her last the other day. MD Cities Improvement Project Syed Zafar Ali Shah also accompanied him on this occasion.

The provincial minister stayed there for some time, expressed heartfelt sympathy with the bereaved family members and offered Fatiha for the deceased.

Over 5.230m families provided free flour bags

PESHAWAR (APP): The Food Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa spokesmen here Wednesday said that over 5.230 million families covering over 90pc target were provided free flour under the Prime Minister's Ramadan package in the province.

The spokesman told APP that people of all districts of KP were benefited from the prime minister flour package.

He said flour was available in large quantities in all districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Following distribution of available stock, he said more wheat would be released to flour mills.

He said that 17.2mn flour bags weighting 10kilogram each would be distributed among 5.750 million deserving families during Ramadan.

Tayyab Qureshi to lead Eid prayer

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Chief Khateeb Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Maulana Muhammad Tayyab Qureshi will lead the Eid-ul-Fitr prayer at Eid Gah Mosque, Charsadda Road, Peshawar. He will deliver his speech on the day of Eid at 7 a.m. and lead the prayer at 7:30 a.m. The chief khateeb will deliver the sermon immediately after the Eid prayers, said a circular issued by the Administrator Auqaf, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Wednesday.

Wheat supply stopped to mills for free Atta

PESHAWAR (APP): Food Directorate Peshawar has stopped the release of wheat to the flour mills for free Atta Scheme till further orders.

According to a notification issued in this connection on Wednesday, the Deputy Director Food (F&I) has announced discontinuation of wheat releases to the flour Mills for free Atta schemes till further order.

Weather to remain partly cloudy in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar Meteorological Department here on Wednesday predicted partly cloudy weather in most districts of the province.

The official said that rain with thunderstorms is also expected in the districts of Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda, Peshawar, Nowshera, Kohat, Khyber and Karam and during the last 24 hours, the highest rainfall has been recorded in Kalam at 51 mm, Dir 36 mm, Chitral 27 mm and Patan 23 mm, Malam Jabba 18, Balakot 16, Tamergharh 15 and Peshawar 6 mm rain record.

The lowest temperature in the province was 2 degrees Celsius in Kalam and 6 degrees Celsius in Malam Jabba, the met department said.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali and Chief Minister Muhammad Azam Khan meeting with a delegation of local tribal elders.

Law Minister for imparting technical skills to juvenile inmates

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker Law Minister, Justice (Rtd.) Irshad Qaiser on Wednesday visited Central Jail here and inspected its various sections.

Superintendent of Jail briefed the visiting guest about different sections of the jail including control room, new block, quick reaction force, rehabilitation courts, library and newly constructed hospital

in the jail premises.

The minister was also briefed about the capacity and condition of various jail barracks, number of inmates and other matters related to welfare of the prisoners.

She was informed that inmates were being imparted necessary education and skills from the books available at the jail's library.

On the occasion, the

minister visited different sections of the jail and met with inmates and inquired about the problems being faced by them.

She expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made for the wellbeing of inmates and stressed upon jail's administration to impart technical skills and education to juveniles enabling them to become a useful part of the society once they are released.

Private Education Network KP boycotted PSRA rules

PESHAWAR (APP): President Muhammad Saleem Khan said on Wednesday that steps should be taken for the immediate election of PSRA members, otherwise, there will be a boycott based on the decisions of the authorities.

Private Education Network Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has boycotted the decisions of the private school regulatory authority, Provincial President Muhammad Saleem Khan said, adding, until the election of private mem-

bers for PSRA, it has no legal status.

The establishment of the authority was implemented to regulate private schools, but now it seems as if the authority has taken the contract to end the private education sector, Saleem Khan, opined.

The protest was postponed due to the government's assurance, but the concerned parties were deliberately delaying the issue, said the Provincial President.

KP Finance Dept bans creation of new posts

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Department, in a letter to all budget officers, has placed a ban on the creation of new posts.

According to the letter written by the Caretaker Adviser on Finance, orders were issued for not creating new posts due to the financial problems faced by the province.

The letter said that due to a massive resource crunch and financial instability in the province, the adviser to Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance and Energy and Power had directed to impose a ban on all kinds of creation of new vacancies and requested that necessary action be taken in the matter.

Eid packages among 200 orphans distributed

PESHAWAR (APP): Umeed Foundation, a local welfare organization here on Wednesday distributed Eid gifts among over 200 orphans studying at Umeed Modern Education School System.

The ceremony was held in Bakhshu Pull and was attended by Tehsil Nazim Shah Alam Haji Kaleemullah, elders of the area Dr Fayyaz, Maulana Farooq Shah and others.

The Eid package consisted of new clothes, shoes, toys and Rs. 200 per child.

Addressing the ceremony, Tehsil Nazim Kaleemullah appreciated the initiative to make the Eidul Fitr joyful for orphans.

He said besides imparting education to orphan children, giving away Eid gifts to them was a much commendable act.

He also thanked the help extended by the philanthropists to whose cooperation made distribution of Eid gifts among the orphans.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Law Minister Irshad Qaiser distributing clothes amongst inmates during her visit to Central Jail.

Easy registration and reporting method on civic spaces demanded

PESHAWAR (APP): AWAZ-CDs and Blue Veins, member organizations of Pakistan Development Alliance, organized a stakeholder's forum to discuss challenges related to civic spaces and identify ways to promote constructive dialogue and engagement among government department and CSOs.

During the forum, civil society organizations called for ease in registration, NOCs, and reporting mechanisms both at the provincial and federal levels.

They highlighted that the current registration process for NGOs and CSOs is lengthy and complex,

which creates barriers for the organizations to operate effectively.

Additionally, the NOCs required from multiple departments further hinder their ability to carry out their work.

The Forum demanded the government streamline the processes to enable the effective participation of civil society in the development of society and support the vulnerable segment.

Qamar Naseem Program Manager Blue Veins said, "Civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting democratic values and advocating for human rights. However, the current registration and NOC

process is cumbersome for small community-based organizations, which limits their ability to work effectively. We urge the government to ease the registration process and ensure the timely issuance of authorizations such as registration with the Charity Commission."

In response, Mr. Shoaib, the representative Social Welfare Department, appreciated the efforts of civil society organizations and assured them of their departmental support to facilitate their work.

He said government recognizes the important role of civil society in promoting development and

democracy.

"We are committed to creating an enabling environment for civil society organizations to operate effectively. We will consider their demands and work towards streamlining the registration and NOC process."

The government representatives emphasized the importance of NGOs complying with the existing laws and regulatory frameworks.

The government representatives called for NGOs to improve their compliance with the existing laws and regulations to ensure transparency and accountability in their work.

Philanthropist to establish Old-Age House

PESHAWAR (APP): Noted philanthropist, Zubair Elahi has planned to establish an Old-Age House to look after helpless senior citizens in the provincial capital.

Mr Elahi, who is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the welfare organization 'Hope' said that a 6 kanal piece of land has already been acquired for the purpose.

He said beside those senior citizens, who are either lacking heirs or have been abandoned by the children, a vocational centre for destitute women would also be established on the acquired land to impart them skill for living honourable life in the society.

Hope is also working on a project of the rehabilitation of drug addicts and has so far rehabilitated hundreds of drug addicts.

Furthermore, his organization is also imparting technical skills to the rehabilitated drug addicts to mainstream such people in the society.

As a part of its war against narcotics and drugs, the organization is extending support to sports' activities.

The establishment of Old-Age House is a longstanding demand of the civil society and general public as cases of the miserable conditions of the abandoned senior citizens have been reported by the media.

Mayor opens Ladies Park in Shalimar Garden



PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali on Wednesday inaugurated a Ladies Park in Shalimar Garden here in city area.

A statement issued by the district administration said on Wednesday that Director General Capital Metropolitan Government Syed Waqas Ali Shah, Director East Rehman Khattak, Director Administration Owais Ahmed Khan, Director Property Mian Anisur Rehman, elected Chairman Imran Naveed, Akhunzada Zahidullah, Mazdoor Etihad Chairman

Qaiser Bacha, Ameer PK 79 Siddiqui Rehman Paracha, Municipal Inter Colleges Shahi Bagh Principal Nusrat Matoob, Degree College Principal Najma Shafiq and others accompanied the Mayor on the occasion.

Haji Zubair Ali speaking on the occasion said, with the grace of Allah Almighty we have inaugurated the first ladies park in Peshawar where only ladies and their families will be allowed to visit.

The ladies and their females would be provided

with the best possible recreational facilities. He said females with different ailments like blood pressure, sugar, diabetes and depression would be able to do some exercises here and refresh their minds from the hustle bustle of domestic issues.

The Mayor said it was an important day in the history of Peshawar as we have established a separate recreational facility for our women folk here. He said no swings will be installed in this park as a safety measure.

Tailors overcharging annoy Eid shoppers

PESHAWAR (APP): The overcharging by tailors have irked Eid shoppers and demanded the district administration to take action against price-hikers.

As only few days left in Eidul Fitr celebrations, the male and female tailors started overcharging people by earning almost double profit in the last days of Ramadan than normal days that annoyed customers of all aged groups.

In Peshawar, Charsadda and Nowshera, the tailors are heavily charging customers demanding Rs2,000 to Rs25,000 per suit for stitching on the last days of Ramadan.

Expressing dissatisfaction on overcharging and quality of stitching clothes by tailors, the Eid shoppers asked the district administration to maintain check and balance over the market rates and regulate

charges of tailoring as quickly as possible.

"The tailors started looting people as one suit was being stitched at Rs2000 to Rs2500 these days. Therefore, I opted to buy readymade cloth to save tailors charges," said Professor Ehtisham Qaiser of Wapda Town Peshawar on Wednesday.

He accused the district administration for its failure to regulate stitching rates of tailors, forcing many to purchase readymade clothes on Eid.

Zubair Afridi, a lady tailor of Fagirabad said the tailors has received double orders on this Eid comparatively from normal days as customers were pressing for new booking despite our refusal.

To fulfill the placed and new orders, he said most of tailors hired extra labourers by working till late night in the local mar-

kets at Fagirabad, Qissa Khwani, Karimpura and Interior City.

Most of tailoring shops are overcrowded with customers due to advance payment of salaries to the federal government employees.

Ayub Khan, a tailor of Pabbi told APP that his business was shined on the arrival of Eid.

He said this was the right time we make some profit compared to other months in the wake of increase in price hike in Peshawar.

He made it clear that charges for suits stitching were almost double because of workload of the customers, increase of electricity charges, shops' rents, labour wages, relevant materials and "we have to put in extra effort to fulfill people orders by using generators in case of loading shedding."

QEC activities at JMC gained new momentum



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The QEC activities at Jinnah Medical College Peshawar have gained new momentum after the annual meeting of QEC-KMU with the deans, principals and directors of all affiliated colleges under the chairmanship of Vice Chancellor KMU.

Numerous improvements have been made in

QEC as it has expanded by hiring fresh employees. The director QEC-JMCP has instructed the IT department to make a separate full functional website domain for QEC.

She also plans to make the evaluation system online.

Moreover, The College has selected several outstanding programme team members to prepare the self-

assessment report (SAR) in an efficient manner.

To further improve the workings of the QEC department, a number of awareness seminars and workshops have also been planned and the CEO JMCP, Miss Sundus Ishaq and the Principal JMCP, Prof. Dr. Amir Khan, are regularly monitoring the activities and growth of QEC department.



In brief

Three bandits killed, 18 held

RAHIM YAR KHAN (PPI): Three dacoits were shot dead and 18 arrested as the police operation entered the 11th day in the Katcha area of Rahim Yar Khan, police said on Wednesday. According to police, a large number of heavy weapons and ammunition were recovered from the dacoits. The police established five more new camps in the area, strengthening the rule of law and the writ of state. It was also learnt that the police also laid a siege to the hideout of notorious criminal Qabil Sakhani and cut the supply line. Earlier, the police reaped big successes in the operation. The police spokesperson had said that the police made advances against the dacoits in the Katcha area. He had added that the police took control of several hideouts of the dacoits. Sporadic incidents of trade of fire between the police and the hardened criminals had been reported.

Free medical camp organised

F.P. Report

GHALANAI: Frontier Corps North organized a Free Medical Camp in Yakkha Ghund, Mohmand District. The camp aimed to provide medical assistance and healthcare services to the local community, and a total of 345 patients including men, women & children were treated during the event. In addition to providing medical treatment, the Free Medical Camp also conducted lab screenings, with a total of 31 tests conducted. The screenings were aimed at identifying and addressing any potential health concerns among the attendees. The Frontier Corps North remains committed to serving and supporting the local communities in Mohmand. The Free Medical Camp was organized as part of the Frontier Corps North's ongoing efforts to provide healthcare services to underserved areas and improve the well-being of the local population.

College professor shot dead

SIALKOT (PPI): A private college professor and another man were shot dead by the firing of an unknown assailant on Abbott Road in the vicinity of Civil Lines police station, Sialkot. In a CCTV footage of the incident, Professor Faisal Zafar Bhatti can be seen standing inside his father's electronics shop when an unidentified man entered the shop and opened fire at him, killing him on the spot. The firing incident inside the electronic shop also resulted in the death of another man. The accused managed to flee after the incident. The police said that it is too early to make any statement about the reasons of the murder and the accused.

Security plan for Eid finalized

F.P. Report

BUNER: District Police Officer (DPO) Farhan Khan has warned that those involved in aerial firing and crackers on Eid night should be sent behind bars. DPO while sharing Eid night and Eid days security arrangement claimed foul proof security arrangements were already planned to provide maximum security to Masjid Bazaar Shrine Tourist Spot right from now till Eid festivities. DPO assured those in Etikaf in Masjid in Bazaar those offer Eid Prayer those visit Shrine and those visits scenic beautiful spot in Kalil Qadar Nagar Karakor Gokand Shahedasar Sar Malang and Mahaban would be fully protected and welcomed to Buner.



KHAR: Maulana Muhammad Yousaf reciting during concluding ceremony of Khatm-e-Quran.

How to lose belly fat

Atif Rana

EVERYONE has some belly fat, even people who have flat abs. That's normal, but too much belly fat can affect your health in a way that other fat doesn't. And having deep belly fat is very harmful to some main organs of the body like the heart, liver, and intestines but you need some visceral fat because it provides cautioning around your organs. But if you have too much of it you may be more likely to get high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and certain cancers including breast cancer and colon cancer but solving these problems is not as difficult as people think.

There are four keys to controlling belly fat. The most important one is intense exercise. It trims all

your fat, including visceral fat. Get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week.

Add walking or jogging for 20 minutes a day. Raising your heart rate for 30 minutes at least three times per week slows down your fat gain but to torture visceral fat, your workouts may need to be stepped up. Harriston says "Rake leaves, walk, garden, go to Zumba, play soccer with your kids.

It doesn't have to be in the gym". There is no magic diet for belly fat but getting enough fiber can help. Research shows that people who eat 10 grams of soluble fiber per day build up less visceral fat over time. That's as simple as eating two small apples, a cup of green peas, or a half cup of pinto beans. With it well sleep is the best way to get rid of fat. Getting the right amount of shut-eye

helps a lot. In one study, people who got 6 to 7 hours of sleep gained less fat. Sleep may not only thing that mattered but it's a part of the picture.

Physical activities and diet are the main key but having less stress as much as you can is beneficial for your health. Everyone has stress. How you can handle it matters. The best thing you can do is to relax with your friends and family and get counseling it makes you healthier and better prepared to make good choices for yourself.

There's nothing impossible in this world you just have to set your weight goals and how much you want to lose fat and have to maintain that level of enthusiasm to reach those numbers. Simple techniques can keep you motivated for the long haul, and allow you to have fun in the process.

Newly constructed police station inaugurated

F.P. Report

WANA: According to the details, District Police Officer South Waziristan Shabbir Hussain Marwat and Commandant SWS Muhammad Owais Shamim inaugurated the newly constructed Police Station at Azamwarsak, tribal elders at the opening ceremony, Ullamas and local dignitaries participated in large numbers.

Meanwhile, DPO and Commandant said that Waziristan Police is being equipped with modern facilities keeping in mind the requirements of modern times. In order to combat criminals, anti-peace and anti-social elements, eleven police stations and police lines equipped with modern facilities are being constructed in South Waziristan. In which Sarveikai and Azamwarsak stations have been completed while the police line is in the final stages of construction.

The Commander and DPO further said that the Waziristan Police performed their duties well in very difficult situations, gave testimonies and played an important role in establishing peace, the police have been equipped with the latest weapons, armored vehicles, advanced night vision cameras, and are in the final stages of constructing buildings equipped with modern facilities.

So that the police continue to protect the life and property of the people in the area and perform their duties in a good manner and honestly, the police force has the status of backbone for peace, whose security will not be compromised, Waziristan police will be given all possible facilities.

Qirat competition held: Security Forces officials conducted a Qirat Competition at Langar Khel Madrassah in Kotkai area of District Upper South Waziristan, around 175 students attended the competition.

The parents of students alongwith elders, tribal elders and dignitaries of adjacent villages were present in the competition to encourage the efforts of Madrassah students. Best students in Qirat recitation were awarded prizes. The wing Commander interacted with Muaalim, Huffaz and students of Madrassah and appreciated their efforts in giving a learning environment.

Relief works is in progress in Torkham



F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: On the second day, relief efforts were in progress in Torkham however no retrieve of the trapped truckers were made possible here on Wednesday.

It is to be stated here that on Tuesday early morning a huge landslide buried nearly 20 export loaded trucks and its drivers in an under-construction trade terminal in Torkham. According to the Rescue 1122 Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dr Khair Ahmad said that the relief had continued for the last thirty hours and rescue workers from Khyber, Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda and Mardan districts beside Pak army rescuers participated in it.

Search operation was carried out through particular and care procedure as menace of the further landslide was still present in the site he added and said heavy machinery was utilized for the purpose. So far three drivers, all Afghan

nationals, were killed and eight others sustained injuries in the mishap, Rescue 1122 official said.

Meanwhile due to landslide export route was blocked by the debris and export to Afghanistan via Torkham was suspended for the second day and long queues of Afghanistan bound located vehicles could be witnessed on Landi Kotal-Torkham highway. Separately Governor and Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa paid a brief visit to Torkham and inspected the the landslide site. They reviewed the relief works and directed for adopting all necessary initiatives to ensure safe recovery of trapped drivers.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner Khyber, Abdul Nasir Khan told media that three dead bodies were so far recovered by the rescue workers of different departments. He said that all the victims belonged to Afghanistan.

Abdul Nasir Khan said a major portion of Torkham-Peshawar road was cleared

from landslides, rocks and debris. He said that three critically injured recovered from debris were shifted to Landi Kotal hospital.

He said a total of 12 people trapped in containers due to landslides were also safely recovered. The Deputy Commissioner said that heavy machinery of different departments were participating in the cleanup operation.

The Deputy Commissioner said heavy machinery of the Engineering Wing of Pakistan Army, Peshawar Development Authority and Rescue 1122 were taking part in the relief and rescue activities. Besides district administration, he said that officers of the district police, Rescue 1122 and Pakistan Army were monitoring the relief operations.

He said relief operations would continue till retrieval of all containers and clearance of the route. He said that normally 20 to 30 containers parked per day in the terminal.

3 held for stealing railway line

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Railway Police Peshawar Division arrested three accused while stealing railway line near Mardan. The accused cut 2 railway tracks with gas cylinder cutter while the railway line was kept near the track for changing.

The three accused were caught red-handed on the information of the railway staff from near In-mand Phatak Rashkai. The accused Asif Nawaz, Luqman Khan and Falak Niaz were arrested along with the gas cutting kit, cylinders and stolen tracks. A case has been registered against the accused in the complaint of PWI Railways in Mardan Railways Police Station.

Emergency meeting held:

An emergent meeting was held under the chairmanship of Zahir Shah Khan, the Provincial General Secretary of the central organization of traders and president of Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in which Chairman Ghulam Sarwar Saraf, General Secretary Waqar Ali Badshah, Executive Members of Mardan Chamber, presidents of various markets and general secretaries participated in a large numbers. In the meeting, due to the excellent relations of the DC Mardan Captain (R) Abdul Rehman with the traders, all the Administration Officers, Assistant Commissioners, AACs fully cooperated with the traders in the blessed

month of Ramadan, thanks to which the business centers of Mardan and the people.

The best relief has been received and the entire business community is expressing confidence in the performance of the present administration. Zahir Shah said that if any traders are defaming the administration for making illegal demands, it has nothing to do with the central organization of traders because the business community is using its platform for the rights and protection of businessmen and not for illegal activities, the situation in this Ramadan was very pleasant and peaceful compared to the previous Ramadan months credit of which go to the District Administration.



KOHIKISTAN: Officials inspecting damages of floods.

From irons to uniforms: Examining everyday

Abdul Wahab

APPLIANCES' Impact on Energy Consumption in Pakistan Pakistan has been grappling with persistent power outages both in recent times and in the past. The precarious state of the power sector underscores the need to explore potential solutions to avert a complete system failure. Although an immediate resolution may not be feasible, certain measures can be taken to effect substantial long-term improvements. The government has shown a strong commitment to addressing the issue by prohibiting the manufacture of conventional fans.

This directive was issued following the Ministry of Science and Technology's recommendation to produce energy-efficient fans that consume no more than 80 watts of power. Furthermore, a report published in the Express Tribune has hinted at the possibility of manufacturing energy-efficient electric bulbs and other household appliances. The

National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (NEECA) has been mandated to ensure compliance with this directive. NEECA is steadfast in its commitment to implementing cost-effective measures as part of its mission. The six fundamental principles outlined in its 2022 policy provide a clear roadmap for achieving this objective. Of particular importance is the principle of "Behavioral Change," which NEECA considers to be an essential practice that all Pakistanis must adhere to during these challenging times.

While electricity is undoubtedly a basic necessity that the state must provide to its citizens, it is equally important to promote capacity building to enable people to use it more efficiently. Developed countries recognize this need and invest in initiatives such as awareness campaigns, outreach programs, and training to encourage the adoption of best practices. By embracing these strategies, Pakistan can enhance its citizens' energy literacy and empower them to make informed decisions about

energy consumption.

In this regard, I came across two examples that are correlated and adaptable as well. First, a friend of mine who recently finished his Ph.D. in China returned home and our first encounter was somewhat uncomfortable. His clothing appeared wrinkled and unkempt, but he seemed at ease. When someone suggested that he might have had a power outage, he surprised us by revealing that he had gone the entire time he was in China without wearing pressed clothes. He further said that schools in China have a tracksuit as a uniform for their students. The benefit of it is that it does not need pressing.

Second, during an official visit to China, my friend observed a distinct aspect of Chinese culture that intrigued him. While touring a local educational institution, he noticed the Chinese instructor leading the tour wearing simple canvas shoes and visibly unpressed clothing, which contrasted sharply with the elaborately dressed students in attendance.

Upon inquiry, the instructor explained that the Chinese people prioritize meaningful and productive pursuits, such as education, innovation, and economic development, over superficial matters like personal appearance. By not wasting time on these trivial aspects, China can save energy and time, which in turn contributes to the country's overall progress and development. This observation highlights a unique perspective rooted in practicality and efficiency that has contributed to China's impressive economic growth over the past few decades.

Now, talking about Pakistan, incorporating the idea of Chinese, would not be a bad one; after all what makes us – Pakistani – superficial that we have to be fancy all the time? An initiative can only be initiated when national interest outweighs personal interests. It is difficult to estimate the exact amount of energy that can be conserved in Pakistan if the educational sector issues a uniform for their students that does not require ironing. However, we

can make some rough calculations to get an idea of the potential energy savings.

According to a study conducted by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, ironing a cotton shirt for 15 minutes consumes approximately 0.6 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity. Assuming that each student wears a cotton shirt that needs to be ironed for 15 minutes every day, the energy consumption can be estimated as follows: Energy consumption per student per day = 0.6 kWh. Assuming that there are approximately 10 million students in Pakistan; the total energy consumption per day can be estimated as follows: Total energy consumption per day = 10 million students x 0.6 kWh/student = 6 million kWh/day This is a significant amount of energy, and if a uniform is adopted that does not require ironing, it could result in significant energy savings. However, it is important to note that this estimate is based on several assumptions and may vary depending on the specific circumstances in Pakistan.

Also, educational matter comes into the provincial ambit after the 18th amendment, but the energy sector can be revived by austerity measures like these by the center with the consultation of the provinces. As we strive for a more sustainable future, it is important to consider the impact of our everyday appliances. One such appliance that requires attention is the traditional iron. With power ranging from a minimum of 1000 watts to 2000 watts, these irons consume a significant amount of energy, contributing to our carbon footprint. Therefore, it is crucial that a ban on traditional irons be imposed. However, it is not just about bans and restrictions. We can learn from the Chinese and adopt good practices that lead to sustainable living. As the world moves towards a more sustainable future, we must shift our focus from the outside-in to the inside-out. We can create a better future for ourselves and the planet by taking responsibility for our actions and making conscious choices.

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Kim says North Korea finishes development of 1st spy satellite

SEOUL (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has completed the development of its first military spy satellite and ordered officials to go ahead with its launch as planned, state media reported Wednesday.

During his visit to the North's aerospace agency, Kim stressed it's crucial to acquire a space-based surveillance system to cope with what he called serious security threats posed by "the most hostile rhetoric and explicit action" by the United States and South Korea this year, the Korean Central News Agency said.

North Korea has said its ongoing torrid run of weapons tests, including its first test-launch of a solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the US mainland last week, are a response to joint military exercises between the United States and its regional allies South Korea and Japan. At the National Aerospace Development Administration, Kim said military reconnaissance was essential for North Korea to effectively use its methods of war deterrence, according to KCNA.

Kim said "the military reconnaissance satellite No. 1" had been built as of April and ordered efforts to speed up final preparations for its launch at a planned date that he didn't disclose. He said North Korea must launch several satellites to firmly establish an intelligence-gathering capability, KCNA said. Kim also accused the US and South Korea of expanding their hostile military campaigns in the name of bolstering their alliance. He accused the US of transforming South Korea into "an advanced base for aggression" by deploying strategic assets like aircraft carriers and nuclear-capable bombers.

The US and South Korean militaries have been expanding their combined drills to beef up their deterrence against North Korea's growing nuclear threats. This week, the allies launched a 12-day aerial exercise involving some 110 warplanes and staged a one-day naval missile defense exercise with Japan. North Korea, for its part, has carried out about 100 missile tests since the start of last year, about 30 of them this year. Observers say while North Korea protests the US-South Korean drills, it also uses them as a pretext to advance its own military capabilities that it believes would help it apply more pressure on Washington to make greater concessions such as the relaxing of sanctions.

A spy satellite is among an array of high-tech weapons Kim has been



developing. The others are a solid-propellant ICBM, a nuclear-power submarine, a hypersonic missile and a multi-warhead missile. North Korea has conducted tests of such weapons, but it is not clear how close they are to operational. North Korea's previous missile and rocket tests have demonstrated the country has a capacity to send satellites into space. But many experts question whether North Korea has sophisticated cameras to use on a spy satellite, because photos it has released from previous test launches were low-resolution imagery.

When North Korea launched a test satellite to assess its photography and data transmission systems last December, it publicized black-and-white photos showing a space view of South Korean cities. Some civilian experts in South Korea said at the time the photos were too crude for the surveillance purpose and that they were likely capable of only recognizing big targets like warships at sea or military installations on the ground. Kim's sister and senior North Korean official, Kim Yo Jong, quickly dismissed such an assessment, saying the test satellite carried a commercial camera because there was no reason to use an expensive, high-resolution camera for a single-shot test.

Kim Jong Un said one of the objectives for its spy satellite is acquiring an ability to "use pre-emptive military force when the situation demands." That shows he intends to link the spy satellite to the North's escalatory nuclear doctrine, which authorizes pre-emptive nuclear strikes. KCNA dispatch focused on

US military assets that have been deployed in South Korea in recent months but made no mention of possible targets in the mainland US That could imply that North Korea may intend to use its reconnaissance satellites to identify and then attack key targets in South Korea, including US military bases, with its short-range missiles.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said North Korea is communicating that its military reconnaissance satellites would be intended to acquire precise location and movement information in real time so that its missiles and other nuclear-armed weapons could accurately strike targets. He said North Korea will likely inform international maritime and telecommunication authorities of its specific launch plans, likely sometime between May and September. Putting a reconnaissance satellite into orbit would require a long-range rocket. But the UN bans such a launch by North Korea because it views it as a cover for testing its long-range ballistic missile technology.

North Korea placed its first and second Earth observation satellites into orbit in 2012 and 2016, but foreign experts say neither one transmitted any imagery back to North Korea. UN sanctions were issued over those launches. North Korea has avoided fresh UN sanctions for its recent ballistic missile tests in 2022 and this year because the UN Security Council permanent members Russia and China won't support US and others' attempts to toughen sanctions on it.

US approves F-16 upgrade after Turkey eases stand on NATO

WASHINGTON (AP): The US agreed to sell Turkey \$259 million in software it has long sought to upgrade its fleet of US F-16 fighter jets. State Department approval of the sale comes about two weeks after Turkey dropped its objections to Finland joining NATO. Turkey continues to withhold its approval for Sweden to join the military alliance. NATO requires unanimous approval to admit new members.

Turkey also still wants to buy 40 new F-16s from the US, but some in Congress oppose the sale until Turkey approves NATO membership for both Nordic countries. Turkey fell out of grace with the US on high-tech military aircraft purchases after it decided in 2017 to acquire Russian air-defense missiles. Turkey was kicked out of a US program to develop the next-generation F-35 fighter plane and Turkish defense officials were sanctioned. The US said the Russian missiles posed a threat to the F-35 and strongly objected to their use within the NATO alliance. Turkey sees the F-16s as an interim option to build up its air capability.

Approval of the software sale will let Turkey update the avionics of its existing F-16 fleet. The State Department said the upgrade includes improvements in communications and security programs like the ground avoidance system. It called it an "interoperability and basic safety-of-flight issue" for Turkey and its allies.

Nearly 1 in 4 S Sudanese affected floods

JUBA (AFP): Nearly a quarter of South Sudan's population has been affected by years of unprecedented flooding, according to a report by the UN Development Programme and the government's relief and rehabilitation commission. Four straight years of flooding have impacted more than 2.6 million people across the world's newest nation, forcing many to turn to wild fruits and leaves for sustenance, the report said.

"Roads and bridges have been washed away, health facilities abandoned or destroyed, crops and pastures submerged under water, families destroyed and parents separated from their children," the commission's chairman Manase Lomole Waya said. The floods also led to the deaths of 172 people caught by rising waters, the report said.

"The affected people and communities are mainly relying on support of relatives and friends, fishing, eating wild fruits and leaves, selling animals, as well as the limited humanitarian assistance supplied," it said. The annual floods since 2019 -- a recent phenomenon that many experts link to climate change -- have turned 10 percent of the country's arable land to swamp at a time when two out of three South Sudanese do not have enough to eat.

The country has already had to grapple with deadly conflict, natural disasters, economic malaise and relentless political infighting since winning independence from Sudan in 2011. Since then it has spent more than half its existence at war, with nearly 400,000 people dying during a five-year civil conflict that ended in 2018.

Last November, the United Nations warned that around two-thirds of South Sudan's population of 11 million people were at risk of severe hunger, surpassing levels seen even during the conflict in 2013 and 2016. The UN blamed the humanitarian disaster on a combination of violence, poor macro-economic conditions, extreme climate events and spiralling costs of food and fuel, as well as a decline in funding for aid programmes. Four out of five in South Sudan live in "absolute poverty", according to World Bank figures for 2018. Although a 2018 ceasefire and power-sharing deal between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar still largely holds, little progress has been made in fulfilling its terms.

Residents, aid workers surprised by closure of Iraqi camp

IRBIL, Iraq (AP): Iraq shut down a camp housing internally displaced Iraqis with alleged ties to the Islamic State group, the migration and displacement ministry announced. The statement said the camp's closure came as part of a government program aiming to "end the displacement file" in the country, where 1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced after years of conflict.

Aid workers criticized the closure as hasty and chaotic. Residents and aid workers at the Jadah 5 camp in northern Iraq's Qayyarah — which housed some 300 families — were informed by government and security officials that they had to leave the camp by Wednesday, a day before the beginning of the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Fitr. Iraq has long sought to close down the displacement camp, one of the last remaining in federally controlled areas, but faced pushback from aid groups concerned over the integration of vulnerable families, including many women and children, stigmatized for their perceived or real affiliation with IS. Aid workers said they had been locked out of the camp by security forces and residents were being evicted after being given two days' notice to leave. An Associated Press correspondent who attempted to reach the camp found it surrounded by a heavy security deployment and was not allowed

to access the premises.

Several official notices of closure had been sent to the camp over the past year and a half but were later delayed. This time, however, the closure came sooner than expected. On March 23, Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displacement sent a letter to the International Organization for Migration, which coordinates humanitarian aid in the camp, informing it that the camp would be shut down in 60 days. The letter did not cite a reason for the closure. A spokesperson for the IOM said the organization is aware that residents have received notice that the camp will be closed but declined to comment further.

"They all must leave — they don't have another option," said Ali Abbas, a spokesperson for the ministry. He said each family had been given 1,500,000 Iraqi dinar (about \$1030) to find new housing. Abbas did not give a reason for the closure decision, and it was not clear why the ministry had moved up the May deadline cited in the letter.

The ministry statement, reported by state media, said that "all the displaced have returned to their original areas of residence on a voluntary basis." The order to vacate the camp, "was sudden, with no notice," said a worker with an aid organization operating in the camp, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear

that the government would retaliate against the non-governmental organization. "So (residents) were confused about how to leave the camp."

Another aid worker, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said the residents were told that if they did not leave, "the army will enter and kick out all those who remain," adding that ministry employees and security forces "started to confiscate the (identification) documents of the people to make sure that they leave." UN and NGO workers were prevented from entering the premises by security forces, the aid workers said, and as of the afternoon all but around 15 to 20 families had left the camp.

Camp residents often fear violence from militias and tribes if they return to their areas of origin. Authorities began a rapid push in late 2020 to close down displacement camps across the country in an effort to push forward with recovery efforts that have lagged years after the defeat of IS. Most camps were shut, aside from those in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, and one where returnees from the al-Hol camp in Syria are housed. International organizations have cited violence, exploitation and lawlessness in the al-Hol camp and called for countries with citizens housed there to repatriate them.

Hunger is soaring and spreading across Africa

DAKAR (AP): Hunger is soaring and spreading across West Africa, with some 48 million people, a 10-year-high, facing food insecurity in the conflict-riddled region, the United Nations warned. Driven primarily by violence as well as the economic fallout from COVID-19 and inflation, food insecurity has heavily impacted Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, northern Nigeria and Mauritania, UN officials said at a press conference in Senegal's capital, Dakar.

UN officials said that for the first time, some 45,000 people in the Sahel region, the arid expanse below the Sahara Desert, are on the brink of starvation, one step away from famine. The vast majority facing catastrophic levels of hunger, 42,000, are in Burkina Faso, the officials reported. "The situation is worrying," said Ann Defraye, a regional nutrition specialist for UNICEF in West and Central Africa. "Last year, we saw a large increase (31%) in the numbers of children admitted to health facilities with severe wasting across the Sahel. ... In many areas, it is getting much more difficult for families to find nutritious

food to eat, especially where we have communities under blockade."

Violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group has ravaged both Burkina Faso and Mali for years. Jihadis have blockaded dozens of villages in the region, cut off access to farms and lined the roads with explosives, making it hard for residents to move freely and forcing aid agencies to fly in food assistance, which is costly. People living in besieged towns in Burkina Faso say they're struggling to survive.

"We don't have enough food. People eat what they get," a resident of Pama, a town in the east that has been under blockade for more than a year told The Associated Press. A few aid groups have managed to provide rice, oil and beans, but women can't grind millet because there's no gas and people can't leave the town because it's surrounded by jihadis, the resident said. He would not give his name for fear of reprisals from speaking publicly.

As civilians flee attacks and militants expand their reach in Burkina Faso, hunger also is spreading

across the border to neighboring Togo and Benin. Nearly 1 million people are expected to be food insecure in Benin and Togo, almost double the number from two years earlier, according to the UN. For the first time, both countries asked aid groups for assistance in dealing with the influx of displaced people and refugees. "We're really concerned with the coastal countries. If there's not enough done in Burkina (Faso), the risk of increasing numbers of people having to cross the border to find safe haven or livelihood opportunities because they cannot use their land or their livestock have been attacked will increase," said Alexandre Le Cuziat, a senior emergency advisor for the World Food Program in West and Central Africa.

"There's still a prevention window in the coastal countries, but it's closing fast. We saw it close fast in the Sahel," Le Cuziat said. Aid groups, regional governments and donor countries need to take lessons learned from the insecurity crisis in other countries and try to mitigate the fallout in the coastal states, he said.

UK demands 'real leadership' from Northern Ireland unionists

LONDON (AFP): The UK government issued its strongest appeal yet to unionists in Northern Ireland to restore the region's power-sharing government, after Brexit disrupted a delicate political balance. The Conservative government called on the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to embrace "real leadership" and emulate predecessors who forged Northern Ireland's 1998 peace accord, which ended three decades of violence against British rule.

The DUP has been boycotting the divided territory's government at Stormont over post-Brexit trading arrangements agreed with the European Union, despite itself supporting the UK's split from the EU. The party has been under sustained pressure from London, Dublin, Brussels and Washington, peaking in a visit to the island last week by US President Joe Biden.

Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris delivered the UK government's sharpest rhetoric yet, in a speech to a conference marking the 25th anniversary of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday peace agreement. Everyone in

Northern Ireland wants better public services, economic prosperity and a brighter future for their children, the minister told the audience at Queen's University in Belfast.

"The biggest threat to Northern Ireland's place in the (UK) union is failing to deliver on these priorities," he said. "Others who share that (pro-UK) view should put the union first, restore the devolved institutions and get on with the job of delivering for the people of Northern Ireland." Citing the compromises forged by dihard unionists in 1998 and subsequently, Heaton-Harris added that "real leadership is about knowing when to say yes and having the courage to do so".

The three-day conference in Belfast has a high-powered cast of leaders who brokered the 1998 deal, including former UK prime minister Tony Blair, then-Irish premier Bertie Ahern and ex-president Bill Clinton. At the conference, EU Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic said he had consulted widely with business leaders in Northern Ireland. "What... I heard very clearly was, they need predictability," said

Sefcovic, who led talks for the new deal with the UK, dubbed the "Windsor Framework". "They need stability," he added, urging political leaders to learn from the "inclusivity" that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement.

The 1998 peace deal ended border checks on the island of Ireland as a condition for overcoming "The Troubles". But Brexit upended Northern Ireland's fragile status quo by necessitating the return of a trading border between the UK and the EU. The customs checks are happening now between Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland, to the DUP's fury. DUP lawmaker Emma Little-Pengelly told the conference that the party's concerns were not being taken seriously enough. "We need to build the strong (Stormont) foundations to make the institutions work. Not just this year, or the next five years, but for the next 25 years," she said. Other Northern Irish leaders said the DUP and Conservatives only had themselves to blame for refusing to accept the inevitable consequences of Brexit.

Iran's leader rules out referendums

DUBAI (AP): Iran's supreme leader ruled out the holding of popular referendums on state policies. Iran faced calls for a referendum on the Islamic Republic itself during anti-government protests last year, and a moderate former president recently suggested such votes should be held to decide major policies as a way of reducing divisions.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say over such policies, rejected the idea when asked about it during a meeting with university students. "Where in the world is this done? Is it possible to hold a referendum for various issues of the country?" he asked. "For any single issue, the country would be engaged in debate and arguments and polarization for six months, so that a referendum can be held on that issue." He appeared to be referring to recent remarks by former President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate, who had suggested holding referendums on domestic and foreign policies. Iran holds regular presidential and parliamentary elections overseen by clerical bodies that vet candidates. Under the constitution, a referendum is only possible if two-thirds of parliament votes for it and a 12-member constitutional body — half of whom are appointed by the supreme leader — approves.

Iran saw months of nationwide anti-government protests sparked by the death in September of a 22-year-old woman who was detained by the moralistic police for allegedly violating the country's strict Islamic dress code. The protests rapidly escalated into calls for the overthrow of the ruling clerics, marking a major challenge to their four-decade rule. The protests died down earlier this year amid a violent crackdown by authorities, though there are lingering signs of discontent. Iran held referendums to establish an Islamic Republic and approve a new constitution shortly after the 1979 revolution.

Hopes crumble for a pause in fighting in Sudan

KHARTOUM (BBC): Heavy gunfire and the roar of warplanes have shattered plans for a ceasefire in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, which was due to start at 18:00 (16:00 GMT). Fighting was reported around the army headquarters by the airport in the city centre, which is surrounded by residential areas. Two rival generals at the heart of the conflict had agreed to a 24-hour humanitarian pause.

Nearly 200 people have been killed in the fighting. Residents are low on food and water as clashes between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group continue. UN Secretary General António Guterres' spokesman said, "The fighting in Sudan, including Khartoum and various other locations, is continuing. No sign of real abatement of the fighting." Earlier in the day, a woman living in Khartoum told the BBC that she had no more drinking water left in her home.

Duaa Tariq said only one bottle remained, which she was saving for her two-year-old child, as her family crammed into a "tiny corridor" to avoid gunfire. "Most of the people [that] died, died in their houses with random bullets and missiles, so it's better to avoid

exposed places in the house" like windows, Ms Tariq said. At the University of Khartoum, a student was killed after being hit by a stray bullet. "We were going to get food for the rest of the students," law student Mosaab Sharif, who is sheltering in a building near the campus, told the BBC.

A Facebook post, verified by the BBC, said the body had been buried on campus after safe passage off site could not be secured. "There were three of us, and then he was hit in the chest. We couldn't even help him. As we were burying our colleague, one of us was hit with a bullet in his hand," Mr Sharif added. He said that "snipers have been targeting anyone with flash lights". Half an hour before the ceasefire was due to start, Khartoum residents were shocked to hear that three children - brothers living in the east of the city - had been killed in a bombardment.

Residents broke their Muslim Ramadan fast just after 18:00 local time to the sound of gunfire, with eyewitnesses in Bahri, in the north of the city, saying aircraft were flying overhead. Another woman in Khartoum told the BBC that heavy weapons fire had continued well after the ceasefire was due to come

into effect. She described how earlier in the day she had escaped with her one-year-old child from her home as it was being struck by missiles. Even if the fighting does die down in the next 24 hours, it is unlikely to be enough time for civilians to seek help, with the Red Cross saying the health system is on the verge of collapse.

The aid group said it has been receiving multiple calls for help from people trapped in their homes in a city that has an estimated population of 10 million residents, with most struggling to cope without electricity. Fighting has also been taking place elsewhere in Sudan, including in Darfur to the west. The UN aid chief has warned of reports that say humanitarian workers are being attacked and sexually assaulted.

"This is unacceptable and must stop," Martin Griffiths tweeted, after the time the ceasefire was expected to have been implemented. The fighting is between army units loyal to the de facto leader, Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, a notorious paramilitary force commanded by Sudan's deputy leader, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known as Hemedti.

Mexico nabs, swiftly departs MS-13 gang leader to El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR (Reuters): Police in Mexico City arrested one of the most wanted leaders of the notorious Mara Salvatrucha gang accused of multiple crimes in the United States, officials said, in a fresh blow to one of Central America's most violent criminal groups.

Jose Wilfredo Ayala, 55, was arrested after a tip from a neighbor, according to the Mexican capital's security ministry. The ministry said it had discovered Ayala - believed to be second-in-command of the gang commonly known as MS-13 - was using a false identity and hiding in Mexico City

and in two areas a short drive north in Hidalgo state. An official with Mexico's national immigration institute INM told Reuters later that Ayala had already been deported to his native El Salvador, but did not provide further detail.

Surveillance video showed Ayala, also known by his alias "Indio" or "El Indio de Hollywood," was likely sheltering in a building in the Mexican capital's Buenavista neighborhood. Ayala is "under investigation for homicide charges and is tied to other crimes like aggravated robbery, using false documents, possessing weapons of war,

public disorder, and others committed in the United States," the ministry said in a statement. A warrant for Ayala's arrest in the US state of Texas citing federal charges is outstanding, officials added.

In an indictment against more than a dozen of MS-13's "highest-ranking" leaders, made public on Feb. 23 by federal prosecutors in New York, Ayala was listed as one of four fugitive leaders. Six others are believed to be in custody of Salvadoran authorities. El Salvador's justice and security ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Ayala's capture.

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Syria’s reintegration into Arab World

SAUDI Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan has paid an official trip to Damascus and held in-depth discussions with top Syrian leadership to help restore ties between the two nations. During the meeting with the Syrian President, Saudi Foreign Minister discussed steps to achieve a comprehensive political settlement that contributes to Syria's complete return to the Arab fold and called for the creation of the appropriate conditions for the return of refugees, the IDPs and for aid to reach all Syrian regions. President Bashar-ul-Assad commended the outwards-looking and realistic Saudi approach to the region and noted that sound relations between Syria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should be the norm because such ties would not only benefit the two brotherly nations but also played an important role in political stability and economic uplift of the entire region.

The second decade of the 21st century brought the so-called wave of Arab Spring to multiple Monarchies and structured democracies stretching across the Middle East and North African region. The governments in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt, and other nations used force to suppress foreign-sponsored public uprisings that led to civil insurgencies, social polarization, and extreme political turmoil in their countries. The majority of Arab monarchs in the Arab Peninsula including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, and Kuwait supported anti-government democracy rebels in their neighboring Syria and Libya, severed diplomatic and trade ties with them, and removed their membership in the Arab League.

Historically, the entire Arab land and almost every other nation remained under direct intimidation and blatant interventions by the so-called Western democracies to liberate their social codes, preserve human rights, and transform their systems in line with the Western political culture amid serious threats to their survival from radical Islamist groups including Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Al-Shabab, etc. Meanwhile, several Arab nations including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Jordan introduced political reforms and liberated their social regimes to meet the current-day challenges aroused by the political movements in their nations. During that time, the Middle East region became an arena for global power competition between major power blocs, as Russia and Iran forged alliances with local armed groups while the United States, NATO, and Israel came in the support of other factions. Historically, the Arabs residing in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Iraq had suffered utmost from war hostilities, humanitarian crises, and the menace of terrorism, while unarmed Palestinians were purely at the mercy of the Israeli regime in the absence of any support from neighboring Arab nations throughout in the past decade.

The Western power contenders could not implement their strategy in the broader Middle East region and abandoned their plans after waging a decade-long destruction, violence, and anarchy in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Lebanon. Libyan dictator Muammar Al-Gaddafi lost his rule while Bashar-ul-Assad remained successful in rescuing his regime. A democratic Iraq emerged after decades-long bloodshed and violence, Lebanon is still embattled with political and economic chaos while Turkey successfully defeated the threat posed by the Kurdistan separatist movement. Although, the West set the stage for another conflict in the region through the formation of a proposed Arab-Israel alliance against Iran, but Arab wisdom and a Muslim brotherhood prevailed, and an adorable campaign for reconciliation, regional growth, and cooperation has begun in the region. Apparently, Muslim Ummah and the entire Arab land had suffered unimaginably from internal rivalries, and mutual tussle, while their enemies took advantage of their disunity. Now, positive momentum and constructive diplomacy has begun among the Arab nations that needs to be preserved and must be expanded to other Muslim countries for greater benefit and interest of the Muslim Ummah across the globe.

Imperative that Sudan army emerges victorious

Osama Al-Sharif

It was almost inevitable that the two reluctant partners that have jointly ruled Sudan for the past four years were destined to fight each other as a political accord to hand over the reins of power to a civilian government was to be signed and adopted earlier this month. But the faceoff between Sovereignty Council president and top army chief Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and head of the notorious Rapid Support Forces militia Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo has little to do with restoring democracy or ending decades of hardship for the people of Sudan. It is in fact a power struggle and a fight between the forces that carried out the 2019 military putsch against long-time dictator Omar Bashir.

For the people of Sudan, there is little sympathy for either man. Al-Burhan and deputy Dagalo have derailed previous attempts to restore civilian rule and, while the signing last December of the Framework Agreement was a significant breakthrough, the fact that Dagalo had caveats about the time-frame for integrating the RSF into the regular army was always going to be a deal-breaker. Other issues for both men involved articles in the agreement regarding divesting the military from economic activities and investigating abuses by the military against civilians.

It is not clear how this week's bloody clashes began or which side to believe when it comes to news from the battlefield. Both sides claim to have scored significant gains, but by Monday evening it

was clear that neither side had come out on top and that skirmishes were taking place at key points in the capital, including the army headquarters, and elsewhere in the country. One would assume that the regular army of about 250,000 well-equipped men, backed by fighter jets and heavy

and is an elite force that Bashir had selected to be his personal militia. In fact, it is believed that Dagalo's decision to back the military coup against his boss was instrumental in toppling Bashir's regime.

While Al-Burhan him-

self of the army, while difficult to imagine, would be catastrophic for Sudan and its territorial integrity. Aside from dire economic and social conditions, the specter of partition and civil strife continues to haunt the country. Tribes in

peace in Darfur and southern Sudan. A prolonged military confrontation could also trigger tribal wars in different parts of the country.

So far, neither Al-Burhan nor Dagalo has agreed to a lasting ceasefire or to peace talks. Al-Burhan escalated things by

an attempt to tie the general to Bashir backers. Such accusations are meant to send cryptic messages to outside parties, both regional and beyond, that have a vested interest in what is happening in Sudan. It was interesting that Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who visited Khartoum in February, warned of a radical Islamist infiltration in Sudan and confirmed that Israel is trying to calm the situation there. Both Al-Burhan and Dagalo have met Israeli officials and are on record supporting the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Dagalo has regional connections and RSF fighters have been dispatched as mercenaries to fight outside Sudan. This is probably why Al-Burhan was quick to warn foreign parties against interfering in the current crisis. The situation in Sudan is critical to the stability of the immediate region. The US, Russia, Egypt and Israel all have a stake in how things turn out. What is worrying is that neither side will be able to seal a quick victory. The current conflict could drag on for weeks and even months. If Dagalo is forced out of the capital, he could retreat to Darfur and wage a guerrilla war against the military and inside cities. In either case, the country will slide into turmoil and a humanitarian crisis will soon ensue. If a stalemate prevails with no conclusive end, then mediators may be able to bring the two sides to the table. That may not be good for the future of Sudan. A situation where both sides remain on the ground will weaken the country and, more importantly, imperil the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

But the RSF is battle-tested, having fought for years in Darfur, and is an elite force that Bashir had selected to be his personal militia. In fact, it is believed that Dagalo's decision to back the military coup against his boss was instrumental in toppling Bashir's regime. While Al-Burhan himself cannot be trusted to oversee the restoration of civilian rule, it is imperative that the Sudanese army emerges as the winner in this confrontation. A defeat of the army, while difficult to imagine, would be catastrophic for Sudan and its territorial integrity. Aside from dire economic and social conditions, the specter of partition and civil strife continues to haunt the country. Tribes in the economically vital eastern region are becoming restless and voices calling for secession are echoing again. Also hanging in the balance is the future of peace in Darfur and southern Sudan. A prolonged military confrontation could also trigger tribal wars in different parts of the country. So far, neither Al-Burhan nor Dagalo has agreed to a lasting ceasefire or to peace talks. Al-Burhan escalated things by disbanding the RSF and declaring Dagalo a mutineer. For his part, Dagalo has accused Al-Burhan of leading an Islamist takeover of the country in an attempt to tie the general to Bashir backers. Such accusations are meant to send cryptic messages to outside parties, both regional and beyond, that have a vested interest in what is happening in Sudan. It was interesting that Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who visited Khartoum in February, warned of a radical Islamist infiltration in Sudan and confirmed that Israel is trying to calm the situation there. Both Al-Burhan and Dagalo have met Israeli officials and are on record supporting the normalization of relations between the two countries.

armor, will eventually overcome the lightly fitted RSF, whose numbers are said to be about 100,000. But the RSF is battle-tested, having fought for years in Darfur,

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the economically vital eastern region are becoming restless and voices calling for secession are echoing again. Also hanging in the balance is the future of

disbanding the RSF and declaring Dagalo a mutineer. For his part, Dagalo has accused Al-Burhan of leading an Islamist takeover of the country in

The US and NATO must team up in the Gulf

It is clear that the era of US hegemony in the Gulf, and the Middle East more broadly, is over. What is less certain is what security system will replace it and whether it will better serve regional security and US interests. The Gulf is becoming a more crowded geopolitical space than ever, with external powers such as China, Russia and India increasing their involvement in the region to safeguard their economic interests, while local powers, most notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, are rising and pursuing a more independent foreign policy course.

This shift away from US guardianship and toward greater multilateralism is precisely what Washington has preached and sought for a decade and a half. When US regional partners are able and willing to step up, as several of them have in some areas, Washington feels more confident about drawing down and paying closer attention to the Indo-Pacific and European theaters. Yet, as welcome as this structural transition

in the Gulf is, the US should still shape it to secure its long-term interests. Washington has two major challenges in mind that could severely complicate this transition. The first is Iran's nuclear ambitions. The second is China and Russia's growing influence in the region.

With regard to the first challenge, the Gulf Arab states should be commended for seeking to gradually reconcile with their main adversary, Iran. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's latest rapprochement with Tehran, leading to the resumption of diplomatic ties, contributes to regional calm and has the potential to be transformative for the region. But enhanced political relations between Tehran and its Gulf Arab neighbors does not, nor was it expected to, defuse the ticking time bomb that is Iran's nuclear program. As Tehran inches closer to obtaining a nuclear weapon - the latest US assessment is that Iran could make the nuclear material for a bomb in about 12 days, if it wanted to - the possibility of Israel resorting to military force to arrest that process

becomes higher.

An Israeli attack against Iran's nuclear infrastructure would undoubtedly lead to regional war. Tensions between Iran and Israel are already high given the latest cycle of violence between the two, which keeps escalating and expanding in geographical scope. In this combustible Iran-Israel dynamic, there is very little the Gulf states can do to pacify it. Concerning the second challenge, greater Chinese and Russian influence in the Gulf gives these powers leverage in their global competition with the US. Washington cannot forbid the Gulf states from doing business with China and Russia, but it must try to prevent those economic exchanges from spilling over into the defense and security realm.

So, how can Washington continue to promote a less US-dependent security order in the Gulf while also addressing these two significant challenges? Helping regional partners develop their self-defense capabilities, as US Central Command has

Bilal Y. Saab

been busy doing, is critical, but it is not enough. This process is also going to take years before it generates bigger outcomes. The Iranian challenge is a lot more urgent. A strategically sound and cost-effective approach would be for Washington to involve its long-standing transatlantic allies in the mission of Gulf security. Two of these allies - the UK and France - have shared values and interests with the US, as well as a military presence in the Gulf.

The idea is to transition from a US-controlled hub-and-spoke security system in the Gulf, which has been the format for decades, to a US-led alliance network that leans heavily on the British, who have a permanent naval base in Bahrain, and the French, who have military and intelligence facilities of their own in the UAE. Burden-sharing is a desired goal that has been reiterated by successive US administrations. But Washington has not truly internalized the concept and embraced it as a real operating principle in its foreign and security

policies, at least in the region. It should, however, because London and Paris, if properly incentivized, have much to offer. Not only do they have military capabilities in the Gulf, but they have deep concerns about Chinese and Russian intentions. Their leaders (especially the French) have good personal relations with Gulf monarchs. At a time of mistrust in US-Gulf relations, British and French good offices could be quite useful.

One existing mechanism through which greater integration within this trio of transatlantic allies on Gulf policy could be achieved, and through which more effective coordination between that Western bloc and the Gulf states could be realized, is NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Created at the 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul, this platform seeks to promote security and political cooperation on a bilateral basis between NATO and partner countries in the Middle East. The truth is that it has not been very effective because the most powerful member of NATO - the US - has not been involved.

Three important modifications could be made to the initiative to make it more successful.

One, Washington would have to play a more active role, both as facilitator and enabler. Two, Saudi Arabia and Oman would have to join (right now, only Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE are members). Three, the interactions between NATO members and the Gulf states would have to include a multilateral format.

Like East Asia, the Gulf is as ripe for regional multilateralism as it is ripe for competition with China and Russia. The US could use more of the former and be better prepared for the latter. America's physical presence in the Gulf is, and will remain, a critical component of Gulf security for years to come. But today's threats require a more sophisticated and collective approach to regional security. There is no better way to pursue that approach than by Washington joining forces with its oldest and closest treaty allies that share its views, values and objectives on the future of the region.

Sudan’s tragedy: Rogue generals and failed coups

Marwan Bishara

At the heart of Sudan's ongoing tragedy lies a familiar travesty. For decades, countries in the Middle East have suffered from military coups carried out in the name of national salvation, pride and prosperity that have consistently culminated in disaster. Many of the coups in the 1950s and 1960s - from Syria to Sudan, through Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and Libya - were led by young officers with lofty visions and high hopes for replacing a dreadful status quo with a better, more prosperous future, free of humiliation and defeat.

But the more recent coups, like that in Algeria in 1992, Egypt in 2013 and Sudan in 2021, lacked vision and ambition beyond merely blocking political change and restoring the appalling status quo ante that favoured military power and privilege. All these coups have generally ended in disaster regardless of their original goals, and yet the farce continues as generals today stubbornly repeat their predecessors' follies to no end, alas. If coups were of any benefit

to the state, Sudan would be the most prosperous country in the region. It has had more than a dozen coups and coup attempts since it gained independence in 1958.

But it is not. All its coups - attempted, realised and failed - have had a devastating effect on the country, unleashing repression onto its struggling population and destabilising the state. Despite this tragic history, those who have never won on the battlefield are still eager to attack civilians and civilian institutions and violently suppress political parties as if they were the enemies of the state, all to preserve their power. Among the few serious studies of the Arab armies is a paper by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies that notes a pattern of behaviour common to most coups, including the latest in Sudan.

It argues that once they take hold of political power, coup leaders do not give it up voluntarily. In other words, they do not seize power for others to rule over them. And once they depose the head of state, coup leaders begin to

suspect one another and tend to turn on each other. Moreover, military leaders-cum-political leaders tend to militarise politics and politicise the military to the detriment of state institutions and the people. Unable or incapable of providing socioeconomic solutions to their nations' problems, they resort to religious populism, sectarianism or the only language they master - force. They perpetuate instability in the name of stability and fear in the name of security. So it is no surprise that Sudan's coup leaders, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, the army chief, and General Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, the head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have pursued the same deceitful ways and means to monopolise power after the 2019 ouster of President Omar al-Bashir. It was no shock that the mischievous generals squeezed out the civilian prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, in 2022, about 14 months after reaching an accommodation with the Forces for Freedom and

Change, which led the civilian movement challenging al-Bashir's regime.

When national and international pressure mounted, they struck a new deal, a transitional Framework Agreement, through which they sought to preserve their power. As their influence grew, so did their suspicion of one another. When attempts at power sharing failed, it was only a matter of time before their distrust and discord escalated into an open, bloody confrontation. With the battles intensifying in the streets of Khartoum and other major cities and the chances for reconciliation dissipating with each passing day, it is hard to say when the fighting may end or who is more likely to come out on top. What is clear thus far is that the less powerful but more mobile and battle-tested RSF has pursued asymmetrical strategies, deploying rapidly to sensitive power centres to achieve quick wins against the less mobile military. It is also trying to capture or kill al-Burhan and thus deliver a decisive psychological blow to the

armed forces.

If the RSF does not achieve a quick victory and the fighting persists unabated, the bigger, more powerful national army, which has the advantage of more sophisticated weapons like fighter jets, could eventually prevail, albeit at a terrible cost to Sudan and the Sudanese people. To be sure, al-Burhan and Hemedti, who were powerful enablers of al-Bashir's dictatorship before turning on him, have had a long, bloody history from Darfur to Yemen. They have conspired against the 2019 popular uprising against al-Bashir and undermined the political transformation towards civilian rule. And today, both have de facto forfeited any right to lead the country, having cynically dragged it down the path of bloodshed and destruction. Having said that, the two strongmen have very different pedigrees and head two very different military forces. While al-Burhan is a professional soldier who climbed the ranks of an army with clear structures and operating systems, Hemedti was a rogue camel

smuggler turned hired gun turned leader of a vicious militia that conducts illicit trade and functions according to his whims and fancies.

Al-Burhan's transgressions are outrageous, considering his position as army chief. But that is precisely why Sudan deserves a national army whose leaders are professional, legitimate and accountable to its government. Every state requires or deserves a truly national army, but no state needs a shadowy militia that functions above the law. It is a recipe for perpetual disaster. That is not to say that the Sudanese people must now take sides as the strongmen fight it out at the expense of the country's security and stability. Regardless of its outcome, once this reckless, bloody fight is over, hopefully soon, Sudan must overhaul its military and rid itself of all militias. As they are pushed to choose the lesser of two evils, the Sudanese should opt for a third choice: a civilian-led, democratically elected government that oversees the return of the army to its barracks.

Aljazeera

Violence inevitable until Israel-Palestine conflict is resolved

THERE is nothing new about Israelis and Palestinians clashing at this time of the year, especially when the holy celebrations of Ramazan, Passover and Easter happen to coincide. This tragic turn of events has become something of a ritual, not a very pleasant one, as their disagreements seem more unbridgeable than ever, their leaderships increasingly authoritarian and out of touch with the people, and their societies polarized. While recent events exhibited familiar patterns, they have also presented some new ones, most of them unwelcome, although the fact that these leaders have managed thus far to prevent the violence from escalating into a full-blown war is a source of relative comfort.

Until there is a resolution that goes beyond conflict management and is courageous and thoughtful enough to address the root causes of the conflict between these two peoples, outbreaks of violence are inevitable. Knowing how volatile the situation is, especially in Jerusalem, concerns and warnings of hostilities were issued months in advance, but in recent years it seems that everyone involved would rather deal with the consequences of these confrontations than take the necessary steps and create political and diplomatic mechanisms to avert them before they can break out. Unlike similar developments in the past, this time both sides are testing each other, but are cautious not to provoke the other to overreact. However, for how long this restraint can be maintained is anybody's guess; there are no guarantees.

One factor that adds to the unpredictability of the situation is the formation of the most far-right government in Israel's history, which is both intimidating and perplexing for the

Palestinians and has wider consequences for the region. On the one hand it is a government that includes ministers calling for expanding the settlements, annexing the occupied West Bank, changing the status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and who are generally hostile to the Palestinians. However, on the other hand, due to its own miscalculation and misjudgment, it is preoccupied with domestic affairs, is deeply divisive and consequently has weakened the society and also its security forces, which might tempt not only Palestinians but also Iran and its regional allies to test its resolve.

For the puzzled, even astonished world, the new Israeli government has embarked on a mission to destroy democracy, splitting the society and also angering many reservist soldiers, who for the first time in the country's history are refusing to show up for service. This is a noticeable weakness, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, instead of taking responsibility, is blaming the hundreds of thousands of protesters who are trying to save their democracy.

For Palestinians, there is a frightening sense of clarity in the sense that this is a government that is not bothered with any pretense of wanting a political settlement to the conflict, nor does it appear to care how the international community perceives it or might react to any provocations by the government itself or the Jewish settlers.

The choice left for many Palestinians - especially in the face of the disarray among their own leadership, much of it emanating from the split between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza - is either to return to more active resistance to

Yossi Mekelberg

the occupation or instead to avoid any act that would upset an Israeli government and give it the pretext to use excessive force to suppress such resistance and even annex parts of the West Bank. Needless to say, neither option is attractive, and both will either end in a heavy and disproportionate reaction from Israel, with terrible consequences, or a return to the current and unacceptable situation of living under oppressive occupation.

Yet, confrontations in recent weeks have been localized and limited in duration. Hamas might encourage Muslim worshippers to clash with Israeli security forces, but when the most fanatical of the Jewish messianic-religious far-right groups insist on practicing an ancient ritual of sacrifice for Passover on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound during Ramazan, there is no need for much encouragement, especially when there is support among the current government for building a third Jewish temple on the site.

I keep hearing from many Israelis, and not necessarily unreasonable ones, that everyone should have equal rights to worship on Temple Mount and Jews should not be discriminated against. There is something naive about this argument, but worryingly it is also insensitive and ignores the wider context. Who would not like to see Jerusalem become a city of peace, a hub of interfaith collaboration and an example for the rest of the world of people of different faiths living in harmony? But this cannot take place while the Israeli occupation continues, the right of Palestinians to self-determination is denied and a group of provocateurs, against the religious ruling of the vast majority of rabbis, are exacerbating an already flammable situation. This situation has been

made worse by the disproportionate reaction of Israeli security forces when Muslim worshippers barricaded themselves inside their mosque.

The horrific murder by Palestinian terrorists of a Jewish mother and her two daughters from the settlement of Efrat, like the vehicle ramming - assuming it was deliberate - that left one Italian tourist dead and others injured on the promenade in Tel Aviv, is inexcusable and will hardly improve the lives of Palestinians or end the occupation and the oppression of Palestinian people. However, while Israelis are understandably shocked by these killings, they also need to remember the many Palestinian civilians who are killed every year by Israeli security forces with complete impunity.

What probably surprised Israel more than any other recent development was the barrage of 34 rockets from Lebanon by a Palestinian group that most likely had the green light from Hezbollah. From what we know so far, it seemed to be a localized attempt to make a point about the vulnerability of Israel to attacks from the north, at a time when Israel is attacking Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria as a matter of routine. Its rather subdued military response in Lebanon and Gaza showed that Israel was not interested in opening a new front with its nemesis in the north or pursuing a war with Hamas in Gaza. Passover and Easter are over and soon Ramazan will also conclude, but the underlying causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain. No one should be complacent enough to suppose that calm is guaranteed for the next few weeks, but even if this were to be the case, to enjoy any lull in hostilities without looking for a long-term peaceful solution would only be deceptive and short-lived.

Arab News



Sweden hopes Turkey okays NATO membership after May election

Henry Ridgwell

WITH Turkey and Hungary continuing to block Sweden's application to join the NATO military alliance, the Swedish government hopes for a swift ratification soon by both countries after Turkish elections scheduled for May 14. Sweden and Finland lodged a joint application to join NATO just weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The alliance welcomed Finland earlier this month - NATO's 31st member state - after Turkish and Hungarian lawmakers finally voted through the ratification in March. Sweden's application has yet to be approved by the same two NATO members. Ankara has accused Sweden of harboring what it considers pro-Kurdish terrorists, including members of the PKK militant group, which Sweden denies. Sweden's prime minister, Ulf Kristersson, said he hoped next month's presidential elections in Turkey could mark a turning point. "Now we're waiting for the Turkish elections. I think everyone realizes that there is a substantial role in this, which is about Turkish domestic politics and that is fully understandable, that's how it is in most countries," Kristersson said at a press conference March 31. Sweden is set to introduce a new anti-terrorism law, which it hopes will persuade Turkey to approve its NATO application. Speaking to reporters April 5, Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, gave a measured response. "Of course, they have taken some steps but they are not enough. We are expecting additional efforts in the

coming period," he said.

NATO's secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, has said he hopes that Sweden's application is ratified in time for the alliance's annual summit, scheduled for July 11-12 in Lithuania. Alper Co'kun, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the former director general for international security affairs at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told VOA Turkish approval of Sweden's application is not guaranteed. "It will depend more on whether in the aftermath of the elections - irrespective of who wins - the Turkish authorities will be able to say to themselves and to the public at large, that some of Turkey's expectations from Sweden have been met in terms of the implementation of that very law," he said. "I do not believe that it is necessarily in Turkey's interest after the election and post the implementation of that (anti-terrorism) law in Sweden, to prolong the matter. So I would assume that it is still a realistic expectation that Sweden will be able to join (NATO) by the summit in Vilnius."

Foreign policy comes second to domestic concerns in Turkey's election campaign - and that could benefit Sweden's NATO application, Co'kun added. "Especially now, in the aftermath of the earthquakes and the economic circumstances in Turkey, it has even decreased even more. In that sense, I don't think as far as the public opinion is concerned, or as far as the interest of the political parties in Turkey is concerned, it's a leading

topic, that there is attention on it. And I think that alleviates the domestic political pressure on the issue, which should facilitate a solution post-election."

Turkish opposition parties have rallied behind a single candidate, Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu, in an effort to unseat incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Cokun believes an opposition win could benefit Sweden. "They've made it clear that they will underline Turkey's place within NATO, within the Western security architecture," he said. Meanwhile, Hungarian lawmakers say they are blocking Sweden's NATO bid over its recent criticism of their country's democratic credentials, part of a long-running dispute over the rule of law between Budapest and its European allies.

Analysts say that Turkey's approval of Sweden's bid would likely pressure Hungary to do the same, citing Budapest's approval of Finland's NATO application, which came just days after Ankara had signaled it would ratify Helsinki's bid to join the alliance. Hungary's foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, told the Associated Press March 25 that his country deserves more respect. "When Finnish and Swedish politicians question the democratic nature of our political system, that's really unacceptable... As we give respect to all countries, we expect respect as well. And this respect was not really given," he said. Szijjártó did not elaborate on whether Hungary would approve Sweden's NATO application, if Turkey were to do so after the May 14 election.

VOA

Afghanistan withdrawal review mostly blames Trump

Kerry Boyd Anderson

THE Biden administration recently released a report that expresses its view of the 2021 US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the evacuation from Kabul. The report identifies some lessons learned but mostly blames the Trump administration, prompting a debate in political circles about whether the White House is failing to acknowledge its own mistakes.

The White House released the report on April 6, preceded by a press conference with National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby. The document draws from internal reviews by the State Department and Defense Department, combined with interagency discussions and work by the National Security Council. The State and Defense Department reviews appear likely to remain classified, though they were recently provided to some congressional committees. The public report represents the White House's assessment of the several months leading to the August 2021 withdrawal. There is also an Afghan War Commission tasked with reviewing the entire 20 years of the war.

Any review of the Biden administration's management of the withdrawal eight months after Joe Biden became president must consider what he inherited from the Trump administration. In February 2020, US and Taliban negotiators agreed to a temporary ceasefire, the withdrawal of all US forces by May 2021, the release of thousands of Taliban prisoners and Taliban guarantees not to allow terrorist

groups to use Afghan territory to attack the US. Crucially, the Afghan government was not included in the agreement. President Donald Trump began to scale down the US troop presence. When Trump took office in 2017, the US had more than 8,000 to more than 10,000 troops in Afghanistan, depending on the source; when Biden took office, there were only 2,500. The Biden team's report argues that the Taliban were very likely to resume attacks on US forces if the US did not meet the withdrawal date of May 1. Some critics have noted that Biden was able to delay the withdrawal until the end of August, suggesting that he had some room to maneuver. Critics have also pointed out that the Taliban had already violated the terms of the Doha Agreement, so Biden could have pulled out of it.

However, as the White House report states, with only 2,500 troops left in the country, pulling out of the deal with the Taliban would have placed those troops in danger and required significantly increasing the number of US forces in the country. With widespread support for ending the US' role in the war and little indication that a surge in forces would change the final outcome, Biden opted to proceed with withdrawal on a slightly extended timeline. The report also blames the Trump administration for failing to leave any plans for withdrawing the remaining troops and evacuating Americans and allies, despite the looming dead-

line. There is publicly available evidence to suggest that this is a fair criticism of the Trump administration.

The terrible images of desperate Afghans trying to flee Kabul forms another key criticism: that Biden failed to sufficiently help Afghan allies. However, the Trump administration had four years to ramp up the process to provide Special Immigrant Visas or other options for the US' Afghan allies; instead, it slowed the process and degraded much of the system designed to review, process and assist such refugees. By the end of the Trump administration, there was a "backlog of over 18,000 SIV applicants," according to the report. Upon entering office, Biden's team worked quickly to rebuild the system and speed up the processes. Still, the Special Immigrant Visas backlog under Trump was well known before Biden took office and the Biden administration could have acted faster to evacuate Afghan allies.

It is fair to place much of the blame on the Trump administration, which had four years to prepare, while Biden had only a few months. Additionally, there are always constraints on policy; for example, the report highlights the difficulty balancing the need to urge Americans to leave Afghanistan with concerns about undermining the Afghan government's stability. Nonetheless, there are reasonable criticisms to make of the Biden administration and its report. One fundamental error was assuming that the Taliban would

not capture Kabul until sometime after the US military withdrawal. The report says that US intelligence assessments suggested that Kabul would hold against the Taliban for weeks to a couple of years and the Biden administration assumed there would be more time to assist Americans and Afghan allies.

No one can predict the future and intelligence assessments tend to be cautious analytical documents. However, the quick fall of Kabul should not have been such a surprise. Multiple potential sources on the ground - including US government employees, journalists and aid workers - knew that the Afghan forces might fall apart quickly. Also, administrations trying to justify mistakes often point to inaccurate "intelligence assessments," but there are often differing opinions within those assessments that were ignored. Given the lessons learned from the Iraq war, there is no excuse to ignore or belittle warnings from people familiar with the situation on the ground. In today's Washington, with extensive resources available for conducting all types of scenarios, there is no excuse for failing to conduct sufficient worst-case scenario exercises or red team reviews of analysis. The Biden administration inherited a mess regarding Afghanistan. There were no good options and it could have been worse. The withdrawal's failures should not be compared to some idealistic vision of a perfect outcome. At the same time, the Biden administration should have been more prepared for a quick collapse.

The 2024 presidential alternative many voters will want

Joe Lieberman

WHEN Ralph Nader ran for president in 2000, he offered a simple rationale for a bid that would ultimately help "spoil" the election for the Democratic ticket I was privileged to be on with Al Gore. In Nader's view, the two parties were ideologically indistinguishable. That argument was baseless. There were significant differences in policy between the George W. Bush-Dick Cheney ticket - which ended up victorious, in part thanks to Nader - and ours. For Nader, this wasn't really about the "two-party duopoly," as he coined it. This was about his desire to push Gore and the Democratic Party to the left.

Today, of course, no one can reasonably argue that the two parties aren't ideologically distinct. The core problem in Washington, DC, is that they're too divided to get much done. Though a majority of Americans long for the era when Republicans and Democrats worked together to find bipartisan solutions to big problems, many members of Congress refuse to work together on immigration, the debt ceiling and other issues critical to the nation, even when bipartisanship is the way to restore our common prosperity and security. Indeed, today, with Republicans controlling the House and Democrats the Senate, bipartisanship is the only way to pass any legislation. While undoing the divisions plaguing our political system will not be simple, there is one step that can be taken - and it begins with giving voters a real alternative in the 2024 presidential election. Most

often, when Americans cast their votes for president and vice president, their ballot has only two viable tickets: one nominated by the Democratic Party and the other by the Republican Party. But what would happen if they had a third viable option?

The process for adding that third viable option is not only arduous and time-consuming, but it varies from state to state and in the District of Columbia. Today, No Labels, a nonprofit organization that I co-chair, is laying the groundwork for such a campaign in 2024. Since early 2022, our team has been diligently working across the country to obtain ballot access for a potential No Labels ticket, typically by collecting a certain number of petition signatures from voters in each state. If we are successful, a unity ticket - comprised of one Democrat and one Republican - could be presented to voters right next to the Republican and Democratic nominees. We think of this as an insurance policy for the country - an option to be deployed if, and only if, both of the two major party nominees fail to offer voters a choice of candidates they'd like to vote for or a way out of the partisan divisiveness that now dominates in the nation's capital. We will be consistently monitoring the sentiment of Americans through our own research and polling, as well as public polling, to make that determination. In this and several other ways, No Labels' effort could not be more different from the "spoiler" cam-

paign that Nader attempted two decades ago. First, if No Labels were to lend its ballot lines to a presidential ticket, the presidential candidate would be a Democrat and the vice presidential candidate would be a Republican, or vice versa. As such, it would appeal to some voters who might otherwise have voted for the Democratic ticket, and other voters who might otherwise have voted for the Republican ticket. And it would appeal to still other voters who would not have voted for either.

These nominees would be selected by a diverse and distinguished group of citizens serving on a committee - and would be ratified by delegates who would gather at the No Labels National Convention planned for April 2024. This convention will occur about six weeks after the March 5th "Super Tuesday" primaries, a day which historically has clarified who the major party nominees will be. Second, No Labels' 2024 effort is not designed to push the Democratic nominees to the left or Republican candidates to the right. Rather, it's intended to force one or both parties to appeal to America's growing commonsense majority. If they don't, our ballot line will create the opening for a unity ticket that will. According to recent polling by CNN, the number of individuals who identify as independent is on the rise, now comprising 41% of the electorate - compared to only 28% who described themselves as Democrats and 31% who described

themselves as Republicans. These numbers are more evidence that there could be a potential path to victory for an independent ticket in 2024. But if there doesn't appear to be such a path in the months ahead, No Labels will stand down, focusing instead on the work we have done over the last decade to elect and organize members of the House and Senate who have demonstrated the courage to reach across the aisle - including members of the bipartisan House Problem Solvers Caucus. It seems the Biden administration already may be beginning to recognize the imperative of appealing to the commonsense majority. President Joe Biden recently signed into law a Republican measure to strike down a Washington, DC, crime bill reducing penalties for those who commit violent crimes, and he announced more stringent border control policies. Our hope is that the Republicans jockeying for their party's nomination will similarly see the need to reach out beyond their base instead of appealing to divisive policies and politics. In the end, No Labels hopes not to have to offer our ballot line to an independent unity ticket. We want the parties to come to their senses. But judging from the angry and apocalyptic reactions of strategists in both parties at the thought of No Labels' insurance policy, it is clear that party leaders now know that there could be a political cost to ignoring the commonsense majority. And that's a reason to hope for a better future for our government and our country.

CNN

A fresh start? Haunted Humza Yousaf looks like he's aged by 30 years

Tim Stanley

THE SNP loves to clap. They clap at Hollywood. They clap at Westminster, where it's not even allowed. It's egalitarian and unpretentious - none of that Tory "hear, hear!" for them. The only downside to all this vigorous clapping is that when you don't clap, it gets noticed. When Humza Yousaf laid out his thrilling new plan for Scotland, he was interrupted by applause just twice. His MSPs looked exhausted and worried. The party is in trouble.

Fifteen minutes into Yousaf's "fresh start" and he's aged by 30 years, with haunted eyes and a hunted vibe. He looks like the prince who inherited a golden crown, only to be informed that he's handling stolen goods. The SNP, which has long insisted that there's more to Scotland than Taggart, has bequeathed him financial crisis, arrests and a luxury motorhome that was left parked, mysteriously, outside the house of Nicola Sturgeon's mother-in-law. "Being First Minister is not without its challenges," he said. The opposition

laughed. Undeterred, he rehearsed the spiel that got him elected to this unhappy office.

First, promise 'the Scots "equality, opportunity and community". Second, blame any shortfall in these on Westminster. And third, talk up one's "lived experience", which is like regular experience but with a compelling adjective. We were reminded that Humza is the proud son of immigrants, but also that he is "the proud son of a business owner" - for Yousaf can be all things to all demographics. Were there votes to be had in professing an interest in Buddhism, he'd be "speaking as the proud reincarnation of Anne Boleyn". On this occasion, we got a blend of Scotland as a "land of opportunity" - ie capitalism - and "redistribution", aka socialism, sticking to Sturgeon's pretence that an independent Scotland will allow voters to grow their cake and eat it. Had the lady been there, she'd have been proud. Oddly, she wasn't.

The SNP "is in meltdown!" claimed the Tories'

Meghan Gallagher. They are "mired in scandal!" said Labour's Anas Sarwar. Humza awoke. "Not a single idea," he said of Sarwar's performance. "Not a single proposal. Completely vacuous from the master of the soundbite." Yousaf had only soundbites to fight back with - but at least the SNP was now clapping, for it's when a party's back is against the wall that it remembers what it stands for. Power. Lovely, gorgeous, reassuring power. Labour wants to work with the Tories, accused Humza. Well, the Tories have given us Brexit, inflation, cuts and, I am sure the evidence will show, the common cold. Plus, it is "brave" for the Conservatives to talk about "propriety" - for "your PM, your deputy PM and your former PM are all under investigation by the standards commission". True, m'lud, but isn't that what brings our great Union together? Terrible leadership that blunders from one crisis to the next? After a decade in office, the SNP is exposed for what it really is. It is terribly British.

The Telegraph

Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



‘Reformation of public sector processes key to ease of doing business’

PESHAWAR (APP): KP Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Adnan Jalil has termed restructuring capabilities and streamlining of the public sector processes as keys to ease of doing business in the province.

He was speaking at the Meeting of the National Network of Economic Thinktanks - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chapter organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here the other day, said a press release issued on Wednesday.

He informed that restricting human resources in TEVTA had so far resulted in a saving of Rs 2.6 million monthly. He said that financial and power con-

straints faced by the caretaker government would prevent the delivery of relief to the business community.

Jalil said that the business community was struggling to survive in an unbalanced environment and stressed the need to streamline the procedure and processes to avoid delays.

Dr Vaqar Ahmed, Joint Executive Director, SDPI in his welcome remarks said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's southern cluster had immense untapped economic potential. He said that such deliberative sessions before the announcement of the budget would help in articulating policy advice for the government to reflect on for strengthening trade and economic

development.

Ahad Nazir, Head of the Center for Private Sector Engagement while sharing the preliminary findings of a survey conducted by SDPI in KP said that difficulty in graduation for firms was observed which is hindering increasing in firms to become exporters.

Poor coordination between government departments results in duplication of policy burden and lack of inclusive industry data results in policies that are generalized and not tailored based on different demographics, he added.

Nazir informed that SDPI would serve as the Secretariat for the National Network of Economic Thinktanks. He reiterated SDPI's interest in bridging

the policy gaps identified by government departments, updating private sector policy developments, reviewing policy documents and bridging gaps between academia and industry for strengthening research environments to meet the industry demand.

Iqbal Sarwar, Director of Business Facilitation, KP-BoIT informed that a mapping activity resulted in identification of 170 regulations for businesses in KP that need to be simplified and thirty regulations so far had been simplified or removed.

Muhammad Salman Khan, Secretary General, Swabi Chamber of Commerce, and Industry stressed educating exporters on international standards and accreditation to tap into the export potential to regional markets.

Qurat-ul-Ain, CEO, Ain Consulting stressed on designating focal persons for improving intra-department coordination to simplify the regulatory environment and suggested forming committees to connect industries, academia, and government bodies to improve their communication and collaboration. Kiran Fida, Project Manager, CGPA stressed briefing the business community on regulations and emphasized on addressing challenges faced by women entrepreneurs through policy initiatives.

Dr Muhammad Yasir, Chairman, Department of Management Sciences, Hazara University reiterated bridging the academia-industry gap to promote indigenous production of chemicals and other products and reducing import reliance.

Rasheed Paracha, Founder Kohat Chamber of Commerce, and Industry said that the unfavorable regulatory environment had discouraged locals. He urged for commercial policy to create a level playing field and limit the number of businesses that refugees can run to enable small local businesses to flourish.

Rupee gains one paisa against Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani rupee gained 01 paisa against the Dollar in the interbank trading on Wednesday and closed at Rs283.89 against the previous day's closing of Rs283.90.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs287.5 and Rs290, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 28 paise to close at Rs311.43 against the last day's closing of Rs311.15, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen declined by 01 paise and stood at Rs2.10; whereas an increase of of Rs1.45 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs353.94 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs352.49.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal went down by 01 paisa and 02 paise; closing at Rs77.30 and Rs75.67, respectively.

KARACHI (INP): The State Bank of Pakistan on Wednesday has directed the commercial and microfinance banks to establish digital fraud risk management units under the supervision of senior management and compensate their customers within three working days of the reporting of fraud in case their mechanism of digital security systems is not updated.

State Bank has reminded all the heads and chief executives of the banks to make digital banking safe.

The SBP has prepared a set of control measures to enhance the security of digital banking products and services. Banks/ MFBs are advised to develop a comprehensive plan with monthly milestones, to be implemented by December

31, 2023, duly approved by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and submit the same to their relevant Banking Supervision Department (BSD) in SBP, within thirty (30) days from the issuance date of the issued circular.

Thereafter, a monthly progress report shall be submitted to the concerned BSD within ten (10) days from the close of each calendar month, the circular issued by the SBP stated.

Banks shall be liable to compensate the customers, in cases where they are unable to establish that the transactions were executed through the customers' registered devices.

Banks shall be responsible for the loss of any customer funds due to delay on their part in taking timely remedial and control meas-



PESHAWAR: Women selecting and purchasing readymade clothes from a vendor at Shafi Bazaar.

PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 51.29 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 51.29 points, with a positive change of 0.13 percent, closing at 40,499.34 against 40,448.05 points on the previous day.

A total of 84,164,030 shares were traded during the day as compared to 67,536,928 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs3.628 billion against Rs2.275 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 313 compa-

nies transacted their shares in the stock market; 174 of them recorded gains and 114 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 25 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were Silk Bank Ltd. with 6,401,500 shares at Rs1.10 per share, World Call Telecom with 5,130,785 shares at Rs1.15 per share, and Engro Crop with 4,278,855 shares at Rs292.00 per share.

Khyber Textile witnessed a maximum increase of Rs41.75 per share price, closing at Rs680.00, where-

as the runner-up was Premium Tex, with a Rs29.56 rise in its per share price to Rs459.99.

Nestle Pakistan XD witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs152.83 per share closing at Rs5197.17, followed by Unilever Foods with a Rs54.00 decline to close at Rs18000.00.

Gold prices decrease by Rs550 to Rs216,850 per tola: The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs550 and was sold at Rs216,850 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs217,400 the previous

day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also declined by Rs471 to Rs185,914 from Rs186,385, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went down to Rs170,421 from Rs170,853.

The price of per tola and that of ten-gram silver remained unchanged to close at Rs2530 and Rs2170 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market dipped by US\$ 31 to \$1974 against its sale at \$2005, the association reported.

PCJCCI stresses utilisation of Pak coal reserves

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) President Moazzam Ghurki stressed utilisation of Pakistan's coal reserves on Wednesday.

During a think-tank session here at the PCJCCI secretariat, he said that coal was most widely used for cheap electricity generation and currently 36% of world's electricity was being generated through this source.

Ghurki added that Pakistan had large reserves of coal, specially lignite coal, which China had imported for US \$8 billion

in 2021 from other countries, instead of Pakistan due to the lack of technology and modern methods.

The government of Pakistan should introduce modern technology to facilitate the miners with the latest mechanisms, to work on the coal reserves.

On this occasion, PCJCCI Senior Vice President Fang Yulong said that Pakistan had large reserves of coal, specially lignite coal, which China had imported earlier. Pakistan had its coal deposits in Balochistan, Punjab and especially Sindh, where

Thar desert having the 16th largest coal deposits.

He highlighted that owing to global energy insecurity caused due to continuing war between Russia and Ukraine, many European nations had been compelled to revive their decades-old coal-based electricity plants to avoid energy shortages for their respective countries.

PCJCCI Vice President Hamza Khalid said that total coal reserves discovered in Pakistan were 185-billion-ton, but the coal mining in Pakistan was facing a lot of issues due to lack of up-gradation of

equipment. The old methods of mining cause numerous deaths due to suffocation and blasts. He added that coal reserves in Thar could go a long way to make Pakistan an energy surplus country with the least reliance on imported fuel for power production.

Salahuddin Hanif, Secretary General PCJCCI, said that Pakistan could adopt a safe and balanced approach to exploit its vast coal reserve for power generation with least damage to the environment to overcome energy shortfall without burdening the economy.

SNGPL launches ration distribution drive

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has launched ration distribution drive as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program. It is pertinent to mention that in wake of economic slowdown and inflation in the country, Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) had advised SNGPL to distribute ration among the deserving and needy people during the month of Ramzan ul Mubarak.

In light of the said directions and keeping in view the need for such program, the Board of Directors and the Company Management decided to immediately launch the ration distribution drive allocating Rs. 100 million for the program.



In order to identify genuinely deserving people as well as to maintain transparency in the distribution process, SNGPL decided to partner with Alkhidmat Foundation, Saylani Welfare and Akhuwat.

The allocated amount for the ration distribution program was distributed

among the three organizations. Under the ration distribution program, 10,000 ration bags will be distributed before Eid to families belonging to Lahore, Peshawar, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sahiwal, Sialkot, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Mardan, Abbottabad, Sargodha, Faisalabad,

Sheikhupura, Multan and Bahawalpur.

Every family gets ration package worth Rs. 10,000 under the program.

Ration distribution drive has been extended to all the regions within the franchise area of SNGPL to ensure maximum outreach of the program.

POL import bill contracts by 11.66%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall petroleum group contracted by 11.66% during the first nine months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-March (2022-23) stood at \$13,083.145 million, as against the imports of \$14,810.060 million during

the same period of last year, according to PBS data.

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 19.91 percent, from \$7,287.499 million last year to \$5,836.530 million during the time period under review.

Likewise, the imports of liquefied natural gas declined by 14.11% and dropped from \$3,320.707 million last year to \$2,852.191 million this year.

On the other hand, the products that witnessed positive growth included petroleum crude, the imports of which grew by 4.69 percent, from \$3,687.672 million last year to \$3,860.732 million whereas imports of liquefied petroleum gas increased by 3.78 percent, from \$513.964 million to \$533.415 million.

The imports of all other petroleum products increased by 27.19 percent, from \$ 0.217 million to \$0.276 million.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the petroleum group imports witnessed a decrease of 35.19 percent during the month of March 2023 as compared to the same months of last year.

The petroleum imports during March 2023 were recorded as \$1,206.434 million against the imports of \$1,861.556 million during March 2022.

On a month-on-month basis, the petroleum imports into the country also declined by 4.63 percent during March 2023, as compared to the imports of \$1,264.981 million in February 2023, said the data.

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Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 13/1. Institution 14/1/2023 date of hearing 26/4/2023 Nor Rehman VS Tariq Khan etc. Notice to No. 6. Waled Khan 8. Rashed Khan. 10. Qasem Khan. 19/1. Mst. Hajmia Bubi widow Abdul Qamer. 19/2. Rabnawaz. 19/3. Hayat Khan. 19/4. Rabjan sons. 19/5. Sumera. 19/6. Sunbal Bibi. 19/7. Sadaf (underage) d/o Abdul Qamer. 29. Hamesh Gul s/o Ataaur Rehman. 30. Mohamad Obidullah. 31. Mohammad Shoaib. 32. Mohamad Umer. 33. Mohammad Usman sons. 34. Kulsom. 35. Mehrunisa. 36. Safia. 37. Laiba. 38. Khudija d/o of Hamesh Gul resident of Ghazikhany Tehsil Gadezai district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8. am dated 26/4/2023 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Muhammad Ishaq Adj-II Kohat. Appeal No. I/FCA date of hearing 27-04-2023. Titled:- Mst. Anum Maria Vs Naveed Suleman, Notice against:- Naveed Suleman Son of Oma Naveel Boota R/o House no 3/C/A-561/B Street no 2 Usman Colony Kata Kana Road Tehsil and District Multan (Respondent) whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a Appeal against you Respondent in which date of hearing 27-04-2023 is fixed for your appearance since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Respondent is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 27-04-2023 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order issued on 17-04-2023 (Court of ADJ-II Kohat).



In brief

Basketball Tournament

ISLAMABAD (APP): Lions B clinched the Federal Cup 3x3 Women's Basketball Tournament title, organised by Federal Basketball Association (FBBA) at Multipurpose Court F-6. Lions B downed Lycans A by 11-5 points in the final to win the Women's Basketball Tournament. In the final of the tournament, Lions B defeated Lycans "A" by 11-5 points. Sana Mahmood scored 5 points while Asma Shehryar scored 4 points each. Rehana Naz of Lycans A scored two points. Earlier in the semi-final round, Lions B defeated AK "A" by 11-7 points, while Lycans A defeated AK B by 13-6 points. The matches of the event were supervised by Moazzam Naveed and Muhammad Mudassar. Speaking on the occasion, Secretary of Federal Basketball Association Ouj E Zahoor, said the purpose of organizing women's tournament along with men's event was to encourage female basketball players so that they can get opportunities to show their skills in the tournament which was participated by six teams. Federal Basketball Association President Ijaz Butt, who was the chief guest of the concluding ceremony along with former coach Malik Riaz, distributed prizes among the players.

Govt taking steps to revive game of hockey

ISLAMABAD (NND): The National Assembly was informed today the government is taking steps to revive the game of hockey. Minister for Inter Provincial Coordination Ehsan Ur Rehman Mazari told the House during Question Hour that these efforts include facilitating the players and providing them with better environment. He said our policy also involves giving special grants to the sports federation performing better. The Minister said hockey is our national game and recalled that our hockey team also won several international tournaments in the past. He said attention is also being paid to uplift other sports as well. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mariyum Aurangzeb has said that a special committee is investigating into the martyrdom of former Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoor in a road accident in Islamabad. Responding to the points raised by Parliamentary Secretary Agha Rafiullah in the National Assembly, she said the report of the committee will be presented in the lower house tomorrow and the Interior Minister will also apprise the nation of the facts. The Information Minister said according to the statement made by Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah in the house, there is so far no evidence that links this accident with a conspiracy.

Norrie cruises into Barcelona

B A R C E L O N A (Agencies): British number one Cameron Norrie claimed a comfortable straight-set victory over qualifier Pavel Kotov to reach the third round of the Barcelona Open. The world number 13 won 6-1 6-2 in one hour 15 minutes on the clay. Norrie, 27, broke twice in each set to win his first match against the 108th-ranked Russian. Britain's Dan Evans is in action later on Wednesday against Italy's Matteo Arnaldi. Norrie, who won a clay-court title at the Rio Open in February, will face either Australia's Jason Kubler or Italy's ninth seed Lorenzo Musetti in the next round.

Russia, Belarus denied entry to basketball qualifying

PARIS (Agencies): The Russia and Belarus men's basketball teams have been banned from the second-chance qualification tournaments for the 2024 Olympics, the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) announced Tuesday. Athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced sanctions from a multitude of sports since Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year. As Moscow's assault on Ukraine stretches into a second year, the International Olympic Committee has recommended allowing athletes from Russia and Moscow ally Belarus to compete just as individual neutrals in upcoming international competitions. "Following the IOC recommendations on the participation of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport in international competitions...the FIBA

Executive Committee has decided to not allow the registration of the Russian men's national team in the FIBA Olympic Pre-Qualifying Tournaments 2023," said a statement on the organisation's website.

Russia and Belarus were banned from qualifying for the 32-nation World Cup which will be held in the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia starting August 25 and serves as the main Olympic qualifying event.

For teams that failed to make the World Cup, the pre-qualification tournaments, which start on August 12, offer another opportunity to qualify for the 12-team Olympic tournament in Paris.

In women's competition, the Russian and Belarusian teams were barred from qualifying for the 16-team EuroBasket final tournament in June which serves as the continent's main Olympic qualifier.

Babar Azam included in Cricket Australia's World Test C'ship 'best XI'



QUETTA (PPI): Cricket Australia includes Pakistan Captain Babar Azam in the World Test Championship's "best XI." Players who excelled throughout the previous two years, from 2021 to 2023, were chosen by Cricket Australia to make up its World Test Championship Team.

To construct a side that would perform well under any circumstances, Cricket Australia declared, "This 'best XI' salutes those who delivered for the entirety of the World

T20's two-year cycle."

With more than 1,500 runs in just 14 Test matches throughout the game's longest format, the great batter had a spectacular 24 months. He is now ranked third on the squad after the opening pair. His 425-ball 196 against Australia in Karachi was an amazing performance that nearly brought Pakistan an improbable victory. In addition, he scored centuries in matches against Sri Lanka, England, and New Zealand. Babar played eight Tests

in Pakistan where the conditions were favorable for batters, and according to Cricket Australia, he averaged 56.30 in away matches, including 119 against Sri Lanka in Galle.

Australian Usman Khawaja who will play the opening position makes up the team's remaining members. In just 16 Test matches, he has amassed 1,608 runs. Dimuth Karunaratne of Sri Lanka, who has 1,054 runs in just 12 games, is Khawaja's opening partner.

England's Joe Root has 1,915 runs in 22 games, Australia's Travis Head has 1,208 runs in 17 games, India's Ravindra Jadeja has 673 runs in 12 games, and Rishabh Pant, who has been selected as the wicketkeeper and has 868 runs in 12 games, are the other players.

Ravichandran Ashwin has been selected for the specialist spinner position in the bowling side with 61 wickets in just 13 matches.

The team's new captain, Pat Cummins of Australia, has taken 53 wickets in 15 games. Kagiso Rabada of South Africa has taken 67 wickets in 13 games, and James Anderson of England has taken 58 wickets in 15 games.

Rawalpindi Police finalizes security arrangements for Pak-New Zealand matches

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi District Police, on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani, have finalized foolproof security arrangements for Pakistan-New Zealand cricket series.

According to a police spokesman, over 5,500 police personnel would be deployed for the security of upcoming cricket matches to be played at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Double Road in Shamsabad area.

The matches would be monitored from a special command post to ensure security arrangements, while all the places adja-

cent to the stadium, including Double Road, Allama Iqbal Park, Food Street and Shehbaz Sharif Sports Complex, would be closed for normal traffic, he added.

The spokesman said special sniper commandos would be deployed on the rooftops around the route and the stadium while the movement of the teams from the hotel to the stadium would be monitored with the help of CCTV cameras.

He said for the convenience of citizens, more than 370 traffic officers would be on duty for effective traffic arrangements. Alternative routes would be provided to the Double Road traffic, he

added. Special teams of Elite commandos, Dolphins and district police would patrol in the surrounding areas of the cricket stadium, he said.

The spokesman said cricket fans would be able to enter the stadium after thorough checking through the designated route. The senior officers would ensure point duties and brief the officers and jawans posted on duty, he added.

All-available resources would be utilized to ensure foolproof security arrangements, he said adding coordinated efforts would be made by all the departments concerned for the purpose.



BARCELONA: Cameron Norrie of Great Britain returns a ball against Pavel Kotov during their Men's Singles Second Round match of the Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell at Real Club De Tennis Barcelona.

Haris Rauf takes rapid strides in ICC Men's T20I Bowler Rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Haris Rauf has catapulted teammate leg-spinner Shadab Khan to become the top-ranked Pakistan bowler in the MRF Tyres ICC Men's T20I Bowler Rankings, released on Wednesday.

The Pakistan quick was just ahead of Shaheen Afridi last week and behind Shadab Khan, who was 12th in the T20I bowling rankings. Ten wickets spread across the first three T20Is has seen Rauf move up five places in the rankings to occupy the 11th spot. He also achieved career-high ratings of 657 points in the process and could potentially enter the top 10 by the end of the five-match series.

Meanwhile, Ish Sodhi (620) and Shaheen (624) have also moved up by four places and two places respectively with the others around them dropping points. In other ranking news, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan remains at the helm of the bowling list.

In batting, the top three positions did not move in spite of the first three matches of the ongoing T20I series between Pakistan and New Zealand in Lahore. Number three, captain Babar Azam continues to move closer to second spot, currently held in the safe hands of his teammate Mohammed Rizwan.

Babar smashed a spectacular and

unbeaten 101 from just 58 deliveries in the second match to notch up his batting rating points to 769, sliding him nearer to Rizwan, who sits on 798 points. The pair trail India batting star, Suryakumar Yadav, who leads comfortably with 906 ratings points.

Other gains have been made by Pakistan all-rounder Iftikhar Ahmed, who has risen 11 spaces to number 44 on the batting list and five slots to 25th in the all-rounders list. New Zealand skipper Tom Latham soared 87 spots to 66th in the batting rankings, while his teammate Mark Chapman also rose significantly from 119th to 83rd.

The other big movement in the rankings came from Sri Lanka with Prabath Jayasuriya continuing his magical start to red-ball cricket. The left-arm spinner picked up a ten-wicket match haul against Ireland in the first Test, his second such figures in a very short six-match Test career.

Jayasuriya has 43 wickets in six Tests already with five five-wicket hauls. A career-best seven-wicket haul in the Galle Test against Ireland ensured he moved up by 13 places in the ICC Test bowling rankings to enter the top 20. While achieving career-best ratings of 669, Jayasuriya also became the top-ranked Sri Lankan

bowler in Test cricket. Ramesh Mendis (576), who moved up by three places after a four-wicket haul in the second innings of the Test against Ireland, is placed next at No.32.

Prabath Jayasuriya leaped 13 slots to a career-best 19th in the bowling list of the MRF Tyres ICC Men's Test Player Rankings following his 10-wicket haul against Ireland this past week. His performance, alongside centuries from teammates captain Dimuth Karunaratne, Kusal Mendis, Dinesh Chandimal and Sadeera Samarawickrama, helped Sri Lanka to a whopping innings and 280-run victory in the first of the two-match series in Galle.

Jayasuriya spun his way from 32nd place in the rankings to his personal best and rating points of 869.

In the batting list, Sri Lanka captain Karunaratne's 179 runs from 235 balls advanced him one spot to ninth with 783 points, while Chandimal and Mendis rose to 14th and 42nd respectively. Ireland's Harry Tector shot up 21 slots to his own career-best 69th in the batting list with 444 rating points. In the Ravichandran Ashwin-led bowling list, Mendis rose three spaces to 32nd, while Vishwa Fernando gained four places to 59th.

Shehroze Kashif determined to complete his goal by year end

ISLAMABAD (APP): Record-breaking Pakistani mountaineer Shehroze Kashif on Wednesday said that he would complete his ambitious goal of scaling all 14 peaks above 8,000 metres before the year end.

The 21-year-old has already climbed 11x8000m above peaks with the latest summit taking place on Monday when he along with compatriot Naila Kiani and other members of the Seven Summits Treks' team successfully ascended Mt. Annapurna 1 (8091-metre), in Nepal's Gandaki province.

"I'll next attempt Dhaulagiri (8,167m). But I'll take a break now for a couple of weeks. My mother is insisting to comeback and celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr at home. So I'll proceed back to my country shortly. It will be after four years that I'll be celebrating eid in my country with my parents. After the eid I'll come back to climb Dhaulagiri," Shehroze told APP on phone from Nepal.

A day after climbing Annapurna, both Shehroze and Naila were rescued from the peak after their descent was disrupted due to bad weather.

Born on March 11, 2002, Shehroze made history by becoming the youngest climber in the world to sum-



mit K2 on July 27, 2021. He also became the youngest Pakistani to summit Mount Everest on May 11, 2021. After the successful summit of Mount Everest, Sports Board Punjab made him the youth ambassador of Punjab. He summited Broad Peak at the age of 17, after which he was called 'The Broad Boy'. He started climbing mountains at the age of 11 with Makra Peak being the first one, followed by Musa ka Musalla and Chembra Peak at 12, Mingli Sar in Shimshal at 13, Khurdopin Pass at 15, and Khosar Gang in alpine style at 18

years of age. Shehroze currently holds two Guinness World Records for being the youngest to climb K2 and the youngest to climb Broad Peak. On May 5, 2022, he became the youngest in the world and the first Pakistani to reach the summit of Kangchenjunga – the third-highest peak in the world.

On May 16, 2022, he summited the world's fourth-highest peak, Mount Lhotse (8,516m), in Nepal. On November 1, 2022, Shehroze was recognized by Guinness World Records for the year 2023 for summing Mount Everest and K2. In July 2022, Shehroze and Fazal Ali went missing between Camp 4 and Camp 3, after successfully summiting Nanga Parbat. However, the duo was discovered shortly after.

With the summit of Annapurna 1, Shehroze has now become the youngest mountaineer in the world to summit 11 peaks above 8000 meters.

"I'm in high spirits. I know hardships and difficulties are part of the game when you set off for an expedition. I intend to achieve my goal before the year ends," he added.

If that happens, he will be the youngest mountaineer to have summited all above 8,000 peaks.

Rodrygo double eases Real Madrid into semi-finals



LONDON (Reuters): Chelsea's hopes of maintaining interest in a woeful season always looked slender after losing last week in the Bernabeu and Rodrygo put them out of their misery with two second-half goals to confirm Real's superiority with a 4-0 aggregate win. The hosts had 19 goal

attempts but once again they lacked any cutting edge as they lost a fourth match in succession in all competitions since the club's record scorer Frank Lampard returned as interim manager.

N'Golo Kante spurned two chances to cut the

deficit and Real's former Chelsea keeper Thibaut Courtois made a crucial save just before halftime to frustrate his old club who have now managed only one goal in their last six games.

Real, bidding for a record-extending 15th European crown, bided their time and Rodrygo opened the scoring in the 58th minute, before tapping in again in the 80th to spark a mass exodus of Chelsea fans who had seen enough.

Despite spending around 600 million pounds (\$745 million) on players since a Todd Boehly-led takeover, the London club have now lost four games in a row for the first time since 1993.

For Real, they may be handing the La Liga title to arch-rivals Barcelona, but remain the team to beat in Europe's elite competition

and manager Carlo Ancelotti is now eyeing a third Champions League crown with them and fifth in all.

Manchester City lead Bayern Munich 3-0 heading in to their quarter-final second leg on Wednesday. Chelsea's fans cranked up the volume more in hope than expectation from the kickoff and the hosts almost got the perfect start when Reece James, Chelsea's most dangerous player, crossed low and the ball broke kindly for Kante who held his head in his hands after bouncing a volley wide.

Real looked capable of killing the tie whenever they moved forward and Rodrygo, who scored a vital goal against Chelsea at the same stage last year, smashed a shot against the post.

Home keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga then beat away a Vinicius Junior effort before Real's master craftsman Luka Modric

forced another save from Arrizabalaga.

"IMPORTANT SAVE"

A Chelsea goal before halftime would have energised the mood and it almost arrived in stoppage time when James fizzed a ball across the area and Marc Cucurella looked poised to score only for Courtois to smother his effort brilliantly.

"The big Courtois save was very important. We didn't want them to go ahead," Ancelotti told reporters. "That could have been worrying. As the second half developed, we were stronger, we created space to open up quality transitions."

"By the end, we had produced a very complete performance. We hit a good level."

Shortly after halftime Kante's deflected effort went agonisingly wide and then Madrid defender Eder

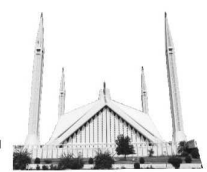
Militao was a tad fortunate not to receive a second yellow card for a clumsy foul on Trevoh Chalobah.

"It was a second yellow card, which means a red, which means 30 minutes with us a man up," Lampard said.

Real then switched gears and Rodrygo skipped past Chalobah's wild slide on the right and his cross was eventually played back to him by fellow Brazilian Vinicius Jr to calmly slot home.

Real's fans wedged in the corner were already serenading their team by the time Chelsea were picked off again and Federico Valverde teed up Rodrygo to apply the knockout blow.

It could have got ugly for Chelsea and Lampard who now faces a huge task injecting some life into a season that is fast becoming an embarrassment for the big spenders.



In brief

Power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Wednesday issued a power suspension programme for Thursday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to the IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 07:00 AM to 11:00 AM, Islamabad Circle, GOR Feeder, Rawalpindi City Circle, F-17/1, F-17/2, Nogzi, Bajnial Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Kahuta City-II, Hanif Shaheed Feeders, Chakwal Circle, Basharat Feeder, Attock Circle, Bolnewal, Taxila-2, Taxila-1, Sher Shah Suri Feeders and surrounding areas.

Umer Sharif remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Umer Sharif, Pakistan's king of comedy who had taken the genre of comedy to new highs, was born on April 1955. He started off his career a stage performer by the name Umer Zarif and later on changed his name to Umer Sharif. Two of his very famous comedy plays included 'Bakra Qiston Pe' and 'Buddha Ghar Pe Hai'. He received two National Awards for the film Mr 420 in the category of Best Actor and Director. He also received 10 Nigar Awards. The government had conferred the prestigious Tamgha-e-Imtiaz on him for his contributions in the Pakistani film industry as an actor, producer and comedian. The legendary comedian battled cardiac ailments and was flown out of Pakistan on an air ambulance on September 28, 2021 for surgery in the United States. However, he was admitted to a hospital in Germany during a stopover as his condition deteriorated, and passed away on October 2, 2021.

Bid to smuggle 22 tonnes flour foiled

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police here on Wednesday foiled a bid to smuggle 22 tonnes wheat flour. According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the Food Department along with Naseerabad police conducted a raid and rounded up a driver namely Hafeez on recovery of 22 tonnes wheat flour. He informed that the accused was 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 the district to foil wheat and flour smuggling bids, he added.

ANF recovers over 22 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in four operations managed to recover over 22 kg of drugs, 36 intoxicated tablets, and 24 grams of weed and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He said ANF conducted a raid near G-9, Karachi Company, Islamabad and recovered 36 intoxicated tablets from the possession of an accused, resident of Quetta. In an operation at Rawalpindi International Mail Office, 24 grams of weed was recovered from a parcel booked for London. In the third operation conducted near Gwadar Jiwani area, 12 kg Ice drug was recovered from secret cavities of a car while in the fourth operation, ANF managed to recover 10 kg of charras from a truck intercepted near Karachi Super Highway, New Sabzi Mandi area.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada holds farewell meeting with the outgoing Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Syeed Mohammad Ali Hosseini.

Ahsan Iqbal rejects 'negative perception' against China's BRI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday strongly rejected the negative perception about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) dubbed as a 'debt trap,' saying stories were concocted to spread propaganda in global geopolitics of competition. "I don't think it's a 'debt trap' as I believe it's a fact trap to distort the spirit of BRI," the minister said in response to negative perceptions against the BRI while talking to international media representatives here. "Wherever the BRI has gone, the local people can testify that it has had a very positive impact," he added. The BRI initiative was taken for the first time in 2013, when the then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif met Chinese premier Li Keqiang in Beijing. The focus was on connecting China with the Chinese-invested Pakistani port of Gwadar through highway,

rail and pipeline infrastructure. Ahsan Iqbal appreciated China for extending the BRI to Pakistan in the shape of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which gave Pakistan a great opportunity in areas of energy, infrastructure, telecommunication, industrial cooperation and in unlocking hidden treasures like massive coal deposits in Thar desert. He described the significance of the project, saying "Gwadar Port City is set to become a major trade and commerce hub in the region with its Free Zone and investment from Chinese companies." The planning minister highlighted the strategic location and potential for trade in Gwadar, stating that goods could be shipped to China through Gwadar in almost one-tenth distance from the South China Sea.

He said the progress and implementation of CPEC projects were being personally supervised by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and

despite negative perceptions, the government had reiterated its commitment to completing the projects on time. "The government's top priority is to attract more private sector investment in Pakistan, particularly in the mining sector which holds tremendous potential for value addition and development," said the planning minister while commenting on future CPEC development projects. Regarding potential partnerships between Pakistani and Chinese companies, Ahsan Iqbal said the government was promoting exports to third countries through joint ventures and seeking Chinese companies' cooperation to set up industries in Pakistan for joint production and export. "As the year 2023 marks the decade of CPEC and the strong partnership between Pakistan and China, both Pakistan and China will be celebrating 10 Years of the BRI and CPEC on July 5, 2023," he said recalling a decade-long saga of undeterred cooperation between the two countries.

'Floods caused Rs 7 bln revenue loss to railways'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique on Wednesday apprised the National Assembly Pakistan Railways suffered Rs 7 billion revenue loss due to last year's devastating flash flood in the country as railways operation remained suspended for 42 days. Replying to a point of order raised by Aliya Kamran, the minister said Pakistan Railways did not receive a single penny despite efforts to get some funds from the finance ministry or federal government due to financial constraints. Despite the financial crunch, an amount of Rs 650 million was arranged to link Quetta with other parts of the country, he added.

He said Quetta railways track was severely damaged by devastating floods last year. However, operation from Balochistan has been fully restored.

He said Railways was among those organizations which pay salaries and pensions to the employees from its own resources and the government only bridged the gap. The federal government has also been requested to arrange some funds for railways.

Javed Latif opposes dialogue with PTI chief

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister Javed Latif on Wednesday said that talks can be held amongst the genuine political parties but not with the person who is responsible for anarchy and stoking moral decline in the society. Taking at the floor of the National Assembly, he regretted that PTI chairman Imran Khan was granted bails while sitting at home, while the PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif who made the country a nuclear power and gave the CPEC and eliminated terrorism, was forced to live in exile.

He said that Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has been banned from politics for ten years which was totally injustice. In past, he had been exiled forcefully from Pakistan by Gen. Musharraf, he told.

The minister also strongly opposed the dialogue with the PTI leader Imran Khan, stating that it cannot be done with "terrorist", corrupt and morally sick minded leader.

President directs State Life to pay death insurance claim to widow

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has directed the State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLICP) to pay the death insurance claim worth Rs 300,000 to the widow of a deceased policyholder who was denied payment on the ground that her husband's death was not the direct consequence of road accident but he was a known patient of epilepsy.

He also upheld the orders of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing SLICP to adopt proper procedure/rules/regulations which were violated by it resulting in maladministration.

The president gave this decision while rejecting a representation filed by SLICP against the decision of the Wafaqi Mohtasib (WM) Akram Masih, the late husband of Rehana Bibi (the complainant), had obtained a life insurance policy from SLICP for the sum assured of Rs 300,000 for a period of 20 years.

He died in a road accident and, after his death, his wife filed a death insurance claim which was rejected by SLICP claiming that he fell down due to an epilepsy attack and his death was not a direct consequence of the road accident as reflected in the FIR and was a known patient of epilepsy.

Feeling aggrieved, she approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib which passed the

order in her favour.

The SLICP, then, filed a representation with the president against the order of Mohtasib.

In his decision, the president observed that the record showed that SLICP had not produced anything to establish that the death of the deceased was a direct consequence of epilepsy despite having all resources at its disposal.

He added that the Ombudsman had rightly observed that SLICP had merely relied on Police Roznamcha without producing any corroborative evidence to support its claim.

President Alvi further pointed out that the Confidential Report of the Field Officer of SLICP depicted that the said officer at the time of issuance of the policy had declared the insured as healthy and categorically stated therein that he knew the deceased policyholder since the last two years, thus, the plea of SLICP was hit by the principle of estoppel.

He held that since the maladministration stood established on the part of SLICP, therefore, SLICP was directed to pay the death insurance claim to the complainant within thirty days of receipt of the President's order and report compliance to the Wafaqi Mohtasib.

Iranian envoy calls on Riaz Pirzada

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Seyyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini held a farewell meeting with Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada here Wednesday on the completion of the Ambassador's term in Pakistan.

The minister expressed his appreciation for the dedicated services of the Ambassador for strengthening the bilateral ties in multiple areas between Pakistan and Iran.

He said that Pakistan and Iran were two brotherly countries having long political and economic ties ingrained in our century's old common religious and cultural affinities.

The minister said that Pakistan had suffered a lot in its relations with the

neighboring countries, as this region has been the international political arena for decades. We have much better human rights situation in Pakistan and other Muslim countries than the so-called champion countries of human rights.

Currently, only Pakistan, Iran and Turkiye are extending their unwavering support for the people of Kashmir and Palestine, who are the victims of severe human rights violations in the world.

The minister called it very welcoming and positive for Muslim world that Iran and Saudi Arabia have come closer.

That rapprochement will be a giant step towards peace and stability in Persian Gulf and it will bring the whole Muslim fraternity on the same page.

He also said that only

with the enhanced cooperation of Iran, we can improve the quality of life of the people living in the border areas of Baluchistan.

The Ambassador of Iran appreciated the warm hospitality and support he had received during his tenure.

He mentioned Pakistan's collaboration in multiple areas of common interest particularly that of in human rights.

He cited that there is immense improvement in various aspects of our bilateral relations. We have opened two new crossing points in Baluchistan and volume of bilateral trade have exceeded \$2 billion.

Both sides reiterated to explore more areas of bilateral cooperation and economic connectivity. Minister wished the ambassador all the best for his future endeavors.

Capital starts to wear a deserted look as working natives move to hometowns

ISLAMABAD (APP): The capital city has started to wear a deserted look as most of the natives, settled here due to jobs, are moving to their native hometowns to celebrate the religious festival of Eid-ul-Fitr with their families and relatives.

The typical hustle and bustle of the city usually fades away during the Eid days as a large number of residents prefer to proceed to their hometowns after taking a couple of leaves or so from their offices and jobs, and this Eid is also not different.

The government has although announced five Eid-ul-Fitr holidays from Friday to Tuesday, the natives have clubbed Wednesday and Thursday before Eid and were seen moving to their hometowns. "I'm leaving for my hometown in Bhakkar through public transport to celebrate Eid with my parents. I've taken a two-day more leaves from my office to stay with my parents for maximum days", Zubaida Abid, who works in an office in the Capital told APP.

"I've purchased all the essentials, including clothes, shoes but could not manage to buy bangles and henna till the last minute due to rush in markets. Now

I'll buy these from my hometown," she said while mentioning the huge rush in the markets. "The festival of Eid-ul-Fitr is very important for me as I get more time to spend with my parents after remaining busy in job here", she said.

Azhar Ali, another resident of the Capital said that Eid was the only occasion when he finds time with his friends but most of them have left for their native hometowns to celebrate the festival with their relatives. "I feel again I'll not be able to enjoy the occasion fully."

"We've planned to arrange a barbecue party out door by inviting our relatives who live in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Hopefully, we'll be able to enjoy the festivity to some extent", he said. "This is a very happy day for me as I'll get a chance to see my children after some six months," said Syed Amir, a government employee, who was on his way to Swat to celebrate the Eid with his family. He said it was difficult to visit his hometown frequently due to the nature of his job and the increasing fares but he could not imagine to miss Eid his family.

'Parliament to complete its 3rd consecutive term due to 18th Amendment'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Shazia Marri on Wednesday said the Parliament was completing its third consecutive term after the promulgation of 18th Constitutional Amendment by the last Pakistan Peoples Party government on April 19, 2010. It was a historical day

when the former president Asif Ali Zardari had surrendered his powers to the Parliament to strengthen the democracy in the country, she said in a statement.

The minister said the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan also got their recognition during the PPP's regime. The for-

mer president had strengthened the provinces by giving them autonomy, she said, adding the Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010 was a pact between the Federation and its units.

Empowering the Parliament would end outside interference in its domain, she added.

Elections in piecemeal will lead riots: Musadik

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik Wednesday said that without new census, the delimitation and elections in parts would drag the country into worst political crises.

Talking to a private news channel, Musadik said that the election in two provinces was tantamount to violate the right to vote of the rest of country.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) had serious reservations on the election, if serious efforts were made to

clear the confusion of majority of political forces, there would have been no obstacle in conduction the elections.

The Federal Consolidated Fund of Pakistan, according to the Constitution, can only be ordered to issue by the federal government, he added.

To a query about the development on the agreement to receive subsidized oil from Russia, the minister stated that hopefully, within a month, we will have the first shipment coming.

Motorway Police to strictly deal with transporters overloading, overcharging on Eid: DIG

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General of National Highways and Motorway Police Muhammad Yousuf Malik has said that the motorway police had taken steps to strictly deal with transporters involved in overloading and fleeing commuters on the account of Eid-ul-Fitr.

In a statement on Wednesday, he said that traffic pressure on the highway increases when people leave for their native towns for Eid celebrations.

Orders had been issued to increase the number of personnel, establish a special squad, the DIG said, adding briefing and patrolling officers present at the toll plazas had been directed to be on high alert. He advised the transporters to avoid overloading and overcharging and follow the traffic rules. Otherwise, strict legal action would be taken, he maintained. Malik said that people travelling in private vehicles should ensure that they have complete sleep

and rest while driving on the highway.

He further advised that while driving, drivers should focus on the road, avoid using mobile phones, and use seat belts.

During the journey, they should ensure that the condition of the vehicle was good, and carry extra water and tyre and tyre changing tools in the vehicle, the DIG stressed.

In case of any emergency, travellers can contact Motorway Police Helpline 130, he added.



ISLAMABAD: At the OGDCL Head Office, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Zahid Akram Durrani, presented the key of ambulances to the District Health Authority of Bannu district.

Afghanistan get membership

KABUL (Agencies): The Ministry of Public Health said that the National Cancer Control Program of the Ministry was able to gain full membership in the Union for International Cancer Control. Union for International Cancer Control is located in Geneva, Switzerland, and is active in different fields, such as advocacy for cancer control, the development and preparation of strategies and policies based on global and national levels, and the standardization of cancer diagnosis and treatment.

ANSA sends back 4 tankers

HERAT (Agencies): The Afghanistan National Standard Authority (ANSA) has sent back four tankers loaded with liquefied gas to Uzbekistan, after assessing them as low-quality. "At least 4 low-quality gas tankers had been stopped at the Aqina part of the Faryab and returned to Uzbekistan for being low-quality." The National Standard Authority (ANSA) has recently taken necessary steps to prevent the import of low-quality oil and gas into the country.

Distribution of residential land in New City to begin

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Urban Development said that the process of distributing residential land in the New City of Kabul will begin.

A ministry official added that work will begin after the Islamic Emirate leader's order.

"In order to implement scientific and technical experience and achievements, the plan and design of the new Kabul project have been reviewed and its detailed plan has been revised according to the master plan," said Madar Ali Karimi Bamyani, deputy minister of the Ministry of Urban Development.

Meanwhile, the acting minister of this ministry said that 15 to 20 percent of buildings in Kabul city are built without standards.

"15 to 20 percent of houses are built without standards, and we had a discussion on this issue with the Kabul Municipality," said acting Minister of Urban Development and Land, Mawlawi Hamdullah Nomani.

The acting Minister of Urban



Development added that a Qatar-backed construction project in the Khushal Khan area has progressed by 30 percent and a China-backed project in the Darulaman area has progressed by 20 percent.

"There was a project in the Khushal Khan area with a Qatari company in 1401 that has progressed by 30 percent," said Nomani.

According to information from the Urban and Development Ministry, a Chinese company is going to invest more than two hundred million dollars in Afghanistan.

Over 2,000 prisoners released

KABUL (Agencies): The Afghan government has announced the release of thousands of prisoners from prisons across the country on the occasion of Eid al-Adha and the holy month of Ramadan.

The Supreme Court said that 2,460 people were released from various prisons based on the instructions of the leadership of the Islamic Emirate and the Ministry of Justice.

Based on Supreme Court decree, combined delegations were appointed to identify the prisoners who deserve amnesty across the country, and after investigations, around 2460 people were identified as deserving of release and a reduction in the prison term.

The Islamic Emirate had already assured timely investigation of the prisoners' cases and good treatment of them.

Qatar delivers 60 tons of aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghanistan has received humanitarian aid delivered by a Qatari aircraft.

A Qatari plane carrying humanitarian aid, including 60 tons of instructional supplies for the education sector and food relief, arrived at Kabul airport.

The aid is part of the State of Qatar's initiatives, a steadfast commitment to stand by and support the Afghanistan people with urgent essential needs.

Over the past few years, Qatar has delivered hundreds of tons of vital humanitarian goods to Afghanistan, including food supplies, via an air bridge from Qatar to Kabul.

In addition, this year, the Qatar Fund for Development signed MoU with the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide education access to 24,900 Afghan children at risk of dropping out.

The project includes the provinces of Khorasan, Tehran, Hormozgan, Kerman, Semnan, and Sistan-Balochistan.

Pakistani Envoy returns to Kabul, months after attack

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Chief of Pakistani's diplomatic mission in Kabul returned to the Afghanistan capital more than four months after surviving an attempted assassination.

The Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi and Ubaidur Rehman Nizamani, met in Kabul.

During the meeting, the acting foreign minister of Afghanistan stated that the return of Pakistan's charge d'affaires in Afghanistan would improve ties between the two countries.

Muttaqi called the release of the vast majority of Afghans from Karachi's prisons a welcome development and urged the release of the remaining Afghans before Eid ul Fitr.

Nizamani was also urged to "further increase transparency in the visa issuance process" by the Afghan foreign ministry.

"FM Muttaqi called the



release of the majority of Afghans from Karachi prisons a positive step, calling for the remaining to be freed before the arrival of Eid ul-Fitr. He also encouraged Mr Nizamani to increase transparency in the visa issuance process further," the statement said.

Nizamani, for his part, expressed the hope that his return would improve the ties between the two countries and added that the Pakistani Embassy would collaborate with the MoFA Afghanistan on a system to make obtaining visas easier.

although one security guard suffered significant injuries.

The Foreign Office later confirmed that Nizamani was the attack's target. The attack, which occurred a month after the Pakistani ambassador took control of his office, was later claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan.

Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi meets ICRC delegation

KABUL (Agencies): The Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan for Administrative Affairs, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi has met with the Head of delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Eloi Fillion for Afghanistan, a statement from his office said.

In the meeting, Mr. Eloi Fillion shared comprehensive information about plans and humanitarian aid of the ICRC in 2023 with Deputy PM Hanafi, the statement said.

"The most important

responsibility of the ICRC in Afghanistan is to make necessary and good communication with the governmental institutions and provide good coordination in relevant issues," the statement quoted Mr. Eloi Fillion as saying.

Four decades of activities of the committee in health sectors, providing humanitarian aid, rural development, and other necessary services have been effective in Afghanistan and it will be continued in the future, the statement quoted.

However, the committee

is facing a financial shortage, but efforts are underway to develop the budget for Afghanistan in the coming year, the statement said.

Meanwhile, Deputy PM Hanafi, while welcoming the delegation, appreciated the humanitarian assistance of the committee to Afghanistan and said: "After the resumption of power by the Islamic Emirate security has been ensured than ever before in Afghanistan and the IEA asks the International Community, particularly, ICRC to increase their humanitarian aids to

Afghanistan."

Trade, cultivation, and use of drugs have been banned by the Islamic Emirate and to eradicate the cultivation of poppy in the country, Afghanistan needs the comprehensive cooperation of the International Community, the statement added.

IEA will not allow any vicious group to use its soil against neighboring and other countries of the world and Afghanistan also wants others to not interfere in its internal affairs and challenges should be solved through diplomatic channels.

Deputy Chief proposes meeting to discuss recognition of Taliban

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Deputy Chief, Amina Mohammad, said Monday that the organization plans to arrange a conference in the coming days to discuss granting recognition to Afghanistan's Taliban.

Mohammed meanwhile said: "We have amazing envoys that work on Afghanistan, and we have Afghan women too, and what we are hoping is that we will gather them now in another two weeks in the region, and they will have that first meeting of envoys across the board, the region and internationally with the secretary general for the first time."

"And out of that, we hope that we will find those baby steps to put us back on the pathway to recognition [of the Taliban], a principled

recognition," Mohammed said. "Is it possible? I don't don't [But] that discussion has to happen. The Taliban want recognition, and that is the leverage we have."

She continued by saying that it would be "a principle recognition" and "in other words, there are conditions."

She said that while the UN bargains with the Taliban to lift the ban on women, it has instructed its Afghan female workers to work from home. She also mentioned that female workers might be paid to work remotely.

She added, "Please treat the Taliban like COVID. We don't know what they are going to do or how they will react. ... But I know three or four [women] are picked up, and maybe I would not see them again. I am not going to risk anyone

Afghan woman to people we know are unpredictable."

The remarks came after the announcement made by the UNDP on Tuesday, saying that the UN is ready to take the "heartbreaking" decision to pull out of the country in May if it cannot persuade the Taliban to allow Afghan female aid workers for the organization.

"It is fair to say that where we are right now is the entire United Nations system having to take a step back and re-evaluate its ability to operate there," Mr Steiner said. "But it is not about negotiating fundamental principles, human rights."

Earlier this month, the UN local female aid workers were banned while the Taliban authorities reacted to the organization's decision, referring to it as an



"internal issue."

Since the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021, the group has issued a more suppressive policy regarding women and girls, depriving them of their fundamental rights.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan described the Taliban's move as a "cruel blow to Afghan women's rights". It said that the Taliban had broken its promises to maintain girls' schools open beyond the sixth grade.

Bidding opens for extraction rights for 18 small mines

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum has 18 small mines in seven provinces of the country are now open for bidding.

Shahabuddin Delawar, acting minister of Mines and Petroleum said that investment in mines can provide work opportunities and progress in the country, and to provide smuggling they supervise the extraction process.

"After today we have

three supervisors in every mine, one of them from intelligence, one from that province, and the third one from the mine," said Shahabuddin Delawar.

According to Delawar In the next five years, Afghanistan will be at the top of countries economically.

"We can say that Afghanistan will be at the top of the countries economically, if this system, and this transparency, this

addressing the problems of the media is one of the basic responsibility of the Ministry of Information and Culture and no other body has the right to interfere in the affairs of the media and journalists.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Information and Culture, there are currently 300 audio, video and publications media operating in the country.

sincerity, remains," said Shahabuddin Delawar.

Meanwhile, some participants in the bidding process asked the Islamic Emirate to provide an investment field for insider companies in big projects.

"It's unhealthy competition, these foreigners who come did not see the area or did not check it properly, they offer very high (returns to the de facto authorities)...and we have

to pledge very high in response, and that's a problem for us," said Abdul Ghani Nowruz, an investor.

"We call on the Islamic Emirate to give all contracts to insider companies if they have the capacity," said Elyas Hotak, an Investor.

18 mines in Helmand, Faryab, Kabul, Kandahar, Logar, Uruzgan, and Paktia will be handed over to domestic investors for five years.

UNDP sees grim prospects for Afghan economic recovery

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says prospects for the recovery of Afghanistan's economy will remain grim if restrictions on women's work are not lifted.

In a new study -Afghanistan Socio-Economic Outlook 2023 — released in Kabul, UNDP said the country's economy would have collapsed if the international community had not continued with assistance since August 2021.

It also asked the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to follow policies that could attract international humanitarian aid and lift the curbs.

The UNDP said since the political change in August, 2021 and an unprecedented drought, poverty had increased as Afghanistan was at the top of the two or three poorest countries in the world.

The report claimed: "During this remarkable development, girls and women, who make half of the country's 40 million population, have been deprived of basic rights and freedoms and participation in normal life activities."

Key findings

The economic situation continues to spiral. GDP is estimated to have further declined by 3.6 percent in 2022 after the 20.7 contraction in 2021. With a population estimated by the UN at about 40 million and GDP of \$14.3 billion in 2021, Afghanistan is among the countries with the lowest per capita income in the world.

"When coupled with a population increase of more than 2 percent, average real per capita income of ordinary Afghans by the end of 2022 was estimated to have declined by 28 percent from the 2020 level," the study revealed.

The restrictions and bans on women's employment and presence in public life were making the situation worse and depriving girls of secondary school and university education was limiting the prospects for recovery for generations to come, it said, stressing the urgent need for humanitarian assistance and livelihood support.

Signs of recovery

A rise in exports; an expected increase in domestic revenue by 8 percent; stabilisation of the exchange rate and a reduc-

tion in inflation were undergirded by substantial international assistance of \$3.7 billion in 2022, of which \$3.2 billion was provided by the UN.

UNDP wrote: "There have been several improvements recently. Security conditions have improved, and corruption has reportedly fallen. Domestic revenues, historically small, are projected to increase due to better collections at customs and some extension of domestic taxes to businesses such as small vendors. Inflation slowed from 18.3 percent in July 2022 to 5.2 percent in December 2022."

Though with large amounts of UN and international aid, the economy stabilized somewhat, GDP is estimated to have contracted by 2.6 percent in 2022.

UNDP has projected real GDP growth by 1.3 percent in 2023 and 0.4 percent in 2024. Still, GDP per capita is expected to decline from \$359 in 2022 to \$345 in 2024, increasing the hardship Afghans face. Importantly, these projections assume that international support for Afghanistan will remain at the 2022 level of \$3.7 billion.

UNDP simulations suggest that if aid were to drop by 30 percent, GDP could contract by 0.4 percent in 2023 and inflation rate might reach about 10 percent in 2024. By that time, per capita incomes could decline to a projected \$306 compared to \$512 in 2020 — a drop of 40 percent.

The level of foreign aid provided in 2023 will be a key determinant of Afghanistan's economic outlook and the scale of response to its humanitarian crisis.

The WoAA2022 survey results suggest that the per capita expenditures of around 85 percent of the population are below the 2020 poverty line.

At face value, this suggests that the number of poor has increased to 34 million in 2022 (from 19 million, using 2020 data) while the funding requirements for Afghans today to maintain their expenditures at the 2020 level may have reached \$5.3 billion (nearly 35 percent of the current GDP) from \$900 million (5 percent of the GDP) two years ago.

The UN aid appeal for international assistance to reach \$4.6 billion in 2023 is

therefore the minimum required to help Afghans in need, the reported explained.

The report said: "Any reduction in international aid will worsen the economic prospects of Afghanistan and extreme poverty will perpetuate for decades. But the economy cannot be reignited if women cannot work, while future economic growth is constrained by underinvestment in girls' and women's education."

Today Afghanistan faces a fiscal crisis. The cutoff in foreign assistance that previously accounted for almost 70 percent of the government budget, has resulted in a sizeable squeeze of public finances.

For 2022 the budget deficit is estimated to have been 28 percent larger than in 2020.

Development spending dropped by 80 percent in the 2022 budget compared with 2020.

The central bank (DAB) has lost most of its instruments to affect economic events. It has been unable to supply adequate liquidity to banks because of the inability to print money and the freeze on its foreign

assets held abroad. However, DAB's capital controls and deposit withdrawal limits have prevented the complete collapse of the banking system, the source added.

The banking system fell into a severe liquidity crisis because of cutbacks in foreign aid, DAB's inability to provide liquidity, heavy deposit withdrawals and concerns about anti-money laundering and combating financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) was affected.

The microfinance sector, previously dependent on donor grants, shrunk by about 50 percent between August 2021 and the end of 2022, harming prospects for micro enterprises and the poor.

Economic outlook

UNDP wrote there had been several improvements recently. Security conditions have improved and corruption has reportedly fallen. Domestic revenues, historically small, are projected to increase due to better collections at customs and extension of domestic taxes to businesses such as small vendors.

The earlier limits on bank deposits have been relaxed somewhat, though

not all banks allow withdrawals in line with the limits. Some banks have recently improved their liquidity position due to collection efforts and by not lending.

The hawala system has proven resilient and transactions have risen, facilitating remittances, import financing, NGO transactions but perhaps also capital flight.

"Overall, Afghanistan's economic outlook remains very difficult. This will be particularly so if the recent restrictions on women's employment in NGOs lead to a significant drop in international aid, exacerbating pressures on the exchange rate and inflation, especially of imported food items."

The report said: "Natural disasters affected 4.1 million households, and the economic shock that ensued in combination with the massive reduction in GDP impacted 3.3 million households. For those affected, loss of income and access to food were the heaviest shocks. Around 4.1 million households reported lost income, and 3.4 million had to go into debt."

The crisis has left a vast

Two wrongs cannot make a right, observes Justice Isa

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Senior Supreme Court judge Justice Qazi Faiz Isa has said that a wrong decision is wrong even majority endorses it. Two wrongs cannot make a right. Justice Isa was speaking at a ceremony held here on Wednesday to celebrate the golden jubilee of the 1973 Constitution. The theme is "Pakistan's Constitution as a Symbol of National Unity".

In a possible reference to the ongoing constitutional tussle regarding formation of bench on holding elections, he said "if a decision is wrong, it will remain wrong even if a majority endorses it. A lie cannot be turned into the truth by a number game," he observed.

Justice Isa said the word 184(3) has been used in the Constitution and not suo motu. This article 184(3) empowers the Supreme Court with conditions to do something for the implementation of fundamental rights. This article secures those who cannot afford to hire services of a lawyer. This article has been used extensively in Pakistan, sometimes in good faith and sometimes very badly.

He said that 184(3) cannot be used to benefit an individual. This article should be used in public interest. Extreme care should be taken while using this article, the justice declared.

"In my opinion, the authority to invoke 184(3) rests with the Supreme Court. My friends are of the opinion that chief justice has the authority to take suo motu notice. There is also an opinion that if 184(3) is invoked, all the judges of the Supreme Court should hear it. Tell me under which article, I will be corrected and I will follow your theory," Justice Isa observed.

Tracing the background of wrong decision by judiciary, he said the main reason for dismemberment of Pakistan was a wrong judicial decision.

The justice opined that dismemberment of Pakistan was not a sudden incident, but

its seeds were sown [way back in 1950s]. Justice Munir of the Federal Court sowed the seeds that broke the country through a wrong judicial decision.

The poisonous seeds grew and the country was divided into two parts in 1971, he added.

Justice Isa said that what we do today, its consequence continue for centuries. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was sentenced to death by one vote. If you don't want history to repeat itself, then learn from the history. History has repeated itself many times to teach us – 1958, 1977, 1993, 1993, 1999. History has taught us lessons seven times, he continued. The senior judge termed the Constitution a gift.

Criticising dictators, Justice Isa said every dictator realized after some time that he was a democratic person. "The dictator [a possible reference to General Ziaul Haq] conducts a referendum and the results is 98%." Unlike the referendum, the results of the general election in Pakistan never exceeded 60 percent, he maintained. He said that despite the differences, the government and the PNA sat at the negotiation table and resolved the issues.

But on July 4, 1977, one person seized power. On October 12, 1999, another government employee took over power. Musharraf's second strike was on 3 November 2007 when he imposed emergency. The justice called himself an optimist. Justice Isa said that judges are burdened by the Constitution as we have taken an oath to defend and protect it. Unless people understand the constitution, it will have no value.

He said every tyrant says my will, but the constitution says it's will of the people. In a dynamic society, there are differences of opinion. If everyone starts nodding in support, then it will become a monarchy and a dictatorship.

IHC seeks arguments in Imran's disqualification case on May 5

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday fixed May 5 for final arguments on Imran Khan's application seeking to withdraw case against his disqualification by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the Toshakhana reference. The court also extended its stay order against the by-polls till the same date.

Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan had filed an application to withdraw the case stating that an identical

case was also pending with the Lahore High Court (LHC). During the course of hearing, the court questioned whether a petitioner could approach another forum for the same matter if his case was already pending with a certain forum. The court also asked whether the petitioner could pursue a case after withdrawing another identical case from another forum.

PML-N's lawyer Mohsin Shah Nawaz Ranjha opposed Imran Khan's request, saying the PTI chief had filed another case in the LHC when his case was already pending with the IHC with regard to the Toshakhana reference. He said the IHC was not informed about the filing of an identical case in the LHC. The court adjourned the case till May 5 for further hearing.

It may be mentioned that the ECP had disqualified former prime minister Imran Khan for not disclosing the gifts received from the Toshakhana. Imran Khan had challenged the decision before the IHC and the LHC at same time.

PTI to move SC against interim Punjab, KP govts as 90-day tenure ends this week

LAHORE (NNI): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has decided to file a petition in the Supreme Court, seeking appointment of administrators in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the 90-day tenure of caretaker governments in both provinces is going to end on April 22.

Former Punjab chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, ex-KP CM Mahmood Khan and Fawad Chaudhry will submit the petition as PTI Chairman Imran Khan has given nod for it after consultation.

Mr Chaudhry said the interim government could not stay in power beyond 90 days as per the Constitution, adding that the petition would be filed today or

tomorrow. The development comes days after Fawad Chaudhry penned a letter to President Dr Arif Alvi on the issue of the expiry of tenure of the caretaker governments in both provinces.

"This is to draw your kind attention towards the breach of mandatory constitutional commands by the Federal Government and The Election Commission of Pakistan," reads the letter. He said the caretaker governments were installed for the limited time period of 90 days under Article 224 of the Constitution to ensure fair and transparent elections, adding that the only objective of the interim set-up was to facilitate the commission in holding free, fair, just and honest

elections in accordance with constitution and law.

"During such period the caretaker governments are vested with only authority and power to run day to day affairs and not to take major policy decisions."

After the dissolution of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial assemblies, the caretaker set-ups were established in both provinces. However, due to the unconstitutional and illegal actions of the ECP and the PDM government, the mandatory time period for holding the elections within the stipulated time lapsed and the Supreme Court was constrained to fix the time period for holding elections by using its constitutional jurisdiction, he said.

UN denies report about its plan to exit from Afghanistan next month

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The United Nations Tuesday denied a press report that the organization plans to pull out of Afghanistan in May if the efforts to persuade the Taliban to let the Afghan women work for it do not succeed, saying there has been either "misinterpretation or misunderstanding" of what the world body officials have said in this regard.

"We are staying in Afghanistan," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, declared while replying to a question at the regular noon briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

The report about UN warning about withdrawal from Afghanistan next month was published in The Guardian, London, based on the American news agency AP's inter-

view with Achim Steiner, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). "We are committing to do whatever we can to deliver for the people of Afghanistan," Dujarric said, pointing out that the UN would review the situation resulting from the Taliban ban on Afghan women from working for the organization on May 5.

"We have been present in Afghanistan, I would say continuously, since the creation of United Nations, and that includes the worst period," the spokesperson said. "So," he said, "We are continuing to try to do whatever we can to reach as many people as we can and continue to try to push back on this counterproductive, to say the least, edict (about ban on Afghan women to work for the UN) by the authority." At the same time,

the spokesperson added, "We are reviewing how we can do our work and how we can do it while respecting International Human Rights Law, while respecting the Charter and while delivering humanitarian aid in an impartial way according to our principles."

"We're trying to see, how do we thread the needle," UN humanitarian aid agencies and its partners have been providing food, education and health care support to Afghans since the Taliban takeover and the economic collapse that followed it. On Tuesday, UNDP released a report, saying the "draconian" restrictions on women's ability to study and work have contributed to the calamitous socio-economic situation in Afghanistan, with devastating consequences for the population.

Rana rules out Imran Khan's arrest during Eid holidays

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has ruled out plans of arresting former prime minister and PTI chairman Imran Khan during Eidul Fitr holidays.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, while talking on a private TV channel program, said the government has no plans to arrest the former prime minister.

"If govt wanted to arrest Imran Khan, he would have been arrested earlier as the PTI chief was appearing before courts with few people." Replying to a question about LHC's verdict not to harass Imran Khan, Rana Sanaullah said that Imran Khan himself took orders from the court to harass him 'legally'."

He said that Imran Khan should celebrate Eid with satisfaction as they have no intention of any operation against him during the Eid holidays? It may be noted that on April 17, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan hinted at police operation at his Zaman Park Lahore residence. As per detail, the Lahore High Court is hearing the plea to dispose of 121 cases against the PTI chief Imran Khan. The former prime minister said despite court orders, the Punjab police conducted an operation at his Lahore Zaman Park residence.

IHC seeks FIRs record against Hassan Niazi

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday served notices to the Capital's Police and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in a case seeking the details of first information reports (FIRs) against Hassan Khan Niazi.

Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, hearing the case, instructed the FIA and police to submit the cases record to the bench by tomorrow.

Hassan Khan Niazi has filed the petition through his lawyer Naeem Panjutha, seeking details of the FIRs registered against him so that he could approach the relevant forums for relief.

Court issues notice to NAB

LAHORE (APP): An accountability court on Wednesday issued notices to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for April 28 on acquittal application filed by Advisor to the Prime Minister on Establishment Ahad Khan Cheema in an assets beyond means case.

Accountability Court Judge Sajid Ali Awan conducted the proceedings on the application.

Advocate Amjad Parvaiz filed the acquittal application on behalf of Ahad Khan Cheema, saying that the bureau filed the assets beyond means case against his client with mala fide. He submitted that no evidence emerged against his client so far and there was no chance of his conviction in the matter. He pleaded with the court to acquit his client. The NAB had alleged that Ahad Cheema accumulated assets in and outside the country beyond his known sources of income.



ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb addressing a press conference.

Senate passes three bills

ISLAMABAD (NNI): The Upper House of the Parliament Wednesday passed three bills. These are: "The National Accountability (Amendment) Bill, 2023", "The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2023" and "The Pakistan Maritime Zones Bill, 2023."

"The National Accountability (Amendment) Bill, 2023" seeks to remove the legal complication in the transfer of cases from the Accountability Court to the relevant forums which do not fall within the jurisdiction of the NAB Ordinance. The Code of Civil Procedure Bill, 2023 aims at providing relief to the litigants and removing the excessive burden from courts.

According to the statement and objects of this bill, "The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Act No. VII), which was enacted on February 21, 2020, is applica-

ble to the extent of Islamabad Capital Territory, Islamabad. A number of reservations had been raised by members of the Islamabad Bar Association, Islamabad Bar Council and District Judiciary regarding the implementation of the 2020 Act. A consequential effect of amendments in the civil Procedure is that the judges, lawyers and litigants are suffering as they are now required to litigate at two different courts.

Each civil judge hears a main suit filed before his Court and simultaneously hears injunction applications from other Courts. This practice exacerbated the backlog of pending cases. Parties are forced to travel between courts which are adding to their time and costs as well as their counsels. Deletion of the right of revision under section 115 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 had contributed to excessive litigation

before High Court under its constitutional jurisdiction further adding to the cost and misery of parties falling prey to unintended consequences. In essence, the 2020 Act had defeated the purpose of quick access to justice, and inexpensive, speedy and fair trial.

"The Pakistan Maritime Zones Bill, 2023" consolidates and amends the law relating to territorial sea and maritime zones of Pakistan. It will enable Pakistan to deal with these matters in accordance with national and international laws, and assert its rights, jurisdiction, and sovereignty in sync with internationally accepted provisions.

Earlier, at the outset, the House offered fatha for the departed soul of former Federal Minister Mufti Abdul Shakoore who died in a road accident in Islamabad and the security personnel martyred in recent acts of terrorism. The House has been prorogued.

Russia launches drone attack on Ukraine's Odesa

KYIV (AFP/APP): Russia launched a drone attack on Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa early Wednesday but there were no reports of casualties, authorities said.

"At night, the enemy carried out an attack by UAVs of the Shahed-136 type on the Odesa region," Yuriy Kruk, head of the Odesa district military administration, said in a statement on Telegram.

Kruk said Ukraine's air defences had destroyed most of the attacking drones but some civilian infrastructure had been hit.

"According to preliminary information, there were no casualties. Measures are being taken to contain

the fire, units of the State Emergency Service and other structures are working on the spot."

In an update on Telegram, General Mykola Oleschuk, commander of the Ukrainian Air Force, said 10 out of 12 "kamikaze" drones had been destroyed by the Odesa air defences.

Ukraine's general staff said over the past day Russia had launched four missiles and 60 air strikes, along with 58 rocket attacks, causing injuries to civilians. The Shahed-136 is a small Iranian-made, self-detonating drone that can be programmed to fly automatically to a set of GPS coordinates with a payload of explosives.

Russia's drone industry has been

hit by international sanctions and a number have been shot down since the start of the war -- prompting Moscow to import drones from Iran.

The Black Sea port of Odesa was a favourite holiday destination for many Ukrainians and Russians before President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in February last year.

Since the start of the invasion, Odesa has been bombed several times by Russian forces. It was also hit by a drone attack two weeks ago that caused some damage.

In January, the United Nations cultural agency UNESCO designated the historic centre of Odesa a World Heritage in Danger site.

Sudan's army declares new ceasefire

KHARTOUM (Reuters): Sudanese troops declared a new ceasefire on Wednesday in their fierce battle with paramilitary forces across the country after the failure of an earlier truce agreement to allow for the evacuation of civilians caught up in the sudden conflict.

The 24-hour ceasefire, which the army's paramilitary rivals had already announced, was supposed to come into effect at 6 p.m. local time (1600 GMT). It was not immediately clear whether fighting had stopped. Earlier in the day continuous bombardments could be heard in central Khartoum around the compound housing the army HQ and at the main airport, which has been fiercely contested and put out of action since fighting erupted at the weekend.

Thick smoke billowed into the sky and the streets were largely empty in the capital. Gunfire rattled in the

south of the city, a Reuters witness said, while the army appeared to retake a key military airport in Sudan's north, images on TV network al Arabiya showed. Sudan's military ruler, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, had said he was operating from the Khartoum army HQ. Reuters could not establish whether he was still there on Wednesday.

"The armed forces are responding to a new attack in the vicinity of the General Command," the army said in a statement. Huddled in their homes, residents of the capital, one of Africa's largest cities, struggled with power cuts and worried how long food supplies would last.

"Today we were starting to run out of some essentials," said architect Hadeel Mohamed, concerned for the safety of her brother who had gone to look for food. With no signs of peace in the city before the Eid

festival that marks the end of Ramadan this week, some Khartoum residents braved the bombardments to leave for the nearby state of Al Gezira, to the south, where fighting has not been reported. The conflict stems from a power struggle between military leader Burhan and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) chief General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, widely known as Hemedti, over a plan to integrate the paramilitary fighters into the regular military.

Burhan heads a ruling council installed after the 2021 military coup and the 2019 ouster of veteran autocrat Omar al-Bashir, while Hemedti, who analysts say may command more than 100,000 fighters, was his deputy on the council.

At least 270 people have died and 2,600 have been injured, the World Health Organization said, citing Sudan's health ministry.

PPP 'completes' number game for AJK govt

M U Z A F F A R A B A D (NNI): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) completed the number game for the election of the prime minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

According to sources, PPP has the support of 28 members of the AJK assembly, and the four-member forward block headed by Barrister Sultan Mehmood is in contact with the PPP. Sources also revealed that four Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are in contact with PPP individually. Furthermore, the Prime Minister of AJK will be from the forward block, Speaker and deputy speaker will be from PPP, sources added.

The sources also said that the PML-N will also be included in the AJK cabinet. Earlier, the regional assembly session adjourned as the deadlock persisted over the election of the prime minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on the fifth day again without proceedings.

The united opposition has devised a strategy in a joint session and decided to give tough time to the ruling party, sources said.

The assembly session has been requisitioned by the opposition after the disqualification of Sardar Tanveer Ilyas by the AJK High Court on April 11 over accusing the judiciary of hindering his government's functioning and interfering in the executive's domain through stay orders.

India population to surpass China mid-year

NEW DELHI (AFP/APP):

India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country by mid-year with almost three million more people, UN estimates showed on Wednesday. India's population will be 1.4286 billion compared to China's 1.4257 billion at mid-year, the United Nations Population Fund's State of World Population report showed.

The number of people in China shrank last year for the first time since 1960, when millions starved to death under the disastrous agricultural policies of former leader Mao Zedong. Many have blamed the slowdown on the soaring cost of living as well as the growing number of women going into the workforce and seeking higher education. Beijing ended its strict "one-child policy", imposed in the 1980s amid overpopulation fears, in 2016 and start-

ed letting couples have three children in 2021.

China faces a looming demographic decline as birth rates plunge and its workforce ages. Several regions have also announced plans to boost birth rates -- but official efforts have so far failed to reverse the decline. India has no recent official data on how many people it has because it has not conducted a census since 2011. India's once in a decade census was due to be held in 2021 but was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It is now bogged down by logistical hurdles and political reluctance, making it unlikely the massive exercise will begin anytime soon. Critics say the government is deliberately delaying the census to hide data on contentious issues such as unemployment ahead of national elections next year.

The Indian economy under Prime Minister

Narendra Modi is struggling to provide jobs for the millions of young people entering the job market every year. Half of the population of the Asian giant are under 30. The country also faces huge challenges providing electricity, food and housing for its growing population, with many of its huge cities already struggling to cope.

According to the Pew Research Centre, India's population has grown by more than one billion people since 1950, the year the UN began gathering population data. The new UN report also estimated that the global population will have hit 8.045 billion by mid-2023. Other countries, mostly in Europe and Asia, can expect a demographic slump over the coming decades, according to other UN figures published last July which forecast how the world's population will develop between now and 2100.