

NSC meeting today
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday summoned a meeting of the National Security Committee today (Friday) at the prime minister house in Islamabad. The meeting will bring together the military and civil leadership to discuss critical national security issues. The PM himself will preside over the meeting and review the current security situation in the country.



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ISLAMABAD: JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Pakistan to be made polio-free: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that the government was resolved to purge the country of deadly polio virus.

The prime minister, in a meeting with a delegation of Rotary Foundation, headed by Chairman of International PolioPlus Committee Michael McGovern, said he would continue to personally monitor the efforts for elimination of polio from the country. He said the services of the Rotary Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the polio-free Pakistan were appreciable.

He told the delegation that the government was ensuring the security of polio workers. The prime minister appreciated the Rotary International for the development of a housing project for the victims of 2022 floods. He instructed the authorities concerned to

Shehbaz, Fazl discuss prevailing political situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with chief of Pakistan Democratic Movement Maulana Fazlur Rehman here on Thursday and held a detailed discussion on the current political situation in the country.

During the meeting, they strongly condemned the attacks of workers of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) on state institutions and damage to government properties. The two leaders consulted on the recent decision of the Supreme Court and discussed the future strategy.

devise a comprehensive strategy for the upcoming polio vaccination drive.

The prime minister was told that this year, the Rotary International and other partner organisations had allocated \$15 million for anti-polio drives. Apprising the prime minister of the current status of anti-polio campaigns, the relevant authorities told that a special drive would be launched in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The

prime minister instructed the law enforcement agencies to ensure foolproof security for the polio workers. He also directed the officers of the Ministry of National Health to make full preparations for the success of upcoming polio vaccination drive. The officer bearers of Rotary International including Aziz Memon, Faiz Kidwai, Adnan Rohela and officers of the relevant ministries attended the meeting.

Imran asks supporters to remain peaceful

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After the SC passed the order, Imran, while still in the court, said that no harm should be caused to the country and asked his supporters to remain peaceful. "We only want elections in the country," he maintained.

The PTI chief stated that he was told by his lawyers a day earlier that "there is anarchy in the country" and asserted: "We don't want anarchy in the country." He further said that people approached the court for justice, but contended that he was instead hit with batons. "Even murderers are not treated this way," Imran stated. The ex-premier went on to say that he was unaware of what was happening in the country. "I was caught as if I am a terrorist," he decried and asked, "How am I responsible for the protests?"

Separately, in an informal conversation with journalists after the proceedings, Imran was asked whether he was aware of the situation in the country. "I am completely unaware of it," the PTI chief replied. To another question on whether anyone else apart from the NAB officials had met him during detention, Imran replied in the negative with a smile.

The PTI chief also expressed his ignorance of the deaths during recent protests across the country. "I did not have access to the television or telephone," he told reporters. Imran also expressed surprise at the arrest of PTI leader Asad Umar. "Nobody informed me about these matters," he said. The PTI chief further lamented that more than 100 cases were registered against him and contended that a party that wanted elections could never want anarchy. "Those who want anarchy are against elections."

PTI celebrate top court's decision

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Elated supporters of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) poured into the streets soon after the Supreme Court's verdict to release party chairman Imran Khan in the Al-Qadir Trust case. The apex court on Tuesday announced that the former prime minister's arrest was "illegal" and directed authorities to release him "immediately".

Soon after that, the supporters and party workers championed the court's decision. Ex-special assistant to the prime minister on youth affairs Usman Dar called on the party supporters to take to the streets to express solidarity and gratitude to the top court. "All Pakistanis, wherever they are, should come out to express solidarity and gratitude to the Supreme Court in their respective areas," the PTI leader tweeted.

PTI leader Imran Ismail was also overjoyed at the SC's verdict. "Imran Khan released by Supreme Court. Pakistan zindabad," he wrote on the popular microblogging site.

The Frontier Post

500 Indian prisoners freed

KARACHI (INP): Pakistani authorities have decided to release 500 Indian prisoners, 499 of them fishermen, who have completed their jail terms. Indian prisoners will be released from jails in phases. Two hundred prisoners will be released from Malir District Jail and will be sent to Lahore. Edhi Foundation will facilitate travel of the released Indian prisoners to Lahore by train which will be handed over to Indian authorities at Wagah border today.

SC terms Imran's arrest from IHC premises unlawful

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday termed the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan from the Islamabad High Court's premises in the Al-Qadir Trust case unlawful and directed him to appear before the IHC on Friday (today).

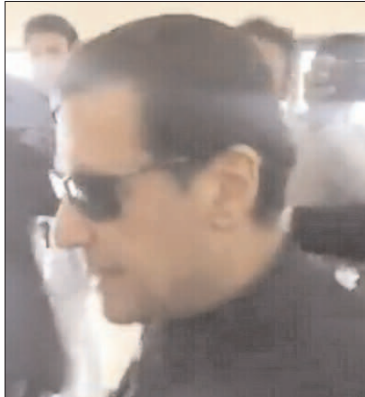
Earlier in the day, the three-member SC bench comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Athar Minallah had ordered the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to produce the PTI chairman before it within an hour.

At the outset of the hearing, the court ordered the police to keep Imran Khan at the Police Lines Guest House and also directed the Inspector General of Police Islamabad to ensure his security. The chief justice called the PTI chairman to the rostrum and said there had been incidents of violence after his arrest and the court wanted peace in the country.

He said when a person came to the court of law, it meant that he had surrendered himself before the court. Subsequently, the court termed PTI Chief Imran Khan's arrest unlawful, asking him to approach the IHC on Friday.

Agencies Add: The top judge observed that the PTI chief was present in the IHC's biometric courtroom on May 9. "When a person comes to the court of law, it means that he surrenders before the court." The CJ said: "Twenty-three million people are waiting for the leader to sail this ship forward. You help with moving this ship forward." "According to the Constitution, a person serving the nation is ameen (honest)," he remarked. "Your rival may not seem to be right, but they are a reality."

The CJ asked that he expected the other party to play its role as well, stressing that "we are sure that you want the rule of law". Justice Bandial also said that he was threatened and



Jemima 'happy' over Imran's release

LONDON (Agencies): Former prime minister Imran Khan's ex-wife film producer Jemima Goldsmith has shared her happiness over the Supreme Court's order to release the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman.

Reacting to the SC order, Goldsmith, who lives in the United Kingdom with her sons, tweeted: "Finally sense has prevailed." She also added a high-five emoji as well as the Pakistani flag.

appealed to the court to let him stay at his Banigala residence in Islamabad but the CJ told him that he was under the court's supervision. "We don't want you to be harmed," Justice Bandial said, reiterating his directives for the government to ensure all the needed security arrangements for Imran. "The case will resume from where the matters became complicated," the top judge remarked, adding that a written order will be issued soon.

At the outset of the hearing — which commenced a little after 2pm — one of Imran's counsels, Hamid Khan, came to the rostrum and informed the apex court that his client had approached the Islamabad High Court (IHC) for pre-arrest bail. His lawyer said that Imran was in the process of getting his biometrics done when he was arrested. "Rangers misbehaved with Imran Khan and arrested him," the lawyer said. CJ Bandial observed that court records showed that the case had not been fixed for hearing. The lawyer told the court that the appeal could not be filed without completing the biometric process.

(Continued on Back Page)

NAB arrested Imran in legal way: Marriyum

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb Thursday said during the tenure of Imran Khan as prime minister, his several political adversaries were arrested from the premises of courts but no notice was taken.

He was the first accused in the history of the NAB whose appeal against his physical remand was taken up by the court for hearing within 48 hours of his arrest, she told a press conference. Marriyum said those who had encouraged terrorists, armed groups and anti-nationalism, would also be called criminals, and "if the fastest relief were given to the criminals like Imran then nobody will be safe from their evil".

Providing relief to a "terrorist and anti-state person" would encourage and incite others to terrorism, she added. "Whether anyone who breaks into the house of a judge will be given relief in the same way as that of Imran Khan?" she questioned. The

minister further asked who would provide justice to the patients, police personnel, martyrs and armed forces veterans who were attacked by the "PTI goons" and who would pay for the damage caused to mosques, schools and hospitals.

She said for the last three days, a few hundred armed groups and terrorists had been attacking sensitive institutions and ransacking state properties, mosques, hospitals and schools. Marriyum said Imran Khan had misappropriated Rs 60 billion of the national exchequer in the name of Al-Qadir Trust case and he was arrested by NAB for interrogation in that regard.

"After his arrest, terrorists and armed groups, who had been persistently incited by the PTI leadership for violence, attacked state and public property across the country," she maintained. The minister opined that NAB arrested Imran in a legal way and produced him in the

accountability court to get his remand for interrogation.

She said Imran Khan was not the first political leader arrested by NAB as he himself had used the Bureau for the witch hunt of political adversaries. He even did not spare the sisters and daughters of his opponents, including Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Rana Sanaullah, Salman Shehbaz, Hamza Shehbaz, Miftah Ismail and others, who were thrown in jails. All his opponents were arrested in fake and concocted cases but no court had taken notice of the "avenging practice", she added. Marriyum said the "Ladla" had been continuously given special treatment since 2014 and no action was ever taken against him by any court. She said the police went to Imran Khan's Zaman Park residence for the execution of his arrest warrants, they were greeted with petrol bombs which was a clear manifestation of contempt of court.

PML-N fumes over Imran Khan's release

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): As soon as the Supreme Court ordered former prime minister Imran Khan's immediate release, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders fired a broadside at the country's top judge for granting relief to the PTI chief in a graft case. In a major relief for the deposed premier, the apex court on Thursday declared his arrest illegal and ordered authorities to release him "immediately".

A three-member bench — headed by CJP Bandial and comprising Justice Athar Minallah and Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar — issued the verdict on PTI's petition challenging Khan's arrest. Reacting to the verdict, PML-N Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz criticised Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial, asking him to step down from the post and join the opposition party — PTI.

"The chief justice was very happy today to meet the criminal who plundered Rs60 billion from the national exchequer and he [CJP] was even more happy to release this criminal," the PML-N leader said while referring to the CJ's remarks during the hearing. The key party of the ruling alliance of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) — a group of 13 political parties — further held the top judge responsible for the attacks on the state installations during the violent protests following the arrest of Imran Khan in the Al-Qadir Trust case on Tuesday.

At least nine people died and dozens of others were injured during the two-day countrywide protests with rioters damaging public properties and storming the military installations. "[...]the CJ is acting as a shield of a fitna [rabble-rouser Imran Khan] and is

pouring fuel on the fire in the country. You should leave the post of chief justice and join the Tehreek-e-Insaf like your mother-in-law," she added.

In a brief statement on Twitter, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal while referring to the crackdown on opposition leaders during the last PTI tenure said: "I wish this Supreme Court was there even during 2018-22!" "It is highly condemnable to make someone who has damaged state buildings in the country and caused loss of billions of rupees as a guest of the Supreme Court," wrote PML-N leader Hina Parvez Butt on Twitter. Reacting to the SC verdict, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Secretary General Nayer Bukhari called for bringing Khan to book and making an example out of him. "Nation wants 'legal repair' of criminals," he added.

Pakistan will not default even without IMF deal: Dar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar emphasised Thursday that Pakistan would not default, even if a stalled loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was not revived. He made the comments while addressing the delay in signing a staff-level agreement (SLA) with the IMF for the release of a crucial economic bailout, during his address at the Islamabad Security Dialogue.

Dar said "rumours" about Pakistan defaulting on its debt obligations should not be spread. "Whether [the deal with the] IMF is [there] or not, Pakistan will not default," he asserted. The financial czar also said Pakistan had fulfilled all conditions and taken steps towards reaching an agreement with the international lender for reviving the stalled loan programme. "International

politics based on injustice with Pakistan should be ended. Internationally, people are amazed at how Pakistan is managing," he added.

Dar added that Pakistan had to pay debts amounting to \$3.7 billion till June, adding that Pakistan would fulfil all promises and make payments on time. Technical discussions with the IMF ended on February 9 and there was a "gap" on the matter of the external account, he said. "If the IMF wants more time for the staff-level agreement, it can take it. The [external debt repayments] in May and June will be done on time," he reiterated. International rating agencies should not discuss Pakistan's default, he said, adding that financing would be arranged for payments in the current fiscal year as friendly countries had promised help.

Pakistan has been negotiating to restart a \$6.5 billion bailout with the IMF for

about half a year, as its foreign exchange reserves — which currently provide an import cover of nearly one month — come under pressure. The country has secured financing support from countries in the Middle East and China — a key IMF condition. The country is reeling from an economic crisis with inflation surging to 36.4%, the highest in its history and the highest in South Asia, while a bruising political battle is raging between the government and former prime minister Imran Khan. The government has removed caps on the exchange rate, imposed taxes, raised energy tariffs, and scaled back subsidies in an attempt to unlock IMF funding. It has also raised key interest rates to a record 21%. Despite Dar's repeated assurances in recent months that Pakistan would not default, analysts say the country is on the brink of it as its foreign reserves continue to remain at a critical level.

Army called in to assist civil admn: KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The caretaker chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan said that damaging and vandalizing private and public properties during protest is regrettable adding that protest and freedom of expression is a democratic and constitutional right of everyone, but this right should be exercised in a peaceful manner. "Vandalism under the guise of protest is illegal and unconstitutional" he said and added that public assets are built with the public's own tax money, and damaging them tantamount damage one's own property.

Talking to mediamen on the occasion, the chief minister said that during the last two days, there had been violent protests at different spots of the province during which private and public properties have been

damaged. The caretaker chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan said that damaging and vandalizing private and public properties during protest is regrettable adding that protest and freedom of expression is a democratic and constitutional right of everyone, but this right should be exercised in a peaceful manner. "Vandalism under the guise of protest is illegal and unconstitutional" he said and added that public assets are built with the public's own tax money, and damaging them tantamount damage one's own property.

Responding to a question, the caretaker chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan said that police was taking action against those who are involved in damaging properties during

these protests; a number of arrests have been made so far whereas identification of those who damaged properties were being identified and legal action would be taken against them.

In response to another question, the Chief Minister made it clear that in the wake of the current situation, army has been called in to assist the civil administration and would be deployed when and where needed. Lauding the role of KP police during these protests, the caretaker chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police has performed very well in this regard and entire provincial cabinet in its meeting the other day also appreciated the performance of police during protest.

PTI leaders Ali Muhammad, Ejaz, Suri held

LAHORE (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Ali Muhammad Khan and Senator Ejaz Chaudhry were arrested from Islamabad on Thursday. According to a report, former federal minister Ali Muhammad Khan was arrested by the SHO of the Secretariat Police Station from Serena Gate.

As per the report, Senator Ejaz Chaudhry has also been arrested by the Islamabad police from the capital. The channel report said that both the PTI leaders have been arrested under the Section 3 MPO (Maintenance of Public Order) from Islamabad. It is worth mentioning here that the Section 3 MPO mentioned that the government, if satisfied that with a view to preventing any person from acting in any manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order, it is necessary to do, may, by an order in writing, direct the arrest and detention in such custody Power to arrest and detain suspected persons.

PTI leader and former deputy speaker of National Assembly Qasim Suri has also been arrested. As per details, police has taken the PTI leader Qasim Suri in custody from Gilgit Baltistan House Islamabad.

Islamabad police earlier hinted at more arrests of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders following the violent protests and vandalism after Imran Khan's arrest in the Al-Qadir Trust case. According to Islamabad police spokesperson, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Asad Umar, Fawad Chaudhry, Jamshed Iqbal Cheema, Musarrat Cheema, Falak Naz Chitrali and Malika Bukhari have been arrested for 'provoking' people for violent protests. All the arrests were made in accordance with the law, the spokesperson added. Warning the PTI leaders to avoid spreading chaos, the Islamabad police hinted at more arrests in the future.

Delegations of merged areas contractors calls on Governor, highlights issues

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali Thursday said that provincial and federal governments are striving to ensure clarity in tender awarding process in merged districts aiming facilitation of contractors and transparency in execution of uplift projects. He was talking to 24-member delegation of All Tribal Contractors Association led by its President, Zahir Jan in Governor House Peshawar. The delegation comprised contractors of merged districts including Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram and Waziristan. The delegation informed governor about their concerns and urged him to contact concerned authorities to resolve them. Speaking on the occasion, KP Governor assured cooperation to delegation and also highlighted sacrifices of tribal people for establishment of peace. He said that appropriate allocation would be made for uplift of tribal areas in coming budget and added that it would change the destiny of tribal areas and help addressing long standing sense of deprivations of tribal people. He also urged tribal contractors to ensure quality and transparency in completing uplift and development schemes in merged districts. Later a delegation of tribal districts tehsil chairmen and elders called on KP Governor and inform him about their concerns relating to uplift work and pending payments to owners of houses and shops destroyed in operations. A delegation of Swabi farmers also called on governor and highlighted their issues regarding acquisition of cultivable land in their respective areas.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Azam Khan talking to media during his visit to Police Hospital.

Special police teams formed to arrest saboteurs

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar police have arrested 42 miscreants for torching and damaging government properties and installations and formed special teams to arrest others involved in ransacking, looting and vehicles' destruction in the city. Police spokesman told media that CCTV footage from the areas including Balahisr Fort, Radio Pakistan and provincial assembly has been collected for identification of the miscreants entering government properties, offices and sensitive installations. Special teams of police, he said, have been formed to arrest these people. He said raids were also being conducted to arrest the local leaders, MNAs and MPAs from Tehreek Insaf for their involvement in inciting the people for attack on government properties. He said cases against the MPAs and MNAs would be registered once their involvement in these anti-state activities was proven. The spokesman further said that protestors damaged government properties and installations at Motorway Interchange, Dalazak Road, Kabootar Chowk and General Bus Stand; however the major losses were incurred to properties at Suray Pull near the provincial assembly and Radio Pakistan. In the Hashtnagri area, he said the protestors broke the locks of various shops and escaped with looted goods while window panes of some plaza were stoned and broken on the GT Road. At Bacha Khan Chowk the signboards of Directorate of Capital Metropolitan and Mayor office were uprooted and taken away by the protestors. He said so far 42 protestors involved in damage to government properties have been arrested and teams have been formed to arrest the other involved accused.



PESHAWAR: Inspection General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Gandapur talking to media.

PHC restraints auctioning of Chromite Mine

PESHAWAR (APP): A division Bench of Peshawar High Court comprised of Justice Shakoor and Justice Arshid Ali on Thursday heard a writ petition filed by Hameedullah Khan Paracha who has challenged the advertisement of Chromite Mine measuring 224 Acres in Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on basis of the joint venture. Advocate Nouman Muhib Kakakhel appeared on behalf of the petitioner. The counsel argued that initially two Mines Chromite A and Chromite B Mines in Kohistan were advertised as sole proprietorships and E-Auction No. 18 was conducted wherein the petitioner was the highest bidder for both the mines which collectively was around 500 acres. The counsel argued that later it was found that Chromite A mine was already advertised and won in E-Auction No.17. The relevant authorities decided to cancel both the bids and advertise it afresh to avoid controversy between both successful bidders who had won the Chromite Mine A in E-Auction 17 and 18 respectively. The counsel argued that later the Chromite A mine measuring 224 Acres was readvertised but this time as Joint Venture with the Government and not as a sole proprietorship. The counsel argued that the Mine A can only be readvertised as Sole Proprietorship and not as Joint Venture as it was already won over in E-Auction 17 and 18, creating a vested right of the petitioner to compete over it over the same terms as advertised before.

He said that a promise was made to readvertise it with the same terms, and the principal of promissory estopped hits the advertisement, hence it's illegal, without jurisdiction and lawful authority. The counsel argued that an appeal had been filed by the petitioner against the impugned order but since three months no date was fixed by the appellate tribunal in the case nor the interim relief was fixed for adjudication. The bench after hearing arguments of the counsel for the petitioner company restrained the DG from the auction of Mine A of Chromite in Kohistan and its allotment by maintaining Status Quo till the final decision of the appeal before the Appellate Tribunal Mines and Minerals.

Legal fraternity stands for supremacy of constitution, says PHCBA

F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: Newly elected president Peshawar High Court Bar Association (PHCBA) Tariq Afridi Advocate said that legal fraternity shouldn't be used for ends of any political party but should be stood for supremacy of constitution and law. This he said while talking to media personnel and that PHCBA will not observe strike for political means but should be obliged to follow decisions of Pakistan Bar Council, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council and association's cabinet decision. PHCBA president stressed that it is high time to stand for supremacy of constitution and rule of law to develop public institutions in lines with modern era. He added that last lawyer appeared before courts and proceeded their cases. He said that PHCBA cabinet, KPBC and PBC agreed to keep ways with political ends of any party and would not observe strike. He argued legal fraternity to stand for supremacy of constitution and uphold voice on every forum in this regard. PHCBA president Tariq Afridi claimed that legal fraternity has always stood for rule of law and supremacy of constitution while added that will oppose every unconstitutional act at every forum.

Devastation of Radio Pakistan Peshawar a great loss

PESHAWAR (INP): Director General Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) Tahir Hassan has said that the devastation of Radio Pakistan Peshawar building by miscreants during violent protest against arrest of PTI chief is great loss. These views were expressed by him during his visit to Broadcasting House Peshawar on Thursday. Tahir Hassan visited all the sections and floors of the building to review the damages caused by the miscreants' attack. He expressed deep sorrow over the loss of precious and important equipment and record of Radio Pakistan Peshawar. The Director General PBC said that Radio Pakistan Peshawar had been raising an effective voice for Kashmir cause.

‘PTI protesters damaged scores of properties’

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz senior leader on Thursday said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) violent protesters have damaged scores of public and private properties which is a condemnable act. In a statement issued here, Arbab Khaizer Hayat said those who damage the country's property are not in the best interest of the country. Radio Station, the Associated Press of Pakistan Office in Peshawar, Election Commission Offices, BRT buses and ambulances were set ablaze by protestors, which was not a justified act, Arbab Khaizer Hayat said. This country belongs to us, only the enemies of the

PTI protesters blocked 139 places in KP

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf workers blocked roads at 139 places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Wednesday, an official of the Police Control said here Thursday. He informed that 659 people were taken into custody during various operations by the police and a total of 15 properties including 13 government buildings of the province were set on fire during the protest including historical Radio Pakistan Peshawar and Associated Press of Pakistan Peshawar Bureau. He said protesters set fire to 17 government and private vehicles, including 12 government vehicles, in different areas of the province. Stolen from Radio Pakistan Peshawar, Associated Press Peshawar Bureau, Nadra Mega Centre, Police Stations and many other buildings and shops, the official said. More than 300 people, including 58 policemen, were injured in the PTI protests, said the official. He disclosed that seven protesters have been killed during clashes with the police.

ANP slams PTI for damaging public property

PESHAWAR (APP): Awami National Party (ANP) senior central leader Haji Ghulam Ahmed Bailor Thursday criticized the negative politics of PTI, describing it as a matter of great embarrassment and regret for the country. He accused PTI of behaving like a terrorist group and losing support due to its arrogant decisions and incompetent leadership under its party chief Imran Khan. He lambasted on the PTI for protesting and damaging public property following the arrest of Imran Khan, saying that no other political party had behaved in such a manner. He cited the example of his own party leaders, Bacha Khan and Wali Khan, who spent years in jail, but never attacked institutions or resorted to violence. He pointed out that Imran Khan instead of creating chaos should face legal trial like any other politician.

JUI-F demands action against saboteurs

PESHAWAR (APP): Deputy provincial general secretary JUI-F KP, Maulana Amanullah Haqqani has demanded action against PTI workers for damaging public properties including defense institutions. He said that the during of last three days, the office bearers and workers of PTI have put the properties of security forces, and public properties on fire and inflicted huge losses to the nation, which was even could not be committed by the enemy during the period of 75 years. He said that the sabotages have been committed under a well-planned conspiracy, which is not only condemnable but rather dealing with the miscreants with iron hand is also the need of hour. He said that security agencies, intelligence agencies and police should identify those involved in arson and miscreants through videos and CCTV footage to not only award them exemplary punishment rather also recover losses inflicted by them to public and private properties.

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa leadership has gone underground amid a crackdown on party workers and leaders over violent protests, it was reported on Thursday. All PTI office-holders' mobile phones appeared switched off, and they were also non-responsive on social media platforms. It may be noted that PTI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter in-charge Pervez Khattak had called for "peaceful protests" on a daily basis earlier in the day. The news comes two days after violent protests followed former PM Imran Khan's arrest by the Rangers paramilitary force from the Islamabad High Court (IHC), over corruption allegations. A day earlier, an accountability court granted the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) his eight-day physical remand. He was accused of looting Rs50 billion of the national treasury, along with a property tycoon, and getting the Al-Qadir University Trust registered on 450-kanal. Hours after Imran's arrest, the IHC declared that his arrest from the court's premises was carried out legally, while the PTI alleges political persecution. Notably, the PTI chief's arrest also came a day after the military warned him against making "baseless allegations" after he again accused a senior intelligence officer of plotting to kill him. Since Imran's arrest, in the two provinces, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P), at least six people have died of the violence that ensued. Authorities have arrested nearly 1,500 PTI workers and leaders in Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and other parts of the country. Government buildings and assets were attacked and set ablaze by protestors in many cities in the two days. The authorities said that scores of policemen were severely injured in clashes with the protestors. In view of the unrest, the federal cabinet approved the deployment of Pakistan Army under Article 245 of the Constitution in Punjab, K-P, and the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) on the recommendation of the interior ministry. Earlier this morning, the ICT said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders, including its vice president Shah Mehmood Qureshi, were arrested for "inciting arson and violent protests under a plan for threatening peace".

PTI workers and leaders in Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and other parts of the country. Government buildings and assets were attacked and set ablaze by protestors in many cities in the two days. The authorities said that scores of policemen were severely injured in clashes with the protestors. In view of the unrest, the federal cabinet approved the deployment of Pakistan Army under Article 245 of the Constitution in Punjab, K-P, and the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) on the recommendation of the interior ministry. Earlier this morning, the ICT said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders, including its vice president Shah Mehmood Qureshi, were arrested for "inciting arson and violent protests under a plan for threatening peace".



PESHAWAR: DG PID Peshawar Ashfaq Ahmad Khalil in a group photo with participants of two days training workshop organized by PID and PIC.

FAPUASA condemns victimization of teaching at KUST

F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: FAPUASA Central strongly supports the demands of the Kohat University Academic Staff Association (KASA) and stands in solidarity with its members. We condemn the actions of the Vice Chancellor (VC) and Registrar of Kohat University, which have led to the victimization, statutory violations, favoritism and harassment of academic staff at the university. Such actions are unacceptable and undermine the principles of academic integrity and institutional autonomy, which are fundamental to the functioning of universities. We demand that the government take immediate action to remove the VC and Registrar of Kohat University, and ensure that academic staff is protected from any further victimization and statutory violations. FAPUASA request the Higher Education Department/Chancellor to form a fact-finding committee to investigate the situation at Kohat University and hold those responsible accountable for their actions. FAPUASA believes that academic institutions must operate in an environment that promotes academic freedom, protects the rights of academic staff, and upholds the principles of institutional autonomy. We urge the government and relevant authorities to take swift and decisive action to ensure that these principles are upheld at Kohat University and all other academic institutions in Pakistan. FAPUASA stand in solidarity with KASA and the academic staff at Kohat University, and we will continue to support them in their efforts to defend their

Journalists urged to prioritize fact

PESHAWAR (APP): Director General Press Information Department, Ashfaq Ahmad Khalil on Thursday emphasised the importance of fact-checking for journalists to provide the public with reliable and truthful information. He was addressing the concluding session of the two-day training on 'News authenticity and tools to counter the fake news, anti-state propaganda and blasphemy' attended by journalists and students of mass communication. DG urged journalists to apply their acquired fact-checking skills in their respective fields. He highlighted the significance of utilizing online fact-checking tools before publishing content, emphasizing that journalists could enhance their professional skills and earn a better livelihood by ensuring the accuracy of their reports. The DG PID also emphasized the need to create informative video content and effectively address a wide range of misinformation, from everyday rumours to organized disinformation campaigns. The resource person for the training encouraged participants to conduct thorough investigations and employ fact-checking methods when reporting on such cases. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of avoiding plagiarism in journalistic writing and provided insights on how journalists could promote their content on digital media platforms through effective content management.

Dry and hot weather to prevail in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Thursday predicted that mainly dry and hot weather is expected in most districts of the province. It said during the last 24 hours, mainly dry weather prevailed over most districts of the province. Rain recorded in the province was nil. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar City 37/18, Chitral 30/14, Timergara 29/16, Dir 29/09, Mirkhani 26/11, Kalam 25/03, Drosh 28/12, Saidu Sharif 32/11, Pattan 33/20, Malam Jabba 19/09, Takht Bhai 37/16, Kakul 29/12, Balakot 31/13, Parachinar 20/10, Bannu 35/17, Cherat 29/22, D.I. Khan 39/22.



In brief

11,000 saplings planted

SIALKOT (INP): Deputy Commissioner Adnan Mehmood Awan has said that 11,000 saplings had been planted in seven green belts of the city so far. The plantation and pipe irrigation project would be completed on Pasrur Road, Wazirabad Road and Shahabpura Road in the next 10 days, he added. He expressed these views while addressing a meeting at the DC's Office. Additional Deputy Commissioner General (ADCG) Ahmed Raza, Chief Officer Municipal Corporation Malik Ijaz, Chief Officer District Council Ulfat Shahzad, Municipal Finance Officer Rana Saqlain, Deputy Director Development Yasir Raza, Additional Deputy Commissioner Technical Mohsin Ali Riaz and others. The deputy commissioner directed SDO Highway Nadeem Ahmed to complete the repair and rehabilitation of Sublime Chowk, Wazirabad Road, to the U-turn, Motorway within a week. Similarly, electricity connection for motors installed for water supply on District Council and Municipal Corporation Green Belts and the maintenance of green belts on Shahabpura and Wazirabad Roads should also be completed as soon as possible. The deputy commissioner directed the CO District Council to make a comprehensive plan for rehabilitation and upgradation of Khayaban-e-Iqbal Park.

6,000 bags of wheat recovered

SIALKOT (INP): Assistant Commissioner Ghulam Sarwar recovered 6,000 bags of wheat from hoarders during a crackdown in Chaprar area. The wheat had been shifted to wheat procurement centres. Later, he reviewed the implementation of prices of food items in various shops in Chaprar and sealed two stores over profiteering. Two profiteers had been handed over to police and a fine of Rs 30,000 was imposed on others. Meanwhile, the AC Sialkot conducted verification of the stock of sugar in tehsil Sialkot and directed dealers to keep complete record of stock and sale.

Tree plantation drive launched

HYDERABAD (APP): The tree plantation drive launched by Social Organization Sami Foundation was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner Shehryar Gul Memon by planting a sapling in front of Law College on Thursday. DC said that more and more tree plantation is necessary to clean the environment from pollution and subside the temperature. He said that more trees are being planted around world to coup up with global warming. DC said that all of us shall plant trees for the improvement of the environment and also protect these plants. On the occasion, Project Manager Sami Foundation Ameer Ali Mahar informed Deputy Commissioner that the organization has arranged 500 saplings to be planted in different sites of Nawabshah city, which is in progress according to season. He said that the tree plantation program would help to make environmentally friendly and green. Later DC visited under construction building of Rescue 1122 at Civil Defense Ground. He said that Rescue 1122 is an important institution to provide help during any emergency or accident so its construction should be completed at the earliest. The officials of the concerned department briefed about the construction process of the Rescue 1122 building.



HYDERABAD: Matric students solving paper during SSC examination.

TIP held solidarity rally with public institutions

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Forces and departments solidarity rally was taken out here in Shahkas area of Jamrud, district Khyber on Thursday. Led by the interim Provincial Minister for welfare and rehabilitation Taj Muhammad Afridi, a large number of workers of Tehreek-e-Islahat Pakistan (TIP) and general masses participated in the rally.

Carrying the national flags of Pakistan by participants while chanting slogans "Long Live Pakistan" marched from the Shahkas, the home village of the minister till forces fort. Addressing on the occasion Taj Muhammad Afridi, Bilal Afridi, Nawab Afridi, Chairman Inayatullah Afridi and others said as per planned plot, conspiracy was hatched against consolidation of the country.



The Strong Army guarantees firm Pakistan; they said and added that the scheme was made to create Libya and Syria like destruction in Pakistan that was foiled by the forces. Destruction of public properties was not democratic behavior and all the allegedly criminals should be brought to book, they remarked.

They maintained that permanent peace was restored in the country especially in the tribal

regions with matchless sacrifices of forces and mud sliding of the Army was beyond thoughts. At the end the participants met with Sector Commander Brigadier Mansoor Abbas and on behalf of tribesmen presented him bouquets.

Meanwhile, on the third day, local workers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf gave up their agitation, initiated at Charwazgai and resumed the Pak-Afghan highway for all kinds of traffic.

Farrukh says nation looking towards CJP

FAISALABAD (INP): PTI central leader Farrukh Habib said that the whole nation was looking towards Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial to take action against the cruelty being meted out to party leaders.

He said that Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Ejaz Chaudhry, Musarrat Jamshed Cheema, and Malika Bokhari were abducted from Gilgit-Baltistan House in Islamabad. "Basic human rights have disappeared in Pakistan," Habib said.

It was worth to mention here that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI's) prominent leaders Asad Umar and Fawad Chaudhry, have been placed under house arrest for next 15 days. The Islamabad administration stated that the PTI leaders Asad Umar and Fawad Chaudhry has been detained for 15 days under 3 MPO.

Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPO), 1960 – Powers to arrest and detain suspected persons to ensure law and order for public safety. PTI Secretary General Asad Umar was detained within the premises of Islamabad High Court, while PTI Vice President Fawad Chaudhry was arrested outside the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, Fawad Chaudhry was present in the Supreme Court's building since 12:00 noon to avoid his arrest. He was immediately arrested by police after he stepped out of the SC premises late Wednesday night. While conducting a press conference, Fawad Chaudhry said it would be the first time in history that a lawyer is being arrested. "Politics have divided the legal fraternity and all sections in Pakistan are facing the same challenge." The administration stated that both of the opposition party leaders were arrested under 3 MPO.

New saline drains are need of time

HYDERABAD (APP): In order to dispose of rainwater in District Naushehro Feroze the restoration of the natural passage of water and new saline drains are need of the time. This was stated by Commissioner SBA Muhammad Abbas Baloch while chairing a meeting in Committee Room.

He said that Irrigation Department and LBOD should prepare schemes with the consultation of district administration so that the public could be saved from any major disaster in future. The meeting was convened to over view the arrangements in the wake of expected rains and floods in District Naushehro Feroze.

DC Naushehro Shahzeb Shaikh, Engineer Drainage-1 Mansoor Ahmed Memon, Project Director SCARP Amjad Memon, Regional Director Local Government Zakir Hussain, Deputy Director Sepco Mansoor Ahmed, District Health Officer N Feroze Dr Asadullah, Deputy Director Information Ghulam Abbas Goraho, officials of police, irrigation, social welfare, agriculture and other related department attended the meeting.

Quetta cops detain 65 PTI protesters

QUETTA (PPI): Violent protests against the arrest of former premier Imran Khan continued in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Islamabad and other parts of the country for the third consecutive day on Thursday.

As per details, police have arrested as many as 65 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf workers involved in 'violent protests' from Quetta. A crackdown against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders and workers continues across Pakistan including Quetta after violent protests, according to a report on Thursday.

In a raid at the provincial secretariat of PTI in Quetta, police arrested 12 PTI workers while in Dukki, PTI's district president was taken into custody along with 4 party workers. Meanwhile, former deputy speaker National Assembly and Senior Vice President of PTI, Qasim Suri, Mubeen Khilji, Munir Baloch and others have been booked by the police over violent protests.

It may be noted that at least seven people died and hundreds were injured in the violent protests being held by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf supporters across the country against the arrest of party chief Imran Khan. Former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan was arrested by National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in the Al-Qadir Trust case on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Haq Du Tehreek (HDT), Quetta, while condemning the use of force against journalists in the protest demonstration of PTI, Thursday demanded of the authorities to take strict departmental action against officers and officials of Quetta police responsible for using force against journalists during the protest demonstration of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) at Airport road, Quetta, said a statement issued by the central secretariat of HDT, Quetta.

Welcoming the announcement of Balochistan Union of Journalists (BUJ) to boycott coverage of Police news, it said that HQT, Quetta under the leadership of Bashir Khan Boxer was ready to extend all kind of assistance to Balochistan Union of Journalists, particularly to Irfan Saeed, President, BUJ and Manzoor Ahmed, General Secretary.

It called on Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo, Governor Balochistan, Malak Abdul Wali Khan Kakar, Chief Secretary Balochistan, Abdul Aziz Uqaili and Inspector General of Police, Balochistan, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh to initiate departmental proceedings against police officers and officers and officials of Quetta police responsible for using force against journalists deputed for the coverage of PTI's protest demonstration held at Airport Road, Quetta.

Book launching ceremony held on 'webinar': Agha Khan University - Institute for Educational Development

(AKU-IED), Pakistan in collaboration with Deakin and RMIT Universities Melbourne, Australia launched a book titled "COVID-19 and the (Broken) Promise of Education for Sustainable Development: A Case Study from Postcolonial Pakistan" on 'Webinar'.

The book is published by BRILL, said a handout issued by Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR) here on Thursday. The book highlighted some key issues of education, curriculum and teacher education in Pakistan in the emergent situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses by governments, NGOs, and donor organizations in that regard.

The book was written by three Pakistani researchers namely Dr Javed Anwar Shahwani, Dr Sher Rahmat Khan, Dr Mir Zaman Shah, who recently completed their PhD from RMIT University in Australia, and their supervisors, Professor Peter Kelly and Dr Seth Brown, and senior researcher Dr Scott Philipps. The authors also included a detailed analysis of the development of Pakistan as a postcolonial nation-state and examine the legacies of colonialism in education systems and policies, teacher education and development.

This mix of theoretical insight and practical experience promises to produce significant policy and development impact in post-COVID-19 Pakistan, South Asia more broadly, and in other postcolonial development contexts around the world as it develops a critique of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as a global and more local framework for development. Professor Peter Kelly of Deakin University chaired the event. Dr Farid Panjwani, the Dean of Aga Khan University - Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED), introduced the book and highlighted its potential contributions.

He underlined the different ways the book could contribute to the discourses of education and teacher education in Pakistan. Dr Panjwani pointed out the constitutional promise of education in Pakistan and the challenges in realizing the promise. The three Pakistani authors spoke about the book. They highlighted the background of writing the book, its major themes and its possible contributions and impacts.

Dr Hafeez Ahmed Jamali, the Director General (DG) of Balochistan Civil Service academy Quetta, shared his views about the book. He pointed out the importance of how this book elaborates on the postcolonial context of Pakistan and why it was important for understanding the current education issues, challenges and solutions in that regard. Mr Ghulam Nabi Marri, an Economist with the UN-International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), also spoke about the book and discussed its salient features.



HYDERABAD: Inundated road by overflowing sewerage water, causing unhygienic atmosphere and creating problems for residents and commuters.

Hazara police arrest 46 PTI workers under 3 MPO

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: The Hazara Police Thursday arrested 46 workers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in various districts of the division under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO).

Some 20 PTI workers along with former provincial minister Qalandar Khan Lodhi were arrested by the Abbottabad Police while 18 protestors were held in Haripur and eight in Manserha for rioting and violence.

According to Hazara

Police Spokesperson Wajid Mahmood, cases were registered at different police stations of Mansehra against 30 nominated local leaders and 200 workers for their involvement in violent protests. He said the arrested workers were presented in different courts while the process of identifying and arresting other PTI workers and nominated leaders was in progress.

The teams from different police stations were conducting raids to arrest other workers. Former National Assembly member Ahmad Shah Ghani, and former

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly members Ali Khan Jadoon and Qalandar Khan Lodhi staged a protest at the Fawara Chowk in Abbottabad in violation of Section 144 and closed the Karakoram Highway.

Due to the road blockage, even ambulances with patients aboard were trapped in the traffic jam, besides severe difficulties faced by commuters. A protest was also held in Mansehra, which resulted in the blocking of the road, causing problems for travellers.

Regular payment of honourarium to imams demanded

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The religious political parties and organizations on Thursday demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and its concerned department to increase the honorarium of imams of mosques and its payment should be ensured every month. Speaking at a news conference at the Chakdara

Press club Maulana Ubaidullah Anwar of the Pakistan Rah e Haq party district president, Maulana Abdul Razaq of Jamaat-i-Islami, Maulana Ubaidullah of Ishaat Tauheed wa Sunnah, Dr Sultan ud Din of Ahl e Hadees, Maulana Shah e Room of the JUI-F and others said that the previous government had taken a good step by announcing honorariums for the

mosques' Imams.

They said there were reports that the honorarium was being stopped by the current caretaker provincial government. They argued that the honorarium given to the scholars and imams of mosques should be increased and its payment be ensured every month not through cross cheques but the amount should be sent to their accounts directly.



Sudanese refugees face hunger and hostility in neighbouring countries

KHARTOUM (Agencies): More than 150,000 people have fled Sudan since the country was plunged into conflict last month, while the number of people internally displaced has doubled in a single week, according to new data from the United Nations. Families have been dispersed, many to the city of Port Sudan on the Red Sea, Chad in the west, and Ethiopia in the east.

By October, some 860,000 people are expected to have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. On-the-ground aid workers told The Telegraph that most new arrivals are women and young children, carrying only their clothes and small amounts of food. Thousands are sheltering in the open. "I just came back from the Chad border, the situation looks really dire. The majority of new arrivals are children. There are a lot of single mothers who came with seven or eight children. Their husbands are already killed or have disappeared," said Eujin Byun, a spokesperson for UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

"There are children coming on their own. There are orphans coming alone. They are trying to find relatives." The battles between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have now engulfed large parts of the country, killing more than 600 people, wounding at least 5,000 and unleashing a humanitarian disaster. Intercommunal violence has reignited in Darfur, western Sudan, forcing 30,000 refugees into Chad. Some 100,000 more are expected to arrive over the coming weeks. The UNHCR expects it will need to establish five new camps to accommodate them.

Yet Chad - like many of Sudan's seven neighbouring countries - is suffering its own humanitarian crisis and has long been hit by acute hunger. Before the latest bout of fighting, eastern Chad was already home to more than 400,000 Sudanese refugees. "The refugees are making makeshift shelters with whatever they can find - trees, broken branches. It's more than 40 degrees during the day. There is not enough food or water,"



said Ms Byun. Halime Yacoub Issac is one of the Sudanese refugees to have fled into Chad, along with her five children. The journey is perilous, with refugees trekking across desert scrubland. "We're entirely dependent on food Chadian families give us," Issac told Reuters news agency, sitting with other newly arrived women and children, some of them orphans. One month on, desperation is growing among the refugees. Chadian soldiers used whips to beat back dozens of women who had started grabbing bags of provisions in Koufroune, another border village, when they saw that supplies brought by a Turkish aid group were running out. Meanwhile, the Guardian reported that refugees arriving in Egypt faced a hostile welcome, with no food, water and bathrooms at the crossing. The state's security officials were accused of holding up young men for hours. Humanitarian agencies say they are also rushing to set up aid camps before the rainy season begins in June. They fear potential widespread flooding could hamper relief efforts. Africa has been facing a deepening set of crises for years - from increasing droughts and floods to a growing list of armed conflicts - which has seen demand surge for life-

saving humanitarian assistance.

"You've got this huge arc of misery across this part of Africa, and Sudan is just the latest crisis to be added to that in humanitarian terms," Andrew Mitchell, Britain's minister of state for development and Africa, said earlier this month. According to an internal UN estimate, five million additional people in Sudan will now require emergency assistance, half of them children. Yet a Reuters analysis of United Nations funding data for Africa shows financial support from key donor governments is dropping off. Britain, for example, announced in 2021 it would temporarily reduce its aid budget to 0.5 per cent of gross national income to help pay for the pandemic response. Between 2020, when the UK was the third-biggest contributor to UN humanitarian appeals in Africa, and 2022, its contribution dropped by 55 per cent. The UN data showed other leading donors, including Canada, Sweden and Norway, all scaled back funding to Africa between 2021-22. UNHCR is appealing for an additional half billion dollars for Sudan. But the UN's joint appeal for the country - a request for \$1.75 billion that predates the latest violence - is only 15 per cent funded.

EU countries start talks on new Russia sanctions

BRUSSELS (Reuters): European Union states hold a first discussion on proposed new sanctions over Russia's war in Ukraine that would target Chinese and Iranian firms and allow export curbs on third countries for busting existing trade restrictions. Talks among EU envoys start at 0800 GMT and are set to be heated, according to one diplomat, with Russia hawks upset the plan doesn't go far enough but others wary of damaging their international ties.

Widely differing perspectives mean a quick deal is not expected, several diplomats said. The EU's chief executive unveiled the plan on a symbolic trip to Kyiv - a counterbalance to annual celebrations in Moscow of the World War Two victory over Nazi Germany that President Vladimir Putin likens to his invasion of Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the new sanctions would focus on cracking down on circumvention of Russia trade curbs already in place, and were designed "in very close coordination" with Group of Seven (G7) nations. "If we see that goods are going from the European Union to third countries and then end up in Russia, we could propose to the member states to sanction those goods' export. This tool will be a last resort and it will be used cautiously," she said. She added the EU would stop transit via Russia of more of its exports, including advanced tech products and aircraft parts. Diplomatic sources familiar with the proposal - drafted by von der Leyen's Commission - said it also included black-listing "tens" of new companies, including from China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The new sanctions would highlight that oil tankers are not allowed to offload in high seas or arrive in ports with their GPS trackers off, an attempt to push back against flouting G7 restrictions on trading Russian oil, according to the sources.

All 27 EU countries must agree for new sanctions to take effect in what would be the bloc's 11th round of such measures since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. It would mark the first time the bloc had targeted China over accusations of Beijing's role in the war, something China's foreign ministry warned the EU against. A diplomatic source from an EU country hawkish on Russia was frustrated the Commission's proposal did not include stopping Russian diamond imports or nuclear energy cooperation. The person said trade lost under the proposal was estimated to be worth up to 500 million euros (\$550 million) compared to what von der Leyen said amounted to 11 billion euros in the previous round. At the opposite end of the debate, a diplomatic source from a country critical of the sanctions said the proposal to target third countries was bound to trigger a fraught discussion.

Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad as saying during meeting that Syria and Turkey "share goals and common interests." He said that "despite all the negatives over the past years," Damascus saw the talks as an opportunity "for both governments to cooperate with the help and support of our friends Russia and Iran."

Yet Mekdad added that the Syrian government's "main goal" was to end all "illegal" military presences in the country, including that of Turkish forces. "We will continue to demand and insist on the subject of withdrawal," he was quoted as saying. Following a deadly earthquake in February that killed tens of thousands of people in Syria and Turkey, regional normalization with Damascus began to accelerate. In April, Moscow hosted the defense ministers of Turkey, Syria and Iran for talks that it said focused on "practical steps to strengthen security in the Syrian Arab Republic and to normalize Syrian-Turkish relations."

US 'cautiously optimistic' about Sudan ceasefire talks

WASHINGTON (Agencies): As its negotiators participate in Sudan ceasefire talks in Saudi Arabia, the United States is "cautiously optimistic" about securing a truce to deliver humanitarian aid to the country, a Department of State official has said. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told senators during a briefing that she had spoken with US officials attending the negotiations in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah.

The talks, which started, involve members of two rival groups: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). "Our goal for these talks has been very narrowly focused: First, securing agreement on a declaration of humanitarian principles and then, getting a ceasefire that is long enough to facilitate the steady delivery of badly needed services," Nuland said. "If this stage is successful - and I talked to our negotiators this morning who are cautiously optimistic - it would then enable expanded talks with additional local, regional and international stakeholders towards a permanent cessation of hostilities, and then a return to civilian-led rule as the Sudanese people have demanded for years."

The violence in Sudan broke out on April 15, as two top generals and their forces clashed for power and control over Sudan's resources. The fighting between the SAF, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, which is loyal to General Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti"

Dagalo, has killed hundreds and displaced hundreds of thousands more so far. Clashes and air raids intensified in the capital Khartoum and surrounding areas despite the talks in Jeddah, residents reported. "There's been heavy air strikes and RPG fire since 6:30am," Ahmed, a resident of the Khartoum North neighbourhood of Shambat, told the Reuters news agency.

"We're lying on the ground, and there are people living near us who ran to the Nile to protect themselves there under the embankment." Witnesses have also reported seeing bodies in the streets, as most hospitals have been put out of service amid deteriorating security. "Our only hope is that the negotiations in Jeddah succeed to end this hell and return to normal life, and to stop the war, the looting, the robbery and the chaos," said Ahmed Ali, a 25-year-old resident of Khartoum. Rights groups have cautioned of a humanitarian catastrophe if the violence continues.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned that as many as 2.5 million more people could slip into hunger in Sudan as a result of the conflict. "This would take acute food insecurity in Sudan to record levels, with more than 19 million people affected, two fifths of the population," WFP said in a statement. The warring sides have agreed to previous US-brokered ceasefires, but the deals rarely held with residents reporting continuing fighting.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has said it is looking to play an active role in Sudan with the immediate stated goal of reducing the violence. The State Department said Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed "recent developments" in Sudan with his Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen.

After years of animosity, ties between Khartoum and Washington had been warming since the Sudanese military removed longtime President Omar al-Bashir from power in 2019, following months of anti-government protests. The two countries re-established diplomatic ties in 2020. Sudan also agreed to normalise relations with Israel and was removed from the US's list of "state sponsors of terrorism". The Sudanese military staged a coup against the civilian government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in October 2021, leading to his resignation early in 2022. In April, before the violence erupted, Sudan's leaders were set to sign a deal to return the country to its democratic transition, but the accord was delayed because of outstanding disagreements. Washington has previously said it supports the Sudanese people's aspirations for peace and stability as well as their demands to return to "civilian authority". Nuland said the US is looking at appropriate targets for sanctions if the fighting rivals do not agree to a ceasefire and delivery of aid. "We have the sanctions tool now that allow us to continue to pressure them," she said.

Turkey and Syria agree to boost ties after talks in Moscow

MOSCOW (AP): Syria and Turkey agreed to set up a "roadmap" to improve strained ties, following talks alongside Russia and Iran in Moscow. The agreement comes a week after Syria and Arab governments meeting in Jordan agreed to establish a roadmap of their own to resolve Syria's lengthy civil war and bolster ties. Syria has been returning to the Arab fold and slowly restoring ties with its neighbors.

The Arab League also readmitted Syria's membership after a 12-year suspension in the onset of the conflict, before Saudi Arabia delivered a formal invitation to President Bashar Assad to attend the upcoming summit in Jeddah. Throughout the 12-year conflict, Turkey has backed armed opposition groups in the country's northwest seeking to remove Assad from power. The Syrian government has frequently denounced Ankara's hold over parts of a northwest enclave previously seized by Assad's opponents. Turkey cap-

tured the territory through several military incursions since 2016 against US-backed Kurdish forces. Russia on the other hand intervened militarily in Syria starting in September 2015, and alongside Iran played a pivotal role in keeping Assad in power and to reclaim much of the country back. Moscow has maintained a military presence in the Mideast country even as the bulk of its forces are busy fighting in Ukraine.

Moscow has spent years trying to help Syrian President Bashar Assad rebuild ties with Turkey and other countries that were fractured in the war, which has killed nearly 500,000 people and displaced half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million. Russia's foreign minister hosted his counterparts from Turkey, Syria and Iran for talks that marked the highest-level contact between Ankara and Damascus since the start of the Syrian civil war over a decade ago. Talks to establish a plan to improve relations between Turkey

and Syria would be done in coordination with ongoing communication between the four countries' defense ministries. "The ministers noted the positive and constructive atmosphere of the exchange of views and agreed to continue high-level contacts and technical talks in the quadripartite format in the coming period," a statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry after the talks read. The statement added that they called for more international aid to Syria, not only to help the country's struggling population but also "in the interests of voluntary, safe, and dignified" refugee returns and post-war reconstruction. The efforts toward a Turkish-Syrian reconciliation come as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is under intense pressure at home to send Syrian refugees back amid a steep economic downturn and increasing anti-refugee sentiment. He is seeking reelection, when Turkey holds both presidential and parliamentary elections. Syrian state media quoted Syrian

Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad as saying during meeting that Syria and Turkey "share goals and common interests." He said that "despite all the negatives over the past years," Damascus saw the talks as an opportunity "for both governments to cooperate with the help and support of our friends Russia and Iran."

Yet Mekdad added that the Syrian government's "main goal" was to end all "illegal" military presences in the country, including that of Turkish forces. "We will continue to demand and insist on the subject of withdrawal," he was quoted as saying. Following a deadly earthquake in February that killed tens of thousands of people in Syria and Turkey, regional normalization with Damascus began to accelerate. In April, Moscow hosted the defense ministers of Turkey, Syria and Iran for talks that it said focused on "practical steps to strengthen security in the Syrian Arab Republic and to normalize Syrian-Turkish relations."

Days after Texas bus stop crash, little info on the victims

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP): Two days after eight people were killed when an SUV slammed into a crowd waiting at a Brownsville bus stop, information on the victims remains scarce, leaving relatives of missing people scrambling to locate loved ones and pleading for information.

Authorities say the driver, 34-year-old George Alvarez of Brownsville, lost control after running a red light but have not ruled out that he may have intentionally plowed into the stop outside the Bishop Enrique San Pedro Ozanam Center, a shelter and hub for migrants who cross into the country from nearby Mexico. Eighteen people were hit, and 10 critically injured.

Fingerprints were collected from the victims. All were male and several were from Venezuela, according to Brownsville police, but so far none of their identities have been released. Police said that the department has a list of over 120 names of people who want to know if their relatives are among the victims. They include dozens of photos and contact information submitted by desperate families, all fearing a phone call bearing bad news. "I know every-

body wants to know the names," said Investigator Martin Sandoval, a department spokesperson. One woman who has managed to locate a missing relative is Mileidy Gonzalez, 23, whose 45-year-old uncle, Juan Carlos Paredes was injured in the crash. She found out about it through news reports and a migrant who was staying at the shelter, and family members were able to identify Paredes in videos.

One of the relatives called multiple hospitals before finally finding her uncle. They were told he was in delicate condition, and they have not been able to communicate directly with him. "His leg, back and a part of his clavicle. They're waiting on specialists to know whether he needs surgery," Gonzalez said by phone. Another name on the police list belongs to Hector David Medina-Medero, a 24-year-old Venezuelan who cut hair at the Ozanam shelter. His mother was waiting outside the police department, expecting the worst. "My son is dead. I know," Marilin de los Angeles Medero Piña said. "My heart tells me." Police will use the list to notify families

once the confirmation process is complete, but circumstances of the crash have caused delays, according to Sandoval. Complicating the matter is the fact that many of the victims did not have official identification on them. "How the accident happened, there were a lot of documents that flew everywhere," he said. "Trying to match a document to a person in that state is kind of difficult, especially when somebody is deceased."

Alvarez, the driver, has been charged with eight counts of manslaughter and 10 counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, with bail set at \$3.6 million. Investigators have been working to determine if the crash may have been purposeful. Jesus Ferrer, 32, was lined up at the bus stop with a group of migrants, including some friends, when they noticed the vehicle driving in their direction. "We spotted a gray SUV that was coming at full speed. It came toward us and veered toward us," he said. Ferrer said the driver tried to flee afterward, but the group stopped him. He added that the man was furious and told those who detained him arrived to "Go

back to your country." Another witness, Luis Herrera, 36, said the driver yelled a string of Spanish-language obscenities commonly used in Mexico as he raced toward the crowd. "You're invading my property," Herrera recalled him saying. Herrera was tossed aside by the vehicle and hurt his wrist, but was medically evaluated and cleared without major injury. "Physically I'm fine, but psychologically I'm not okay after all that's happened," he said.

Police chief Felix Saucedo said that police had not confirmed witness reports that the driver was cursing at people. Brownsville police said they were aware of a hospital toxicology report indicating Alvarez had cocaine, marijuana and Benzodiazepines in his system. But Sandoval said the report cannot be relied upon to determine whether the driver may have legally been under the influence at the time, as those drugs can remain in one's system for days or weeks. Police are waiting for separate toxicology reports that may be able to determine whether Alvarez had certain quantities of the drugs in his system, Sandoval added.

California to pay \$24m for man's death in police custody

LOS ANGELES (AP): California will pay a \$24 million civil rights settlement to the family of a man who died in police custody after screaming "I can't breathe" as multiple officers restrained him while trying to take a blood sample, lawyers said. Seven California Highway Patrol officers and a nurse were charged with involuntary manslaughter earlier this year in connection with the 2020 death of Edward Bronstein, age 38.

Annee Della Donna and Eric Dubin, attorneys for Bronstein's young children, said it's the largest civil rights settlement of its kind by the state of California, and the second largest nationally since the city of Minneapolis paid \$27 million in the George Floyd case. The attorneys scheduled a news conference in Los Angeles to provide details. The settlement comes amid renewed scrutiny of potentially fatal restraints following last week's death of a New York City subway rider, Jordan Neely, who was placed in a chokehold by a US Marine veteran.

Russia ends visa regime for Georgia, lifts flight ban

MOSCOW (AP): Russian President Vladimir Putin abolished visas for Georgian nationals and lifted a 2019 ban on direct flights to the South Caucasus nation, a move that comes amid rocky relations between the two countries and that was quickly denounced by Georgia's president as a "provocation."

According to a decree Putin signed, starting from May 15, Georgian nationals will be allowed to enter Russia without visas -- unless they're coming to Russia to work or to stay for longer than 90 days. Another presidential decree lifts a ban on direct flights by Russian airlines to Georgia. Russia unilaterally imposed the ban in 2019 after a wave of anti-Kremlin protests in Georgia.

The decrees come a day after leaders of several Central Asian and South Caucasus nations stood beside Putin at a military parade marking the anniversary of Nazi Germany's defeat in World War II, in

what looked like the Kremlin seeking to show that Russia still had allies and was not completely isolated. Following Putin's decrees, Russia's Foreign Ministry issued a statement lifting its 2019 recommendation for Russian citizens to avoid traveling to Georgia. Putin's decrees, the statement said, "are in line with our principled approach of consistently facilitating the conditions for communication and contacts between the citizens of Russia and Georgia, despite the absence of diplomatic relations." Russia-Georgia relations have been complicated since the Soviet Union's collapse in the early 1990s. The two countries fought a short war in 2008 that ended with Georgia losing control of two Russia-friendly separatist regions. In the aftermath, Tbilisi severed diplomatic ties with Moscow, and the issue of the regions' status remains a key irritant, even as relations have somewhat improved. Beginning in 2000, Georgia and Russia

implemented a visa regime. However, in 2012 Tbilisi unilaterally abolished visas for Russians, who are currently allowed to stay in Georgia visa-free for up to a year. After Moscow sent troops into Ukraine last year, Georgia joined all international resolutions condemning the military action, while also providing Ukraine with humanitarian aid and taking in thousands of war refugees. Its authorities stopped short of supplying Kyiv with military assistance, however, citing the need to maintain neutrality and not get dragged into the conflict. At the same time, the Black Sea country of 3.7 million became one of the main destinations for Russians fleeing the crack-down and the partial mobilization into the army Putin announced in September 2022. Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili has said that more than 700,000 Russians crossed into Georgia after the Kremlin started drafting men to fight in Ukraine.

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Rising inflation and political tumult

PAKISTANI rupee suffered a Rs 5.38 devaluation against the Dollar in the interbank trading on Wednesday due to unrest created by the PTI riots and closed at Rs 290.22 against the previous day's closing of Rs 284.84. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs 292 and Rs 296, respectively. Similarly, the price of the Euro increased by Rs5.28 to close at Rs317.96 against the last day's closing of Rs 312.68, while the Japanese Yen gained 03 paisas to close at Rs 2.14, whereas a surge of Rs7.28 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs 366.26 as compared to its last day's closing of Rs 358.98. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal went up by Rs1.47 and Rs1.43 to close at Rs79.03 and Rs77.38, respectively.

Pakistan's rupee has witnessed a sharp decline against foreign currencies including the US dollar, Pound starting, the yen, and Yoan, etc. over the almost past two years. Persistent political unrest and inconsistent economic and regulatory policies remained at the forefront in nose-downing the national economy along with multiple other issues including the COVID-19 pandemic, global energy crises, and the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, no revival of the IMF program and state control over the dollar rate under Dar's doctrine proved to be catastrophic for Pakistani businesses as well as currency reserves in the country. At the same time, the use of hawala-hundi and other nonbanking channels for payment transfer by the local exporters of goods together with the smuggling of valuable goods and dollars to neighboring Afghanistan posed a serious challenge for Pakistani economists in recent months.

The people of Pakistan were struck into persistent hapless and torment over the past two years, while the impact of already high inflation has been multiplied by the prevailing political unrest and anarchy as the dollar skyrocketed and is likely to cross the psychological threshold of Rs. 300 per buck. Currently, the headline inflation touched a historic high of 36.5% last month while all indicators of the national economy including energy, transport, food stamps, health, housing, tour, and tourism had witnessed a sharp slowdown in recent months, while this situation would further aggravate in the coming days. The unending tussle between the ruling PDM coalition government and the PTI-led opposition has entirely sunk the dwindling ship of the country's economy. Neither the government nor the opposition has a sense of the devastating effects of their rigid attitude and insane politics on the national economy amid high levels of inflation, scarcity of commodities, and extreme poverty in the country. Both warring political factions are determined to save their politics at the cost of national sovereignty and citizens' right to life and basic needs. Meanwhile, people are compelled to shortcut their food or trade out their body organs to fulfill the essential needs of their kids. According to the World Bank report, 2 million Pakistanis get below the poverty line on an annual basis while these figures exceeded 18 million in the current year.

Pakistan has experienced the worst effects of institutional degradation, repeated dictatorial regimes, and weak democracy in the past while unethical politics and selfish behaviors have pushed to country to the brink of collapse. Currently, a bed-sick economy is taking its last breaths amid the countrywide shutdown of business and trade activities, while the entire government is busy in its political fight against its staunch adversary. The incumbent rulers must ensure the writ of the law, control inflation and provide relief to the public, otherwise, the public has no choice but to reject such rulers in the upcoming general elections.

Sudan can turn this crisis into an opportunity

Magdi A Mofadal

end of violence has already started.

We cannot change a single comma in our history or bring back a single drop of precious blood spilled in any conflict. However, we can draw hundreds of lessons from the current crisis, and from our past mistakes, missteps, and failures.

achieve sustainable development in the country. What happens in Sudan will cross the borders to stir up an already restive region. Instability in Sudan will suffocate the Republic of South Sudan, which depends entirely on Sudanese infrastructure for its oil exports, the mainstay of its economy. Sudan's

in Africa and the Arab world.

Population growth, which is expected to double by 2050, along with land degradation, climate change, soil erosion and urbanisation has made food security a primary concern in both of these regions. With each one of its 18 states carrying great potential for improving food

many tourist attractions in Sudan that have the potential to bring in much-needed revenue and revitalise local economies around them too. Investing in the aforementioned sectors in Sudan would not only transform the country's economy and provide handsome returns for investors, but also contribute to achieving balanced regional development, nation-building and sustaining peace. To help Sudan achieve these ambitious goals, however, there is a need for a sort of Marshall Plan that can rehabilitate its economy and prepare it for the takeoff stage. First and foremost, Sudan needs to be spared the current global geopolitical rivalries. Turning it into an arena for international competition and rivalry will only hinder Sudan's recovery. The country's resources are sufficient to provide investment opportunities for all interested regional and international partners.

Despite the gravity of the current situation, it is possible to stop Sudan from falling into the abyss. Let us hope that all stakeholders put their hands together to turn the current crisis into an opportunity to build a new Sudan that can heal its deep wounds and accommodate all its sons and daughters. This would be a massive win not only for Sudan, but also for the region, and the international community at large.

Aljazeera

The humanitarian truces that have been agreed upon and extended several times, albeit with violations, are steps in the right direction. It seems that the countdown to the end of violence has already started. We cannot change a single comma in our history or bring back a single drop of precious blood spilled in any conflict. However, we can draw hundreds of lessons from the current crisis, and from our past mistakes, missteps, and failures. Countering hate speech is of paramount importance to our future. There is a crying need for a comprehensive and inclusive national healing, reconciliation and justice process that addresses all the grievances and atrocities committed. It is essential for ensuring sustainable peace and stability and having a smooth transition to democracy. Alongside this process, we need to forge a smart partnership with the international community. We should use Sudan's importance to the region and the international community in combination with its other resources to achieve sustainable development in the country. What happens in Sudan will cross the borders to stir up an already restive region. Instability in Sudan will suffocate the Republic of South Sudan, which depends entirely on Sudanese infrastructure for its oil exports, the mainstay of its economy.

math of genocide are vivid examples in this respect.

Following these shining examples, Sudan can also resolve its interconnected crises and get on a path towards peace, reconciliation, stability, and development. Silencing the guns and addressing the dire humanitarian situation would be the first step in the arduous journey to chart a new path for our beloved country. The humanitarian truces that have been agreed upon and extended several times, albeit with violations, are steps in the right direction. It seems that the countdown to the

Countering hate speech is of paramount importance to our future. There is a crying need for a comprehensive and inclusive national healing, reconciliation and justice process that addresses all the grievances and atrocities committed. It is essential for ensuring sustainable peace and stability and having a smooth transition to democracy.

Alongside this process, we need to forge a smart partnership with the international community. We should use Sudan's importance to the region and the international community in combination with its other resources to

stability has been and will continue to be vital for regional peace and security, countering terrorism, and combating illegal immigration and transnational organised crime.

Besides achieving peace and improving security, resolving Sudan's current crisis will also require a roadmap for economic recovery. Luckily, Sudan is rich in resources and opportunities. It has been classified by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as one of the few countries that can substantially contribute to achieving food security

security, investing in the food sector can transform the entire country and provide new employment opportunities for young people. Sudan is also endowed with mineral resources that are needed by global markets. It has great potential for renewable energy, especially solar, and can contribute significantly to the global quest for zero carbon.

Sudan's geographical location provides ample opportunity for it to become a transport hub connecting different regional economic communities in Africa. There are

To achieve peace, both Ukraine and Russia must feel secure

Joergen Moeller

IT has been more than a year since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war has killed and wounded hundreds of thousands of civilians and troops and devastated the country. In recent months, however, there has been little movement in the front line and observers are increasingly talking about a stalemate and the need to move towards talks between Moscow and Kyiv.

Although both sides have said they are ready for negotiations, they have yet to sit down to discuss peace. As the international community mulls how to jump-start this process, it is important to remember that peace can only be achieved by making both Ukraine and Russia feel secure. Both of them. Not one of them. Both countries are signatories to the Charter for European Security adopted in 1999 at the 6th Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe summit in Istanbul. Article II of the document affirms the right of each state to establish its own security through alliances and treaties, and stipulates that there needs to be mutual respect for such arrangements.

Clearly, today Ukraine and Russia's security paradigms cannot be easily reconciled, but that does not

mean it is impossible to come up with an arrangement both sides would agree to, especially one that involves guarantees by other powers. The United States has been indispensable for Ukraine's security and independence, but its commitment will not last. Washington has been recently signalling that countering Russian expansionism in Ukraine and elsewhere is a sideshow and that China is its main preoccupation.

Therefore, a security guarantee for Ukraine must be offered by the European Union, whose economic and security interests are at stake in this conflict. Ukraine may prefer dealing with the Americans, but sooner or later it will realise that its European neighbours are far more stable allies. The Europeans can guarantee Ukrainian security by resuscitating earlier plans for a European Defence Community (EDC) put forward in 1952 by the Benelux countries - including France, Italy, and West Germany - to meet the Soviet military threat.

It was aborted when ratification failed in the French parliament, but today it is unlikely that Paris would block such an initiative. The EDC could station a force inside Ukraine to make the guarantee credible. In this way, the Europeans would counter

Russia's claim of acting in self-defence against NATO in Ukraine. Europe's conventional forces would be sufficiently strong to match a Russian threat provided that the EU member states implement current plans to boost defence capabilities and do not fall prey to wishful thinking that the world is a peaceful place.

The problem with this arrangement may be countering Russia's nuclear threat. There are two ways to square that circle. First, a Russian attack on Ukraine could be deterred by the simple presence of EDC troops. They would come from countries that are NATO members. Although it is not clear whether in this situation, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which defines collective defence, can be activated, the strategic ambiguity it creates may be enough to deter a Russian attack. Second, France's nuclear weapons could also be used as a deterrent. French President Emmanuel Macron has already indicated that Paris is considering playing a role in Europe's collective security through its nuclear arsenal.

And ideas to multilateralise a nuclear deterrent have been floated before. At the beginning of the 1960s, the US proposed a NATO multilateral nuclear

fleet known as the Multilateral Force. The French nuclear arsenal is not diversified enough to respond to Russian nuclear threats and bringing it to that level would require time and money. So, French nuclear weapons replacing the US arsenal as a nuclear deterrent to Russia in Europe would only be a workable solution in the long run. Establishing a security guarantee for Russia will likely fall to China. Beijing has continually stated that the "Ukraine crisis is not what we want to see". What it probably wants to see is Russian President Vladimir Putin being neither a loser nor a winner. China has no interest in an outcome that helps Russia, its archrival in Central Asia, grow stronger, nor does it want to see the downfall of Putin's regime, as its collapse may sow doubts about the stability of autocratic regimes.

In March, after hosting Chinese President Xi Jinping, Putin said that Russia and China are not creating a military alliance. That is because the Russian president does not need one. He only needs to know that his and his regime's survival is a Chinese core interest - that is enough of a security guarantee for him. But the prospect of Russia negotiating peace in earnest

as long as it discerns sympathy for its position from China is remote. That is why, if Beijing is serious about "not wanting to see" the Ukrainian crisis continue, it will have to demonstrate to Moscow the limits of its security guarantee. It can do so by merely changing its rhetoric and pushing the idea that it is Russia that is blocking a peace deal. This would certainly undermine global sympathy for Moscow, taking away one of its trump cards.

Putin is, of course, likely to resist peace talks without a clear victory in Ukraine because he perceives the domestic cost as too high. After spending more than a year telling the Russian people that he is leading a "military operation" to rid Ukraine of "Nazis" and stop a "genocide" against Russian speakers in the country, they may start asking questions if he abruptly ends the campaign to negotiate with those who he called "Nazis". Xi may be able to help Putin with this quandary, pointing to the rhetorical acrobatics one of his predecessors, Deng Xiaoping, had to resort to, after the 1979 Chinese attack on Vietnam was repulsed by the battle-hardened Vietnamese army. "Vietnam has been taught a lesson," Xiaoping said back then, and Putin may as well concur today:

"Ukraine has been taught a lesson."

Inevitably, the end of the war in Ukraine will involve Russia coming to terms with being a nation-state. Putin and the Russian people will have to accept that the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union are confined to history and they cannot be resurrected. The West, for its part, will have to work on reversing global perceptions of who is to blame for the conflict. Otherwise, suspicion that the US and the EU used Ukraine to pursue their own interests will grow, further isolating them. The US should also be careful not to classify a possible Chinese-Russian "entente" as an attempt to disrupt the global order and as a major threat to its interests. If it does, the rest of the world may harden its conviction that NATO is set on a confrontation with Russia and eventually China.

Although establishing security guarantees for both Ukraine and Russia will be undoubtedly challenging, it is the only way to put an end to this conflict. Living with a protracted war is unalluring for all parties. And as much as it fears China's rise, the West will have to accept its role in pushing for peace in Ukraine. Otherwise, it would risk falling into an ever-deepening isolation from the rest of the world.

World can start stabilizing Syria sans involving Assad

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

THE Arab League announced on Sunday that it had readmitted Syria. Two days earlier, the US State Department's regional spokesperson Hala Ghrairi announced that the White House was against normalization with Bashar Assad as long as the regime refused to change its behavior. However, the Arab overture is far from normalization. At best, it can be described as conditional engagement.

So far, Assad has only shown rigidity. He thinks that the Arab Gulf states will just acknowledge him as the winner of Syria's war and give him billions of dollars for reconstruction. Saudi Arabia issued a communique following last month's visit to Damascus by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, in which countering the trade in narcotics was highlighted. Shortly after this visit, and while the Syrian foreign minister was meeting with Arab counterparts in Amman, Jordan, the Saudi authorities busted a shipment of Captagon in Jeddah. If this means anything, it is that Assad has no control over what happens on the ground.

Even if he was unwilling to change his behavior, Assad would not have sent the ship-

ment so soon. He would have waited until he got something from the deal. This episode shows that, in all likelihood, the step-by-step process linked to Assad's readmission to the Arab League will not work. Even if he is willing, which is highly doubtful, he is incapable of fulfilling the basic conditions to stabilize Syria and secure the safe return of refugees. Hence, a parallel track should be adopted. The EU, which is most concerned about Syria because it does not want another wave of refugees heading toward its borders, should make a serious effort to stabilize the country - and this definitely does not mean talking to Assad. The international community should speak to Assad's patrons, Russia and Iran. In order to do that effectively, the international community should work with Saudi Arabia. Europe, because of the sanctions, cannot talk to Russia, but Saudi Arabia can. And regarding Iran, Saudi Arabia is working on a rapprochement. Syria can be an area for cooperation.

The goals should be stabilizing the security situation, ensuring the safe return of refugees and jumpstarting the local economy so that people can sustain themselves. The low-hanging fruit is Deraa in

the southwest. The Russians did try to establish local reconciliation in Deraa in order to stabilize the area, but it failed due to the regime reneging on all its commitments. In 2018, a deal was brokered between the regime and the opposition, driven by the Russians and approved by the Americans. The agreement consisted of the opposition forces reconciling with the regime and becoming a legion in the army named the 8th Brigade. It joined the 5th Corps, which is under Russian control, in return for the regime giving its fighters amnesty and reinstating those who were government employees to their jobs. The settlement included 12 points, but the regime did not commit to any of them.

Young men who had been given amnesty were stopped at a checkpoint on the way to Damascus and tortured and killed, with their bodies sent back to their families. So, the Russian effort failed because of Assad. Nevertheless, Russia has no choice in Syria but to back Assad as he is guaranteeing Moscow's jurisdiction over its only naval base on the Mediterranean. Throughout history, Russia has waged wars to reach warm waters.

Syria is Russia's only foothold on the Mediterranean. Russia and Iran were banking on the international community accepting Assad and giving him funds for reconstruction, from which they would benefit. They are now realizing this is not the case and Assad is more likely to face the same destiny as Omar Bashir. The Caesar Act sanctions are unlikely to be removed and he is unlikely to be accepted by the international community. Hence, their hopes of a comprehensive solution are fading away.

A deal with Russia should be clinched by bypassing the regime. The deal should include international recognition of Moscow's jurisdiction over the Tartus naval base. Though the international community is working on delegitimizing Russia and curbing its presence worldwide, it needs to make this compromise in order to get the Kremlin on board with ending the conflict. The agreement should also include the involvement of Russian companies in the redevelopment of Deraa, along with local councils and in the presence of international observers. Russia

should then guarantee the safe return of those internally displaced people who are from Deraa but are currently in Idlib. Another deal should be struck regarding the areas around Lebanon, where the main actors are Iran and Hezbollah. Most of the refugees in Lebanon come from areas that are occupied by Hezbollah, such as Qalamoun, Qusayr, Harasta and Zabadani. Basically, Iran is in Syria to secure the "useful Syria," which is a term to describe the land bridge that links Iraq to Lebanon and the Mediterranean. Iran has secured this, but at a high cost. Iranian forces are facing regular bombing raids from Israel and these strikes are likely to increase as Tel Aviv feels more insecure. This means their presence is not sustainable.

Internally, in Lebanon, there is a huge campaign against Syrian refugees. The public discourse is asking for their return to Syria. Hezbollah is worried about their presence in Lebanon. According to a Hezbollah source, 80,000 of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are armed. This a ticking time bomb for the group because, if the refugees do ever use these arms, it will be mainly against those who drove them out of their homes in

the first place. So, it is in Hezbollah's interest to withdraw from the areas it occupies in Syria in order to facilitate the refugees' return; but it would need to cover its back. It would not want any hostile armed group crossing from Syria and targeting them in Lebanon. Zabadani, for example, is a strategic point in Syria overlooking the Beqaa Valley, which is a stronghold of Hezbollah.

The withdrawal should be coupled with the deployment of a joint Islamic force, including Arab deterrence troops as well as Iranian ones. Israel is unlikely to strike any units that include Arab Gulf forces. On the other hand, Israel will be appeased, as the Iranian forces would be operating within a framework, keeping their hostile activities toward Israel under control. The international community should give legitimacy to such a force. These two deals would be a stepping stone to a more localized agreement across the country. They would also make Assad irrelevant in the eyes of his patrons. This is much better and more effective than clinching a deal with the brutal dictator, who will use any funds to reconstruct his regime.

Arab News

Lebanon’s long search for a governable republic goes on

Mohamed Chebaro

DURING a recent visit to Lebanon, I was alarmed to hear more talk that the only option left is for each community to run its own internal affairs. This would be a form of devolution, or decentralization, permitting each community or locality in this small country to govern its territories and people, including power generation, water distribution and some form of local security. It would be a snub to the ever-dysfunctional central state, its failing institutions and the corrupt elite dominating its affairs.

I was astonished to hear that some have been toying with the idea of seceding from the unruly elite and their regional backers in the hope of ensuring access to various amenities, such as water, electricity, fuel and bread, for the inhabitants of these self-styled cantons. Maybe services could be delivered at a price, moving away from the corruption, waste and shortages witnessed on the state level, where whole regions of the country have, for years, tended to excuse themselves from paying taxes or for the utilities they consume.

Pessimism is the name of the game in Lebanon. There is nothing to base any positivity on amid the current stalemate, where the country remains without an elected president, a prime minister and a working parliament. To some Lebanese, seeing the return of Syria to the Arab League is a sign that Lebanon's political and economic stalemates might soon ease as a result of some form of region-

al settlement, especially if the Syrian refugees living and working in Lebanon are able to return to their country. But this and the unattainable dream of dividing the country are far-fetched and naive bets. Who says that the dominant force politically and militarily in Lebanon - that is Hezbollah and its allies - would condone such a demarche?

In the minds of some in Lebanon, the country's uncertain existence goes back to the many failed attempts to constitute a nation state, as nothing has really evolved and provided permanence in terms of governability and stability since the creation of Lebanon, based on the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. This was when the French and the British carved up between them many parts of the Middle East that had been ruled for centuries by the Ottomans, placing them under a direct French or British mandate in preparation for their future self-rule. The Lebanese state that won independence in 1943 failed to cement a national identity and it needed a covenant brokered between its Christian and Muslim leaderships to creak through the first years of its existence. Then it survived a mini-civil war at the end of the 1950s, prior to feeling the full brunt of rising Arab nationalism and anti-Israeli alignment before succumbing to yet another civil war in 1975. This ended with a rejigging of the constitution and the old national covenant formula in the 1989 Taif Agreement. That

deal, brokered by Saudi Arabia, redistributed power among the Lebanese based on parity between Christians and Muslims.

The Doha agreement of 2008, born from yet another stalemate, enshrined a new form of quasi-consociationalism, whereby nothing could be achieved short of a consensus among the forever conflictive ruling elites in the country. One group even managed to justify keeping its weapons independently of the national security apparatus, under the loose justification of resisting Israel. Parallel to the calls to divide the country, others have been calling for a review of the current Lebanese constitutional formula, which sees the power shared between Christians and Muslims.

For all its history, Lebanon has had a precarious political system in constant need of intensive care to hold it together. But the recent collapse of the value of its currency, the scale of the damage the country's economy has suffered, its bankrupt state finances, its damaged banking system (once a jewel in the Lebanese economic crown), the near-nonexistent basic services, withering education system, and overloaded and starved healthcare system, to mention just a few adversities, all topped off by a lack of accountability, show that Lebanon has entered a long, dark tunnel that could lead to its extinction. The recent fortunate gas and oil discoveries in its national waters could offer the country a lifeline, but only if the corrupt rul-

ing elite tame their greed and comply with calls to carry out major reforms that would see international organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in addition to regional donors, ready to help bail Lebanon out. But in the absence of legislation and the implementation of reforms crucial to its recovery from one of the world's worst ever financial crises, Lebanon's economy is sinking further into uncertainty. The Lebanese currency has already lost more than 98 percent of its value against the US dollar since 2019, leaving the country at the mercy of triple-digit inflation, which is spreading poverty and leading to waves of emigration.

With the continued intransigence of the ruling elite - which is blockading the political arena, holding the Lebanese hostage and showing no willingness to allow different players to find solutions to the country's existential crisis - I cannot blame some Lebanese for thinking about desperate measures to preserve their existence and the well-being of their communities, even through embarking on futile ideas such as dividing the country. Lebanon, we were told long ago, is too big to be swallowed up by another country and too small to be carved up. But apparently no one would mind if it fails or if it ceases to exist. Lebanon has, since its inception, remained a creation unable to shield itself from regional discord or find consensus among its many people for an identity that unites them and could lead them to a more peaceful and prosperous future.



‘Do or die’ for democracy in Thailand’s crunch polls

Vijitra Duangdee

THAIS go to the polls May 14 in an election pro-democracy parties say is critical for resetting the kingdom's politics nearly a decade after the military and its establishment supporters seized power in a coup. The election broadly pits pro-democracy parties, including the main opposition Pheu Thai and the youth-facing Move Forward, against conservative rivals, whose leading light is caretaker prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

Prayuth, 69, is a former army chief who led a coup in 2014 as head of the military, which has used coups and court decisions to stay involved in the country's politics for decades. Prayuth's critics say he has presided over nearly nine years of falling freedoms and soaring inequality, which have seen young pro-democracy activists chased through the courts, and the benefits of Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy shared among an increasingly narrow elite. Nothing less than the future of the country is at stake on May 14, Kanphong Prayoonsak, a Move Forward candidate in a Bangkok district told VOA in early April. "It's do or die ... it's the old ways and powers versus change," he said. "If the old power does come back, the country will fall into chaos and political turmoil once again. We will enter an era of regression."

His party wants to bring in sweeping reforms of Thailand's economy and political structure, to remove the army from politics forever. His party is polling strongly - just behind Thailand's biggest party, Pheu Thai. Pheu Thai is the political machine of billionaire former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin lives in exile, as does his sister, Yingluck, also a former prime minister, after a 2006 coup also toppled her government. Overall Thailand's National Assembly has 750 members, although only members of the lower house, the House of Representatives, are up for election this year. A majority of 376 from both the Senate and House of Representatives

will be needed to form a government after the election and then elect a premier. The electoral landscape is complicated, and experts say deliberately so to help the army keep one foot in power against pro-democracy opponents who have won every popular vote over the last two decades. In the House of Representatives parties will compete in 400 constituencies and for a further 100 seats allocated according to the proportion of the overall vote each receives.

All 250 seats in the Senate, though, have been appointed by Prayuth's government, and their terms will be up in May of next year. That means he potentially needs just 126 House members' support after the poll if the Senate backs him. Prayuth, an arch-nationalist and royalist who sharply divides public opinion, is the prime ministerial candidate for the newly formed United Thai Nation Party. He successfully survived large pro-democracy protests across 2020 and 2021, which for the first time raised open questions over the role and wealth of the monarchy, Thailand's most powerful institution. A court also ruled last year that he had not breached an eight-year limit in power, a criteria written into the constitution by his administration to prevent Shinawatra premiers serving for long. "All I've ever done has been for the nation," he told a crowd in southern Thailand on April 30. "I've retired [from the army] for eight years now so I'm fully a civilian ... but the army is also important, we can't just not have it. "We must pay back our nation if we were born in this country."

On the conservative side of Thai politics he faces a potential challenge from Prawit Wongsuwan, another former army chief, aged 77, who served in Prayuth's government, but stayed with the ruling Phalang Pracharat party. He wants to be prime minister and has pitched himself as a compromise candidate, especially if Prayuth does not perform as well as he expects. "Many might call me a dictator in disguise but I tell myself I might have not been

clear in explaining about 'my democratic soul'" he wrote on his Facebook page on April 21, adding "it has to be me" who bridges the conservative and liberal divide. Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul may also have a say in who enters the government as the head of the Bhumjaithai party, which has campaigned on the basis of its cannabis liberalization policy. His party is expected to scoop up dozens of seats which may give him a deciding role in a government coalition. Pheu Thai leads the polls from the pro-democracy side.

The party is targeting a landslide of 310 House seats, which would put it in a commanding position to pull together a coalition for government. Former Prime Minister Thaksin's 36-year-old daughter, Paetongtarn, is running as one of its three prime ministerial candidates. But experts say the pro-democracy vote may be shared by the Move Forward Party, which has won the loyalty of under-35 voters, with its wider diagnosis of Thailand's entrenched social and economic ills. Its platform includes decentralizing power, demilitarizing politics and tackling the country's super-rich monopolies, which own large swaths of the economy. It also wants to reform the royal defamation law, which has been used to charge scores of young pro-democracy protesters in recent years. "I can actually see a glimpse of change from Move Forward," said Atipat Serininyompakorn, 30, a Bangkok-based photographer. "I can see my future in their policies". Given the divide, experts warn a return of Prayuth may tip Thailand back into crisis. "We can expect to see the same pattern of crackdowns and persecution of activists calling for sweeping reforms to continue," said analyst Napon Jatusritipak of the Singapore-based ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. "I also expect to see significant backlash against this government, especially if it is a minority one, from the supporters of political parties from the other side of the spectrum. Over 52 million voters are eligible to vote in the May 14 polls.

VOA

Macron must cede some power if he is to save French democracy

Zaid M. Belbagi

IN 1958, Charles de Gaulle heaved himself out of retirement to bring France's fractured politics under control. With it, the French people, who overwhelmingly voted for his constitutional changes, ushered in the markedly presidential Fifth Republic.

This system, often compared to a monarchy due to the overarching powers it bestows upon the president, has served France well for the best part of 65 years. However, it is becoming increasingly controversial for its capacity to facilitate unilateral government. For example, following months of protests and public anger, the constitution's role in facilitating President Emmanuel Macron's controversial pension reforms have put it under the spotlight, as protesters chant "Down with the Fifth Republic."

Macron lost the sheen of a fresh-faced reformer a year into his first term. Pursuing systemic public spending reforms that rocked the very tenets of the French state, his quest was not aided by his swift adoption of the autocratic tendencies of his Bourbon predecessors. While his first term was characterized by the grueling regular marches of the Yellow Vest movement, it seems his second will bear the scars of his top-down pension system overhaul. Having first palmed off the task of passing the difficult reforms to his prime minister, the president - almost oblivious to the public anger and parliamentary opposition - then proceeded to force through his proposal to raise the retirement age with the implementation of Article 49.3, a handy

constitutional facility arming the presidency with the ability to avoid the governmental paralysis and chaos of the Fourth Republic. Its use in these circumstances, however, has proved too much for the French public who, after months characterized by rolling strikes, fuel shortages and uncollected rubbish heaps, are not simply at odds with the president, but rather with a presidential system that overly centralizes power at the expense of France's fiercely democratic republican principles.

Up until 1958, French presidents were unrecognizable from today's Jupiterian figures. Elected by some 80,000 officials, they oversaw a system that was plagued by a lack of political consensus, a weak executive and the constant forming and falling of governments. Lacking a parliamentary majority, prime ministers struggled to pursue reforms, leading to a state of continued political malaise, which was not aided by the experience of two world wars, Nazi occupation and the Great Depression. Matters came to a head in 1958, when the Algerian War of Independence took on the dimension of a civil war and France faced the real prospect of a military coup. The inability of parliament to choose a government, coupled with popular discontent, spurred De Gaulle to call for the suspension of government and a new constitutional system built on universal suffrage and a strong president. Presidents were thus given executive powers to rule the country in consultation with a

prime minister whom, not entirely dissimilarly to the French kings of old, they would appoint directly.

What delayed any criticism of this model were the "Thirty Glorious Years," during which time French industry and the economy grew exponentially, putting the malaise of the wartime years to bed. This prosperity encouraged a system under which the French parted with a significant portion of their income, but in return forced the state to support generous public spending. Economic stagnation thereafter, however, saw the growth of the far right and, with it, the dwindling popularity of France's presidents, from Jacques Chirac to Macron. The public's disillusion with this system was initially targeted at individual presidents, but is now aimed at a system that is seen to empower the empowered and is removed from any notions of equality, which French citizens hold dear. This is no more pertinent than in the powers enshrined by the constitution, which are increasingly outdated. Amid the tumult of the late 1950s, De Gaulle and his Cabinet were granted six months to rule by decree. Article 49.3 came to guarantee this autocratic facility as required. While it is unlikely that De Gaulle envisaged its regular use, France's current Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne has employed it 11 times over the last 10 months. The current furor surrounding the raising of the retirement age is a clear illustration of the shortcomings of a system in which parliament can often seem

irrelevant. The lowest unemployment rate in decades and France's growing role as a financial services hub have done little to temper public anger at a system that modern French citizens see as overly centralized and perpetuating a technocratic elite with a "born-to-rule" political philosophy, which they see as being embodied by Macron.

President Macron's political isolation led to his electoral struggles last summer, which saw gains for the extreme left and right. Even then, before his foray into pension reform, the far left called for a "Sixth Republic" to neuter the powers of what its leader, Jean-Luc Melenchon, has described as the "monarch president." As Macron continues to rely upon the unpopular facets of the hyper-presidential system, he is empowering populist extremists who may very well inherit the same authoritarian powers should the president continue to founder. France's pension reforms will be a reality from September. However, how Macron will see out the next four years amid such levels of public anger is a real concern. Forever chasing the big idea and seeking to tackle controversial political issues in the hope of enshrining his political legacy, the most rewarding path open to Macron is to seek a more inclusive political system in the time he has left in office. Fathering a new constitution - and thereby a new republic - is the greatest career achievement he can hope for; the only question is whether he will surrender some power to save French democracy.

Erdogan is in the fight of his political life. The real winner may be Putin

Elmira Bayrasli

For Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's longest serving ruler, Sunday's upcoming election may be the end of a two-decade winning streak. Polls show that Erdogan, who has been at the country's helm since 2003, first as prime minister and since 2014 as president, is in a tight race and vulnerable to defeat. This has made many in Brussels and Washington giddy - and hopeful that Turkey, a once reliable ally and partner turned spoiler, will rejoin the Western fold.

At the start of his rule, Erdogan, a pious Muslim who successfully governed Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, in the 1990s, affirmed the country's western orientation and ambition to join the European Union. For the past decade, however, Erdogan, now 69, has not only adopted a more combative and unsavory tone towards the US and Europe - but more combative and unsavory friends. At the top of that list is Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Putin won Erdogan over on the night of July 15, 2016. Following an attempted coup to unseat Erdogan, the Russian president called his Turkish counterpart and offered his country's support. The US president at the time, Barack Obama, called Erdogan four days later. It helped feed the conspiracy narrative Erdogan's government had long put forward - that the US, who refused to extradite the suspected coup plotter, the Islamic preacher Fetullah Gulen, was guilty of "dirty plots" against Turkey. It moved Moscow and Ankara closer together.

The following year, much to the

chagrin of fellow NATO members, the Turkish government announced the purchase of a Russian-made air defense system, the S-400. Fast forward to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Erdogan has refused to sanction or implement a flight ban on Turkey's northern neighbor. Over the past few months, Ankara has also blocked Sweden's application to NATO, claiming Stockholm supports Kurdish separatist militants who are a threat to Turkey. If all of that were not enough to upset the West, before the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria this past February that killed nearly 60,000 people and displaced over a million, Erdogan had turned up threats against Greece in the Aegean. His mishandling of the disaster and subsequent revelations that he allowed developers to skirt construction regulations, brought him to heel and tone down any war rhetoric. Still, it was not enough to change the eastern tilt of Turkish foreign policy. Whether Erdogan wins or loses, Ankara is unlikely to untangle itself from Moscow and turn back to the West. To start, Turkey can't afford it. The economy is mired in inflation. The Turkish lira is weak. Growth has stalled. The country needs to maintain its trade ties for its exports to the Middle East, Caucasus and Europe. More importantly, it depends on tourism dollars and energy imports from Russia. Moscow has been supplying cash-strapped Turkey with natural gas, on credit. Especially if Erdogan loses, you can bet that Putin will

press the new government to not only pay up, but to continue to be one of the few countries that engages with him. Even if Erdogan is defeated, he will not simply disappear from public life. This is not just a matter of whether he would peacefully hand over power. Erdogan would be relegated to the opposition. In a bitterly polarized Turkey, that would continue to give him leverage.

In addition to the president, Turks will vote for representatives in parliament. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, known through the initials AKP, is expected to secure a significant bloc, if not a majority. That's the pulpit Erdogan would use to attack the new government. And attack he would. Erdogan's popularity soars when he dials into Turkish nationalism and lashes out at what he has described as the country's "opponents" - the PKK, the West, Israel, all working, as he claims, to undermine the Turkish Republic, which turns 100 in October. Erdogan's wide-reaching grip on the media would help with this. In power for 20 years, Erdogan has been able to crush a free press, turning it into a megaphone for his own use. Journalists who criticize the government are jailed. Media outlets largely operate under the control of Erdogan cronies. (The Turkish president has previously dismissed concerns about press freedom in his country). Erdogan has also been able to shape Turkey's institutions to his will. This includes the foreign ministry. In a recent report published by the

Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), author Sinan Ciddi notes that starting in 2009, the Erdogan government "began to appoint foreign service officers at both the junior and senior levels based on allegiance to the AKP/Erdogan line." It enabled "nepotism, cronyism, and sycophancy with a huge disregard for impartiality and expertise." (The Erdogan government has not commented on the accusations). What does or can the West do? Allow Ankara to keep its distance, Washington and Brussels have to recognize that Turkey is a country literally and metaphorically at the crossroads. Not entirely in the West or the East, it is positioned to be both a difficult and useful partner.

While Ankara may currently engage Moscow, it cannot completely spurn NATO or the EU either. Turkey's success depends on economic growth, namely through exports and foreign investments. Hence, it willingly sold armed drones to Ukraine. Last summer, Turkey successfully brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine to export grain out of Ukraine. Erdogan has long been eager to catapult Turkey to be a regional player and has been eager to bring the warring sides to negotiate peace. A strident Turkey, not completely aligned with the West and the gatekeeper to Russia and Ukraine's only shipping outlet over the Black Sea, makes it a credible broker for both sides. That's the role the West should cast for Turkey. It is a role the Turks, under Erdogan or otherwise, would have no choice but to play.

CNN

ON 9 May, the European Union celebrates Europe Day. On this same day in 1950, in the aftermath of the devastating second world war, Robert Schuman, the foreign minister of France, proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community. His goal was to build a Europe free from conflict, based on economic cooperation and integration. This, he knew, had to be done step by step.

Moving well beyond coal and steel, those old engines of economic progress, the EU is engaged today in most areas of human activity, including the fight against the climate crisis, the development and regulation of AI, and the use of outer space. Furthermore, the EU has become a bulwark of democracy and promotes security, economic development, human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world. These are objectives shared by the UK. Nowhere is this more evident than in our common response to the outbreak of war on the European continent: the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This unprovoked aggression poses the gravest military threat to global security we have been confronted with since the end of the cold war. It is not only a threat to Europe, but to the world at large.

The war of conquest launched by Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, violates key principles of sovereignty and respect for territorial

Pedro Serrano

integrity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. And this violation is perpetrated by one of the largest military powers in the world, whose leaders and their supporters are now responsible for war crimes and the gravest attacks against humanitarian law. They blatantly ignore Russian responsibility to safeguard international peace and security as a permanent member of the UN security council. The EU and the UK have risen to the occasion in this hour of need. More visibly than ever before, the EU has become a vertebral column for security and prosperity in Europe, and an indispensable partner for all those, European and non-European, engaged in supporting Ukraine and working for the re-establishment of international peace and security. The UK deserves special mention among those international partners. As on past occasions, London's voice and efforts, from the outbreak of the conflict and even before, have been strong in defending international legality and providing determined support to Ukraine. One could say that, after Brexit, the EU and the UK have rediscovered each other, and the strong ties that unite them, in their defence of Ukraine and of peace in Europe.

Indeed, our cooperation has been constant and intense since very worrying threats started to surface at Ukraine's

borders, and even more after the Russian invasion was launched. As acknowledged in the UK's recent review of foreign and defence policy, Europe's security is the UK's primary interest. And the EU is an indispensable partner. This may also have weighed on the pragmatic and constructive approach followed by the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, and the Northern Ireland secretary, Chris Heaton-Harris, in finding a negotiated solution that is the Windsor framework. For the EU, a main goal has been to find joint solutions to the challenges Brexit has created for the Good Friday agreement. Continued work with the UK has succeeded, in the spirit of that landmark agreement, to find collective and, at times, imaginative solutions listening to, and respecting, all communities in Northern Ireland. Rediscovery of common interests and concerns have led to the Windsor framework and to a much welcome and necessary regain in trust in EU-UK relations. The task ahead is therefore to build on this reengagement. It is to our mutual advantage that we have solid relations between our societies, our business and academic communities, and the need to ensure they continue engaging with and enriching each other in a mutually profitable and respectful manner. A strong UK and a strong EU are valuable partners.

The Guardian

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PSX's 100-index gains 250.68 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) Thursday witnessed a bullish trend gaining 250.68 points, with a positive change of 0.61 per cent, closing at 41,325.61 against 41,074.95 points on the previous day.

A total of 96,850,678 shares valuing Rs 2.891 billion were traded during the day as compared to 99,182,930 shares valuing Rs 3.303 billion the previous day. As many as 316 companies transacted their shares in the stock market;

182 of them recorded gains and 107 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 27 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 17,191,010 shares at Rs 1.14 per share, PIAC (A) with 4,769,500 shares at Rs 3.60 per share, and Quice Food with 4,289,000 shares at Rs 4.42 per share.

Sapphire Fiber witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 69.46 per share price, closing at Rs 1003.76, whereas the runner-up was

Packages Ltd. with a Rs 22.83 rise in its per share price to Rs 364.55.

Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 100.00 per share closing at Rs 5700.00, followed by Bata (Pak) with a Rs 40.00 decline to close at Rs 1700.

Gold prices decrease by Rs 2700 to Rs 237,300 per tola: The per tola price of 24-karat gold decreased by Rs 2,700 to Rs 237,300 on Thursday against its sale at Rs 240,000 the previous day, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association

reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold also decreased by Rs 2,314 to Rs 203,447 from Rs 205,761 whereas the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold went down to Rs 186,393 from Rs 188,615.

The price of per tola silver and that of 10-gram silver remained changed to close at Rs 3,100 and Rs 2,657.75 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market rose by \$7 to close at \$2,038 as compared to \$2,031 last day, the Association reported.



MULTAN: A factory worker making thread reels on machine.

PFC to take part in 6th China Int'l Import Expo

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) will take part in 6th China International Import Expo to discover business opportunities and explore new markets access for Pakistani products.

In a statement Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PFC Mian Kashif Ashfaq said, "PFC along with Chenone will be participating in this mega event," said a press release issued here on Thursday.

He said, "Chenone will also exhibit its high-quality international standards products to capture their

share in the global market." He said, "it's an excellent opportunity to showcase local products and develop business deals with international buyers."

Mian Kashif Ashfaq said, "Around over a hundred companies from the country will be exhibiting their products and this expo will also offer professional buyers a sourcing platform with a wide variety of products ranging from basics to the most creative and qualitative."

Mian Kashif Ashfaq said, "PFC and Chenone have already attended sev-

eral other international fairs in the US, China, Italy, Sri Lanka, etc, and introduced its products which are in great demand."

He hoped for getting orders from the foreign market.

"The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) is facilitating the manufacturers of export products," he added.

He said, "I will also hold a series of marathon meetings with tycoons for investment to avail government unprecedented special package for foreign investors."

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, Maersk Brooklyn, MSC Heidi, Cussler, Clipper Eos and Ardmore Endurance carrying Containers, LPG and Mogas, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, EngroVopak Terminal and FOTCO Oil Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, three more ships, Yankul Silver, Chemroad Journey and Gulf Jumeirah with Palm oil, Chemicals and Mogas also arrived at the outer anchorage of the port on the same day.

A total of 07 ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, Clipper, Sea Ambition and MSC Heidi left the Port on Thursday morning and another Container vessel Cussler is expected to sail on Thursday.

A cargo volume of 92,257 tones, comprising 52,335 tones imports Cargo and 41,922 tones export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 4,352 Containers (1,886 TEUs Imports and 2,466 TEUs export) was handled at the port during the last 24 hours.

There are 04 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Chemroad Journey and CMA CGM Ivanhoe & another ship, OOCL Le Havre carrying Chemicals and Containers are expected to take berths at EVTL and QICT respectively on Thursday.

Chinese yuan strengthens against USD

BEIJING (APP): The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 198 pips to 6.9101 against the US dollar Thursday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

It added, among other recommendations, PBF Vice President Jahanara Wattoo proposed the economic managers to incentivise investors, simplify tax system and take solid step to reform the tax collecting agency.

She expressed serious concern over excessively burdening the manufacturing sector that contributes more than 20 percent to the economy, having a share of 70 percent in tax payments.

Wattoo suggested the authorities to rationalize import tariff, which was unlike any other competing country.

She urged the government to take practical and concrete steps for the implementation of business-friendly policies, saying that high prices of utilities like electricity, gas and petroleum products were slowing down the wheel of economy. She added there was a need to freeze the prices of those inputs for at least three years so that the economy could get required jumpstart.

Markets struggle as traders unmoved by inflation data

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets were mixed Thursday as investors shrugged at data showing US inflation fell further but only marginally, suggesting the Federal Reserve still had much to do in its battle against rising prices.

Adding to the uncertainty was the battle to raise the US debt ceiling to avert a destabilising default, with Democrats and Republicans unable to reach a deal just weeks before the country runs out of cash to pay its bills.

The consumer price index reading was the lowest in two years and a tad below what was expected, giving the Fed a little room to take a break in its long-running rate hike campaign.

However, the figure

came after a stronger-than-expected print Friday on jobs creation that showed the world's top economy remained strong, while observers said further evidence was needed to show that the tightening was bearing fruit.

The 4.9 percent rise in April was far above the Fed's stated goal of two percent, which some analysts said meant it was unlikely officials would consider cutting rates at the end of the year, as some investors had been betting on.

"We need more CPI prints to clarify that inflation is definitely declining," Priya Misra at TD Securities said.

"Markets may be too optimistic and put too much weight on the weakness in

some series that are inherently volatile, such as hotels."

Still, Wall Street largely cheered the figures, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq rallying, helped by a bump in rate-sensitive tech giants, though the Dow dipped.

Asia saw similar action, with Hong Kong and Shanghai edging slightly higher as data showed below-forecast Chinese inflation that indicated the nation's economic recovery was still struggling, though it gave the central bank room to provide some stimulus.

Seoul and Manila also gained but Tokyo, Sydney, Singapore, Wellington, Taipei and Jakarta were in the red.

The dollar held losses against its peers that came

on a pick-up in bets the Fed will not lift rates in June.

The debt ceiling standoff continues to cause unease on trading floors as party leaders struggle to reach a consensus to allow more borrowing.

President Joe Biden and Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy plan to hold another meeting on Friday.

Former president Donald Trump, who is seeking re-election in 2024, said during a CNN town hall that Republicans should refuse to raise the US debt limit if they do not get the spending cuts they are demanding.

That would spark a default that most economists warn would be catastrophic for the global economy and markets.

Businessmen condemn politics of violence

ISLAMABAD (APP): The business community Thursday condemning politics of violence warned such anti state activities of disgruntled unscrupulous elements would further inflict colossal loss to bleak economy and deepen economic crunch in the country.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists and traders led by Shahid Nazir, Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis said that politics of confrontation and violence was not solution to any issue except giving birth to chaos to serve the nefarious design of their foreign masters.

He said prevailing poor state of economy could not

afford such political instability. He said it was established fact worldwide that political political stability was pre-requisite for sustainable economic growth, prosperity and development in every sphere of life, said a press release.

He said business community was already suffering a lot due to imposition of ban on imports including imports of raw materials which he said slowed down economic growth.

He urged the top leadership of main stream political parties to iron out their differences amicably through parleys in the larger national interests.

He said business com-

munity firmly believed in rule of law, supremacy of constitution and promotion of democratic system of government.

Meher said Pakistan carved out after offering tremendous sacrifices by our elders and it was our duty to protect the geographical frontiers, fortify solidarity and cement sovereignty. He said entire business community would not allow anyone to play with the destiny of the nation and safeguard the national interests.

He said business community would continue to uphold the glory of motto of the father of the nation 'unity, faith and discipline'.

UBG expresses unwavering solidarity with armed forces

ISLAMABAD (APP): The United Business Group in the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry on Thursday expressed unwavering solidarity with the armed forces for frustrating the evil designs of anti-state elements.

Chairing a meeting to take stock of the current state of affairs, Chairman United Business Group Shahzad Ali Malik said the government, the armed forces and the people were on one page with utmost discipline and unflinching faith to defend the geographical frontiers and stamp out the menace of all kinds of violence from the

country. He said that the Pakistan armed forces, one of the best in the world, should not be maligned into politics to achieve the nefarious designs and vested interests of their foreign masters, said a press release.

The patriotic business community would thwart such targeted specific anti-state stances by a section of disgruntled and unscrupulous elements, he added.

Malik further said, "Our armed forces are our greatest asset as they not only offer their precious lives on battlefields but also always remain in a state of high preparedness to undertake the responsibility of work-

ing as a cohesive force in very challenging situations, may it be horrifying earthquakes or the devastating floods." He said that Pakistan was faced with multiple challenges on the political, economic and security fronts and was passing through a critical phase of history.

He stressed, "With the proverbial resilience of our people, we are destined to overcome this challenge and will soon emerge as a stronger country."

Shahzad Malik said that a peaceful environment was a prerequisite for strengthening of the national economy and democratic system.

Growth oriented budget with austerity measures needed for economy

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) has suggested the government to take effective economic measures including in the coming federal budget to encourage business activities in the country with a flavour of austerity measures in the public sectors.

Sharing the Forum's proposals for upcoming federal budget 2023-24 with media, PBF President Mian Muhammad Usman Zulfiqar stressed the need for establishing export warehouses at the borders to uplift trade with neighboring countries and incorporating the agriculture and service sectors into the tax net.

He said that in an effort to increase the GDP growth up to six percent in next financial year, the budget makers have to reduce tax rates to widen the tax base and curtail parallel economy, also providing a competitive edge to Pakistan's products in global markets.

Muhammad Usman said the PBF was giving its proposals for the federal budg-

et 2023-24 with main focus on jobs creation by strengthening industry, broadening of tax base through lowering rate and introducing liberal policies to attract foreign investment.

During the last three decades, he said, it was only twice when Pakistan's economy grew by more than 5 percent – first in 2003-2006 and second during 2016-2018 and third during 2021-22.

He said that realizing the full potential of information technology, the industrial production can be increased. He observed that the digital finance potential of Pakistan could be \$36 billion in next four years, giving a seven percent boost to the GDP and generating four million new jobs.

The PBF President said the real fact is a lack of realization that the world business patterns have changed and Pakistan has made no efforts to adjust to those realities. If the country wants to have a higher

growth rate, it would have to adopt new innovative ways in the post-pandemic world as is being done by other countries, which are expecting a fast V-shaped recovery. "We need to bring our digital infrastructure at par with other fast developing countries, besides adopting new technologies and implementing e-government solutions," he suggested.

Similarly PBF has recommended the government to abolish the Super Tax which was imposed on companies earning more than Rs. 150 million last year. Cement, steel, sugar, oil and gas, fertilizers, textiles, automobiles, tobacco, and other industries were among them. PBF President also urged the general rate of Minimum Tax u/s 113 of ITO 2001 to be reduced from 1.25 percent to 0.25 percent. "Considering current economic turmoil and inflationary pressure on prices and cost, the minimum tax should be abolished, at least for listed companies,"

it added, among other recommendations.

PBF Vice President Jahanara Wattoo proposed the economic managers to incentivise investors, simplify tax system and take solid step to reform the tax collecting agency.

She expressed serious concern over excessively burdening the manufacturing sector that contributes more than 20 percent to the economy, having a share of 70 percent in tax payments.

Wattoo suggested the authorities to rationalize import tariff, which was unlike any other competing country.

She urged the government to take practical and concrete steps for the implementation of business-friendly policies, saying that high prices of utilities like electricity, gas and petroleum products were slowing down the wheel of economy. She added there was a need to freeze the prices of those inputs for at least three years so that the economy could get required jumpstart.

She also suggested that the sales tax slab should immediately be curtailed in order to reduce cost of production and inflationary pressures.

"The PBF urges the government to reduce sales tax to single digit and also cut corporate tax to make the upcoming budget business-friendly."

As the lower rate of sales tax will increase revenue and discourage malpractices in input and adjustment.

It will give the industry a breathing space against the menace of smuggling. A significant portion of the total budget should be allocated for Hydro power projects, she stressed and further said Reliance on costly thermal power has raised the cost of production and the import bill as well.

In order to tackle the energy shortages, maximum funds should be allocated for construction of dams or water reservoirs.

The country is in dire need of an urgent shift in its energy-mix in favor of

Hydro power and local fuels, she added.

Jahanara Wattoo also stated government should avoid announcing any tax amnesty schemes in the new financial year to encourage the honest taxpayers; she added.

On this occasion, PBF Vice President Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad said the slowing down of agriculture sector growth is causing serious repercussions on all aspects of the economy including inflation, poverty, employment, income distribution, current account and food security. In this regard government must announce tangible steps in the upcoming federal budget including curtailment of fertilizer prices and electricity tariff on tube-wells – aimed at bringing down high prices of agriculture inputs.

Jawad proposed that the government may announce concrete package in the budget for the facilitation of horticulture industry as its global trade crossed \$250 billion.

He said that the government should allocate funds to promote the hybrid seed industry in Pakistan under private-public partnership to increase per-acre productivity.

"The world is focusing on the use of certified seed for enhancing agriculture productivity due to better profitability and international recognition."

Ahmad Jawad urged setting up different projects including cool chain infrastructure, ripening centres, food processing and value addition industry, agro-processing industry and accredited testing laboratories at special economic zones under Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode, to ensure availability of good quality produce for exports.

The government should incentivise businessmen to invest in latest cold storages as it was a vital part of the supply chain for exporting fruits and vegetables as well as for local markets with a tax exception for five years; to chase the target of 900 straight of the art

cold storages, he added.

Additionally, he said, loan scheme for new agriculture graduates for promoting agriculture services should also be government's priority in the budget. Similarly, special mark-up rate could be announced for the banks preferably at 5% in the budget to purchase agriculture machinery for the facilitation of the farming community. Further farm to market; Khadim-e-Pakistan Dehi Roads and further it's time to get Aarahthi registration. "We will get taxes, benefit farmers".

Jawad also demanded that funds for Crop Insurance Scheme (CIS) may also be allocated in the provincial budgets for farmers to the areas affected by natural disasters/calamities, widespread diseases and unpredictable weather conditions in a transparent manner with a assurance of merit, through Sindh Bank, Bank of Punjab, Bank of Khyber and Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL).



In brief

Trials of Senior Inter-District Cricket

PESHAWAR (APP): The trials for the PCB Senior Inter-District Cricket Tournament will kick off on May 18 here at Malik Cricket Academy. Talking to APP here on Thursday, President Peshawar District Cricket Association (PDCA) Syed Asghar Ali said the trials organised by the District Peshawar Cricket Association will start at 9 a.m., wherein players registered with all the affiliated clubs with Peshawar District Cricket Association to take part. "The players are advised to bring their original ID card or Original Form-B on the date of the trials," he added.

MoU signed between police, sports dept

MULTAN (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Mansoor-Ul-Haq Rana signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the sports department regarding promoting sports activities and the provision of facilities during sports events here on Thursday. The police department would use the district sports ground for sports activities of the department and also avail facilities by the sports department. Speaking on the occasion, CPO Mansoor-Ul-Haq Rana lauded the sports department for offering a district sports ground to the police department for sports activities and also assured facilities. He said that the MoU would help boost healthy activities in the department.

Pedersen claims stage-six win

MILAN (BBC): Denmark's Mads Pedersen won the sixth stage of the Giro d'Italia after the peloton caught a two-man breakaway with the finishing line in sight. Pedersen claimed victory following a sprint after Australia's Simon Clarke and Italian Alessandro de Marchi were passed with about 250m to go. Italy's Jonathan Milan was second, with Pascal Ackermann of Germany in third on the 162km stage through Naples. Norway's Andreas Leknessund retained the overall lead of the race. Pedersen, 27, has now won stages at the Tour de France, Vuelta a Espana and Giro d'Italia. "I'm pretty happy. It's what we came for," said Pedersen. "It was a tough day for the team and it's nice to pay them back with this victory - a good day. "It was pretty close in the end, it was not easy to catch them for a long time. We really had to use everyone. "I feel sorry for those guys because they did really well but I'm happy I could take the win." Great Britain's Geraint Thomas had an issue with his bike with just under 12km to go but recovered to finish with the peloton and is sixth overall. Slovenia's Primoz Roglic, who also had an issue with his bike, is fifth. Belgian's Remco Evenepoel, who crashed twice on stage five, finished in the peloton and remains second in the general classification, 28 seconds behind Leknessund. "It's not nice, especially early in the Giro like this," said Evenepoel prior to the start of the sixth stage on Thursday. "[I have] some pain in the back, some big bruises. I've got a big black spot on my back which is some blood. "It's life, it's racing. We have to deal with it and just handle the pain as well as possible and try to relax as much as possible because I think I will need a lot of energy now to heal from the wounds." Leknessund said he feels "ready for the mountain stage" on Friday, which will be a 218km ride from Capua to Gran Sasso d'Italia.

Australia retain No. 1 spot in ODI rankings after annual update

Australia have retained their No. 1 spot in the ICC men's ODI team rankings following the annual update that dropped results from the 2019-20 season and reflects all matches completed since May 2020.

With 118 rating points, Australia are two points clear of second-placed Pakistan after the update, which weights matches completed before May 2022 at 50% and subsequent matches at 100%. Earlier this month, after a similar update for Test rankings, Australia had lost their No. 1 position in red-

ball cricket to India.

Pakistan had grabbed the top ODI spot last week, after taking a 4-0 lead during their five-match home series against New Zealand. But their stay proved to be a short one as they lost the final match and slipped back behind Australia. Had Pakistan won the series 5-0, they would have remained at the top of the table even after the annual update.

India, who are No. 1 in both Tests and T20Is, are at No. 3 in ODIs, with just one rating point separating them and Pakistan.

India are followed by New Zealand and England who lost four and ten points, respectively, after the update.

Afghanistan were the biggest beneficiaries. They are now eighth, having overtaken Sri Lanka and West Indies. South Africa and Bangladesh are at No. 6 and 7, respectively. The top eight happen to be the teams that have qualified directly for this year's ODI World Cup, to be held in India. The women's annual team rankings updates will be carried out at the beginning of October.

KP 81 member contingent leaves to take part in 34th National Games

PESHAWAR (APP): The 81-member contingent of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa left for Quetta to participate in the 34th National Games via buses and was seen off by President KP Olympic Association at Peshawar Sports Complex on Thursday.

The contingents include male and female players of hockey, football, handball and boxing.

General Secretary KP Olympic Association Zulfiqar Ali Butt, Director Operation Aziz Ullah Khan, Muhammad Amjad Khan,

Khalid Waqar, Nasir Mohmand, President KP Sports Writers Association Asim Shiraz, Secretary Shahid Khan Afridi and other officials and a large number of male and female athletes were also present.

Syed Aqil Shah said, "I hope you have prepared well for the Games and they have to use their talent to win medals."

The opening ceremony will be held on May 22. Some of the National Games competitions will also be held in Lahore and Islamabad.

SBP DG urges coaches to prepare their squads for National Games

LAHORE (APP): Sports Board Punjab (SBP) Director General Dr Asif Tufail has directed coaches and trainers of the Punjab contingent to prepare their squads fully for the grand National Games event.

The training camps of different Punjab teams continued here on the second day on Thursday to prepare for the coming 34th National Games, which will be staged at Quetta from May 22.

"The top athletes from across the country are participating in the 34th National Games and that's why Punjab coaches need

to impart professional training to their male and female athletes," the SBP DG added.

Dr Asif Tufail said that Punjab coaches should fully focus on the diet plan and physical fitness of all male and female athletes. "There is no doubt that fully fit athletes can offer satisfactory performance in competitive sports events," he added.

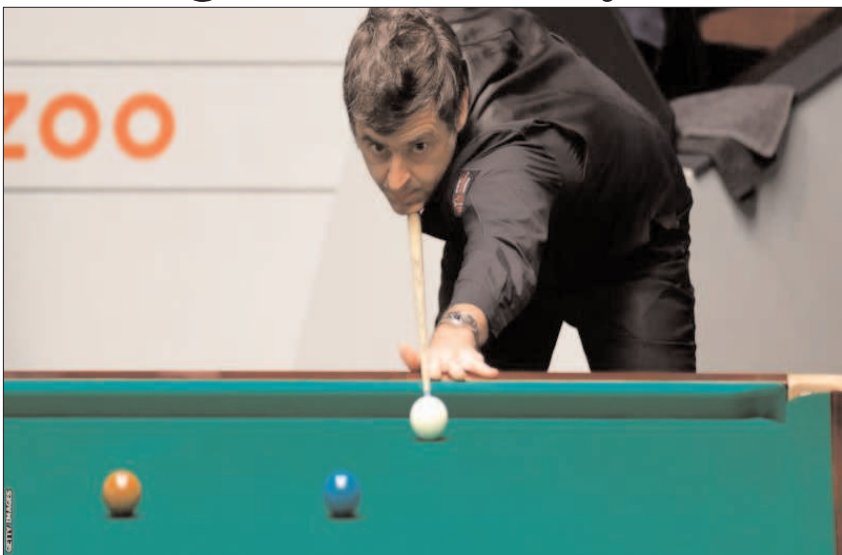
He said that Punjab sports contingents would participate in Gymnastics, Baseball, Taekwondo, Cycling, Rugby, Tennis, Basketball, Bodybuilding, Judo, Karate, Squash,

Archery, Athletics, Wrestling, Wushu, Tug of War, Table Tennis and Weightlifting events during National Games.

Young male and female badminton players participated in the training camp at Nishtar Park Sports Complex Gymnasium Hall on Thursday, where expert coaches imparted training to camp probables.

The male and female badminton players also played practice matches to polish their game skills under the supervision of senior coaches Zareena Waqar and Tayyab Sohail.

Ronnie O'Sullivan 'lost himself' to alcohol and drugs for seven years



LONDON (BBC): Ronnie O'Sullivan has said he "lost himself" for seven years to alcohol and drugs, and came to learn that "happiness is an inside job". The seven-time world champion has had well-documented issues with drink, drugs and depression. He was stripped of the Irish Masters title in 1998 after testing positive for cannabis, and in 2000 entered rehab to treat his addictions.

"There are massive gaps," the 47-year-old told BBC Radio 4 Today.

"I lost six, seven years to drinking and taking cannabis. Then four years of dealing with stuff away from the table which I didn't deal with very well.

"I wasn't focusing on snooker. But I suppose everyone has those problems, but there's 10 years there where I didn't really do much. I didn't practise much, I didn't have the headspace to win."

World number one O'Sullivan won his seventh world title in 2022 but was knocked out in the quarter-finals of this year's tournament by eventual champion Luca Brecel.

During his lowest points, O'Sullivan - whose parents were sent to prison during his teenage years - said he relied on alcohol and cannabis to "get through the day". "I lost my personality and confidence and needed to take substances just to feel like I could socialise," said O'Sullivan, whose latest book Unbreakable was released on Thursday.

"Then you get clean, and you become awkward in social situations and you think 'how do I deal with these situations?' You get a bit anxious and it started to affect me in certain ways. How do I live clean?"

"It was weird - I had to learn to do all that stuff again. It took time but once I got there, I realised you

have to carve out a different life for yourself. Maybe I'm not suited for X, Y and Z."

"My happy place is going running in the morning and I go out with my running friends, and I'm cool with that. Put me in an environment where there's lots of people and I run for the corner."

In 2013, O'Sullivan - who turned professional at the age of 16 - said he feared being caught by drug testers and "pushed his luck" between tournaments early in his career.

He now sees snooker as "great escapism", with snooker halls the place he goes to "feel relaxed and calm". "I always loved my sport and that's what's most important to me. That strips away any temptations of going out," he said.

"I think going to rehab taught me happiness is an inside job, which I truly believe. So since that moment in 2000, I've always believed that."



MULTAN: Youngsters playing volleyball in a local ground.

Fabian weighs in for world-title eliminator against Gegard Mousasi

PARIS (BBC): Fabian Edwards and Gegard Mousasi weighed in as anticipation grows before their middleweight title eliminator at Bellator 296 in Paris on Friday.

The pair stared at each other intently, before exchanging friendly words and shaking hands during their face-off.

A win for either fighter will earn them a title shot against champion Johnny Eblen. Britain's Edwards, 30, is aiming to join his brother - UFC welterweight title holder Leon - as champion. Siblings such as Anthony and Sergio Pettis, and Patricio and Patricky Freire, have all held world titles, but never at the same time across multiple major MMA promotions.

Edwards comes into the bout following two wins over veterans Lyoto Machida and Charlie Ward last year, while the Netherlands' Mousasi, 37, last fought in June, losing the title to Eblen.

Mousasi, sporting a casual look while wearing jeans, appeared the more relaxed of the two fighters. He is a veteran of 59 fights, with 49 wins across 20 years, and could mark the toughest test of Edwards' six-year career, which has yielded 11 victories from 13 bouts.

Elsewhere, Mansour Barnaoui and Brent Primus both made the weight before their Lightweight Grand Prix quarter-final bout. A semi-final against current champion Usman Nurmagomedov is at stake after he beat Benson Henderson at Bellator 292 in March.

The eventual winner of the tournament, which also features AJ McKee, Patricky 'Pitbull' Freire and Alexandr Shabliy, will win \$1m (£794,000).

Bangladesh U19 beat Pakistan U19 by four wickets

LAHORE (APP): Bangladesh U19 defeated Pakistan U19 by four wickets at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi on Thursday.

According to information made available here by the Pakistan Cricket Board this was Pakistan U19's first loss on the tour, after the tourists have won solitary four-day match by 10 wickets, first one-day by nine wickets and second one-day by 78 runs. All three matches were held at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

In today's match, after being put into bat, Pakistan U19 were bowled out for 154 in 41.4 overs. Captain Saad Baig was the notable run-getter

for the losing team with a 42-ball 35, hitting four fours and one six. Arafat Minhas (28, 50b, 4x4s) and Ali Asfand (27 not out, 38b, 5x4s) were the other contributors with the bat.

For Bangladesh U19, Rohanat Borson and Iqbal Hossain Emmon bagged three wickets each.

In turn, in pursuit of the 155-run target, Bangladesh U19 lost six wickets and achieved the target in 26 overs. Wicketkeeper-batter Adil Bin Siddik top-scored with 36 off 34 balls, which included eight boundaries.

For Pakistan U19, right-arm fast Aimal Khan took two wickets for 36 from seven overs.

Pakistan U19 still lead the five-match one-day

series 2-1. Both sides will feature in the fourth match of the series at the same venue on Saturday, 13 May. The tourists will aim to stage a comeback and win another series on the tour, while the hosts will be looking to win the next match and play the series decider on Monday, 15 May.

Scores in brief
Bangladesh U19 beat Pakistan U19 by four wickets

Pakistan U19 154 all out, 41.4 overs (Saad Baig 35, Arafat Minhas 28, Ali Asfand 27 not out; Rohanat Borson 3-22, Iqbal Hossain Emmon 3-37)

Bangladesh U19 155-6, 26 overs (Adil Bin Siddik 36, Shihab James 27; Aimal Khan 2-36)

Nationwide women volleyball teams arrives in Sukkur IBA

SUKKUR (APP): Nationwide women volleyball teams 34th national games training camp held at Sukkur IBA University, where women volleyball teams from various universities of the country, including Government College University Faisalabad, University of the Punjab, Lahore College of Women University and University of Karachi, are being taken part in a training camp held at Sukkur IBA University here on Thursday.

During their stay at Sukkur IBA University's training camp, students of women's volleyball teams had a meeting with Vice-Chancellor (VC), Sukkur IBA University, Prof Dr Asif Ahmed Shaikh. While addressing to the players of Women's Volleyball Teams, the VC expressed his pride in the team's accomplishments and encouraged them to continue striving for excellence, representing their respective institutions with honour and integrity.

He said that there is no shortage of talent in Pakistan, the need is to provide the right opportunities to the youth. The Vice Chancellor's presence and motivational speech left a lasting

impression on the Women's Volleyball Team, igniting a renewed sense of determination and motivation as they prepare to compete in the 34th National Games.

Dr. Shahzaman Khan, Head of the physical department told that the HEC Teams are here for a two weeks long stay at the training camp at Sukkur IBA University, headed by Asad Ali, Deputy Director of Sports, after successfully completing the Volleyball Training Camp, teams will be participating in 34th National Games, to be held at Quetta from 14 to 21 May 2023.

Spain to host 2023 Billie Jean King Cup finals

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has confirmed Seville, Spain as host for the Finals of the 2023 Billie Jean King Cup by Gainbridge.

The climax of the 2023 women's World Cup of Tennis would take place on November 7-12 with 12 teams battling it out to take home the coveted trophy and don the iconic Billie Jean Blue jackets, a news release on Thursday said.

This year the Billie Jean King Cup was celebrating 60 years since the global event was first played in June 1963 in London.

Last year's winners Switzerland and runners-up Australia would be joined by the nine nations that triumphed in April's Qualifiers: Canada, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Slovenia, Spain and USA. The ITF has also awarded a wildcard for the Finals to Poland. Teams would compete in four round-robin groups of three, with the four group winners progressing to the semi-finals. This would be the sixth time and first since 2008 that Spain has hosted the Finals of the competition. Seville would host the event for the next two years, with an option to extend it for a third year. Further details about this year's venue will be confirmed in due course.

Since being re-branded from the Fed Cup in 2020, the competition has continued to develop as a bold, powerful platform for the growth of women's tennis across the world.

The ITF has also confirmed that the Billie Jean King Cup by Gainbridge Juniors and Davis Cup Juniors Finals would take place in Cordoba, with details of dates and venues to be announced in due course. The



announcement comes as part of a wider partnership between the ITF and the Region of Andalusia which will see the region host all ITF major team events this year, including the Davis Cup Finals in Malaga.

David Haggerty, ITF President, said, "Following a competitive bidding process and some impressive proposals from a number of potential hosts, we are delighted to announce Seville as the host of this year's Billie Jean King Cup by Gainbridge Finals. We are very confident the city will stage a fantastic event and do justice to what is the culmination of a year's worth of exhilarating competition in the women's World Cup of Tennis. I am sure Seville will provide the perfect setting for the electric atmosphere of the Billie Jean King Cup Finals, and I am looking forward to seeing supporters from around the world joining us for this unique occasion. Throughout the various stages of the event this year we have seen how much it means to players to represent their countries, and I have no doubt that passion will be on show again in

Seville. "We are also looking forward to bringing the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup Juniors Finals to Cordoba later this year. Both events give young tennis players a fantastic opportunity to experience the unique atmosphere of playing in a team for their country, and Cordoba will be a great setting for that experience."

With the exception of Poland, the losing nations from the Qualifiers (Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Great Britain, Mexico, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine) will compete in the 2023 Play-offs on 10-11 or 11-12 November, alongside the seven teams that won promotion from the three regional Group I events which also took place in April: Argentina and Colombia (from Americas Group I); Japan and Korea, Rep. (from Asia/Oceania Group I); and Hungary, Netherlands, and Sweden (from Europe/Africa Group I). Serbia will take the place of Poland in the Play-off draw by virtue of being the highest-finishing non-promoted team from Europe/Africa Group I in 2023.



In brief

Mainly dry weather expected

ISLAMABAD (INP): Mainly dry weather is expected in most parts of the country while hot in plain areas. Day temperature is likely to rise gradually in most parts of the country. Temperature of some major cities recorded on Thursday. Islamabad seventeen degree centigrade, Lahore twenty-four, Karachi twenty-eight, Peshawar twenty, Quetta sixteen, Gilgit nine, Murree eleven and Muzafarabad fourteen degree centigrade. According to Met Office weather forecast for Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, dry weather is expected in Srinagar, Jammu, Pulwama, Anantnag and Baramula while partly cloudy in Leh and Shoptian. Temperature recorded. Srinagar and Baramula ten degree centigrade, Jammu seventeen, Leh zero, Pulwama and Shoptian nine, and Anantnag eight degree centigrade.

IRSA releases 136,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 136,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 118,900 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1436.32 feet and was 38.32 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 32,500 cusecs and 50,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1121.95 feet, 71.95 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 38,300 cusecs and 38,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 63,000, 56,800, 42,500 and 10,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 26,900 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 12,400 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

Five drug pushers held

RAWALPINDI (INP): Five drug pushers were arrested and narcotics recovered from their possession during separate actions in different areas of Rawalpindi, police said on Thursday. According to details, Sadiqabad, RA Bazaar, Rawat and Chakri police of Rawalpindi launched crackdown against drug peddlers in their jurisdictions. During separate actions, five drug pushers including Fiaz, Arslam, Mehmood, Taimoor and Rehmat were arrested besides recovery of 2.8 kilogram hashish and 80 gram methamphetamine (Ice) from their possession. Division SPs vowed to continue actions against drug peddlers and bringing them to net.

Mall Road Saddar closed

RAWALPINDI (APP): Mall Road Saddar is closed for all kind of vehicular traffic while other city roads including Murree Road are open. A City Traffic Police (CTP) spokesman said on Thursday that traffic was normal on city roads and Murree Road except Mall Road Saddar and some other roads in its surrounding area which were closed for all kind of vehicular traffic. Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan said that traffic police officers and wardens were in the field and regulating traffic on city roads. CTP had finalized arrangements to control traffic load on alternate routes on different city roads in case of traffic diversion, he said.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf receiving Deputy Chairman State Council of Oman Sheikh Dr. Al-Khattab bin Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai at Parliament House.

‘Pakistan and Oman enjoyed cordial ties’

ISLAMABAD (APP): National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf on Thursday said that Pakistan and Oman enjoyed cordial ties deeply entrenched in shared values of brotherhood and socio-economic interests. Talking to Deputy Chairman State Council of Oman Sheikh Dr. Al-Khattab bin Ghalib bin Ali Al-Hinai, he said Pakistani diaspora in Oman was playing a key role for its socio-economic development.

He appreciated the Oman people and government for hosting a large number of Pakistani work-

ers gracefully.

The speaker appreciated Oman's participation in golden jubilee celebrations of the Constitution.

The Oman Parliamentary delegation is in on official visit in Pakistan to attend International constitutional convention organized by National Assembly Secretariat in connection with Golden Jubilee celebration of Constitution.

Discussing nature of friendly ties between the two sides, the speaker said, "Pakistan attaches high importance to its fraternal ties with Oman. The bilat-

eral relations are historical, deep-rooted and based on commonalities of faith, culture and traditions."

He also appreciated Oman's role in strengthening peace and stability in the region. Dr. Al-Khattab appreciated the kind remarks of the speaker and said that Oman considered Pakistan as its brother. He also stressed on the need to enhance parliamentary contacts via Parliamentary Friendship Group to explore avenues of cooperation in diverse sector particularly climate change. MNA, Naz Baloch was also present in the meeting.

Commissioner visits rehab centre, inspect facilities

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Laiqat Ali Chatha on Thursday visited Wah General Hospital to inspect the facilities being provided to the drug addicts at the newly set up Potohar Rehab Centre.

He appreciated the efforts of health, education, excise and other departments for giving due attention to drug addicts and bringing them to the mainstream. Chatta directed the officials to display anti-drug awareness banners in all educational institutions and prominent places and apprise the people about the Potohar Rehab Centre.

"The centre aims to reiterate the pledge that people from all walks of life will do their duty to make Rawalpindi a drug-free region", he added.

On the occasion, the hospital administration briefed the commissioner that treatment of 19 drug addicts was underway while 50 beds had been allocated for the affected patients. The officials informed that apart from free-of-cost treatment, food was also being provided. The services of psychiatrists have also been hired to treat the patients to make them respectful citizens of society.

Birth anniversary of Saadat Hasan Manto observed

ISLAMABAD (APP): The birth anniversary of renowned Urdu story, film, radio scriptwriter and journalist Saadat Hasan Manto was observed on Thursday.

Manto was born in Paproudi village in the Ludhiana district of the eastern Punjab, in a Muslim family on May 11, 1912. He belonged to a Kashmiri trading family that had settled in Amritsar in the early 19th century and took up legal profession. His father, Khwaja Ghulam Hasan, was a session judge of a local court. After partition, his family migrated to Lahore.

Manto wrote 250 short stories, a novel, five collections of radio plays, three collections of essays and two collections of personal sketches. Some of his publications are, Atishpare, Manto Ke Afsane, Dhuane, Afsane Aur Drame, Laazat-e-Sang, Thanda Gosht, Baghair Ijazat, Burque, Ratti, Masha, Tolah. He died on January 18, 1955 in Lahore.

‘PTI leadership’s conduct to fuel protests, agitations irresponsible & dangerous’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman on Wednesday said the way Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s leadership fueled protests and agitations was a very irresponsible and dangerous reaction.

In a series of tweets, she lambasted the PTI leadership for triggering violence across the country after the arrest of its party chairman.

Senator Rehman said the leadership of PTI could have controlled the violent protests in time, but it was a pity that the violence of the agitating workers was not even condemned.

She added that the PTI leadership told the violent protesters to "set fire, burn, break up" but later showed indifference to

the violent activists instead of stopping them. "Systematic attacks on sensitive institutions, public and private properties. This was not the reaction of a political party at all. This is the terrible consequences of Tehreek-e-Insaf's division and hateful style of politics that are emerging," Sherry Rehman said.

The leadership of political parties did not incite workers to arson and incitement, but rather the function of leadership was to control workers and prevent them from provocation, she added.

"Peaceful demonstration is the constitutional right of every party and person, but Tehreek-e-Insaf does not know the difference between peaceful and violent protest," the minister added.

Chinese Company ensures safe drinking water for Islamabad Students

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chinese environmental technology company, Zhongke Runlan Environmental Technology (Beijing) Co., Ltd., in collaboration with international organizations, has donated reverse osmosis (RO) water treatment equipment to Islamabad Model College for Girls in Pakistan to address the school's water quality challenges.

Last month, a team of engineers from the company arrived in Pakistan to provide technical guidance and install the equipment at the school, according to China Economic Net (CEN).

According to Runlan, under the framework of China's "Belt and Road" initiative and in line with the principles of green development, Chinese companies are actively contributing to global sustainable development by sharing China's clean energy equipment, technology, and services with the world.

Upon their arrival in Pakistan, the team of technicians promptly ventured to the site to carry out water sample testing. Startling results emerged from their assessments: "After our testing, we found that the electrical conductivity of the water sample reached 2330?s/cm, indicating a high concentration of harmful ion impurities far exceeding international standards," stated a representative from Runlan Environmental Technology.

Pakistan is one of the countries facing severe water pollution issues, particularly when it comes to drinking water. In certain regions, due to adverse natural conditions

and improper utilization of water resources, the groundwater contains a high concentration of harmful substances, rendering it unsuitable for consumption.

This directly poses a threat to the drinking water safety of local residents. Islamabad Model College for Girls, located in the rural area of Tarnol in Islamabad, is one such school grappling with this issue. The school lacks proper water filtration equipment, forcing some children to bring their own drinking water from home every day. Unfortunately, not all children have access to clean water facilities at home. The team started their interaction with the school staff by explaining the basic theoretical knowledge about the RO reverse osmosis water treatment equipment.

They then proceeded to demonstrate the specific wiring steps and testing procedures to the school. After undergoing treatment with the RO reverse osmosis water purification equipment, the electrical conductivity of the water samples decreased to 42?s/cm, meeting international standards. "We are delighted to see children are now drinking safe and reliable water, this matters the most," representative form Zhongke Runlan expressed to the reporter. Information in this article comes from third party providers. This website does not provide explicit or implied warranty for such information and is not liable for any losses directly or indirectly caused by using such information.

Educational activities in ICT schools and colleges disrupted amidst law & order situation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The educational activities in schools and colleges working under the ambit of Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) across the city have been severely affected due to the recent law and order situation in the country, which stemmed from the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Chief Imran Khan.

The law and order situation in the country has resulted in a chain reaction of events that have left students, parents, and teachers in a state of confusion and frustration. The controlling office of the educational institutions of Islamabad, FDE, has come under fire for its lack of effective communication and inability to provide timely information to students and parents regarding suspension of academic activities.

The educational institutions have suspended bus service without prior notification to the students. The sudden and unexplained halt in bus services has left students stranded and unaware of whether classes are continuing or not. The lack of decisive action and effective communication from the authorities has compounded the problem, exacerbated the suffering of students and parents.

Nazia, a concerned mother whose son studies at Islamabad Model College for Boys in G-6/3, while talking to APP expressed her frustration over the situation.

She told how both she and her son waited at the bus stop for an hour, only to realize that the bus service had been discontinued without any prior intimation from the college.

This lack of communication caused unnecessary inconvenience and suffering for both the students and parents, she added.

Meanwhile, a concerned teacher, speaking on the condition of anonymity, shared her own experience of the chaos. Living in Soan Garden, she encountered road closures near Faizabad due to ongoing protests. After waiting for a considerable time, she was compelled to return home, leaving her school untended. The teacher expressed disappointment over the lack of leadership and prompt decision-making displayed by the education department in such critical situations.

The educational institutions should be closed in such a situation, she added.

Muhammad Imran, a resident of sector G-14 said, "There were no academic activities in the schools yesterday. The absence of clear directives and guidance from the schools has left me in a difficult position, uncertain about whether to send my children to schools or keep them at home. The plight of parents like me is exacerbated by the lack of formal communication regarding the continuation of classes. The schools should have effective communication with parents."

Sheikh Rashid says it would be better to go to jail

RAWALPINDI (PPI): Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said on Thursday that he was depressed over worsening political situation in the country following the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan.

"It would be better to go to jail," the former interior minister lamented over the political turmoil that has spilled onto streets. Lashing out at the ruling coalition of 13 parties, he said their only agenda was to disqualify Mr Khan and put him in jail.

He said such tactics would not suppress the political status of the PTI chief but they were proving favourable for him. He said the government had shot itself in the foot by taking such an action against the PTI chief. He said the ruling partners had crippled the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in order to get their cases removed. Mr Ahmed said the masses were fed up with the incompetent government as it was unable to deliver.

The AML chief said several people had lost their lives only in Lahore during

confrontation between the PTI protesters and police. He said the PTI leaders, who were picked by Imran Khan for talks with the government, had been arrested on court premises. He said security was being provided to those who had looted the public money.

"Pakistan Army is a great institution and it cannot open fire on public," he said, adding that it was injustice to damage the military's departments.

"The basic reason for violence is that the protests are being led by the public itself," he said.

PTDC takes tremendous measures to promote tourism

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) after taking numerous measures to promote tourism here in Federal Capital by projecting and marketing the country's history, culture, arts and tourism, was hoping to achieve a boom in the tourism sector. "Islamabad is rich with cultural heritage and potential for immense tourism due to its unmatched landscape, natural beauty, diverse culture, and cuisine," said a news release received here on Thursday.

A large number of tourists including local and foreign dignitaries are visiting Islamabad's recreational sites such as Faisal Mosque, Lake View, Daman-e-Koh, Pakistan Monument and others to enjoy

the pleasant and lovely weather besides the peaceful atmosphere."

After realizing the growth potential of the tourism sector in the country, the PTDC initiated devising policies, strategies and frameworks to attract tourists coming from various parts of the country and the world. The PTDC is representing the country by organizing domestic and international events and exhibitions for assisting tourists with the provision of transport and accommodations facilities within the country. The incumbent government has taken many initiatives to promote and revive the tourism industry to explore historical sites to yield desirable results in this sector.



ISLAMABAD: CDA Workers installing new pole lights at IJP Road.

All Afghan enjoys equal rights

KABUL (Agencies): Deputy Prime Minister, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, in a meeting with several elders and influential figures of Panjshir and Kapisa, reminded saying that all Afghan enjoy equal rights and IEA serves the people without any difference. In this meeting with influential figures of Panjshir and Kapisa provinces, praised the IEA officials for meeting them and they shared some of their problems with Deputy Prime Minister Kabir, according to a statement.

New package of aid arrived

KABUL (Agencies): DAB announced the arrival of a new package of humanitarian aid to Kabul. DAB said that a package of 40 million US dollars in cash aid arrived in Kabul and was transferred to one of the country's commercial banks. DAB welcomed the aid of the international community and called for more cooperation in this field. The bank thanked the international community for its support of Afghanistan and asked for further cooperation with the war-torn country.

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

‘UN not support any armed resistance’

KABUL (Agencies): The European Union envoy for Afghanistan, Thomas Nicholson, reminded saying, that the EU will not support armed resistance against Afghanistan's new government.

The European Union envoy, Nicholson made these statements after the end of his trip to Kabul.

He said that the war in Afghanistan has ended and the people of this country, adding that the end of the war is an opportunity to put an end to all kinds of violence in the country and to

start the economic cycle.

“I repeat the European Union's clear position of not providing political, material, or other support to the armed resistance in Afghanistan”, he said.

Pointing to the recent Doha meeting, he said that the meeting was a welcome initiative of the United Nations to once again put Afghanistan in the spotlight.

Nicholson stressed that interaction with the Islamic Emirate should continue to address common concerns, including security and the fight against terrorism.

He stressed saying that It is necessary to protect human rights, prevent illegal immigration and human trafficking, deal with drug production and trafficking, and stabilize the Afghan economy.

During his trip to Afghanistan, he met with the officials of the Islamic Emirate, including the head of the intelligence Department of the Islamic Emirate.

The officials of the Islamic Emirate assured that Afghanistan's soil will not be used to threaten the security of other countries.

IEA destroys over 800 acres of poppy fields

KABUL (Agencies): The Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) says anti-narcotics police have destroyed 800 acres of poppy fields in several operations across six provinces.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs said that 356 acres of land was destroyed in the center and districts of Yaftal-e-Payan, Arghanj Khwa, Kishim and Shahri Buzurg districts of Badakhshan province; 338 acres of land in Gulbahar and Jabal Saraj districts of Parwan province; 62 acres of land in the Darah Sof, in Samangan province; 30 acres of land in Andrab, Doshi and Borka districts of Baghlan province; 8 acres of land in Alisheng district of Laghman province; and 7 acres of land in Manogi district of Kunar province.

The Islamic Emirate's spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, last week said that there is a serious fight underway against the cultivation and trafficking of drugs in an attempt to eradicate all traces of narcotics in the country.

Mujahid emphasized that efforts are being made to prevent drug trafficking, and that since the IEA's takeover in August 2021, a large number of drug traffickers have been arrested and imprisoned.

“The drug problem in Afghanistan is being solved, this year's poppy cultivation in the whole country was close to zero, if someone had cultivated in mountainous and remote areas, it was destroyed,” said Mujahid.

“There is also seriousness in the prevention of drug trafficking and every day we witness arrest cases. In the near future, Inshallah, it will reach zero.”

He also assured neighboring countries and the region that they need not be concerned about drug smuggling from Afghanistan but to cooperate with the government and people in the fight against drugs and help find alternative crops to poppies.

Earthquake strikes Faizabad

FAIZABAD, Badakhshan (Khaama Press): An earthquake of magnitude 4.5 jolted at a depth of 99 Km southwest of Faizabad capital city of Badakhshan province, Afghanistan, on Thursday.

With a Richter scale value of 4.5, the quake rattled Faizabad capital city of Badakhshan province of Afghanistan on Thursday, the Indian National Center for Seismology (NCS) said.

According to the NCS, the earthquake took place on Thursday at 4:51 am local time at a depth of 172 Km, Tweeted NCS “Earthquake of Magnitude: 4.5, Occurred on 11-05-2023, 05:51:03 IST, Lat: 36.33 & Long: 69.98, Depth: 172 Km, Location: 99km SSW of Fayzabad, Afghanistan.”

There have been no casualties as of yet. Further details are awaited.

Earlier, the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) tweeted on Tuesday that a magnitude of 4.3 struck Afghanistan 116 kilometres to the southeast of Fayzabad.

The province is one of the disaster-prone regions in the country. Recently, the number of quakes has increased in the region.

Afghanistan is one of the most vulnerable countries regarding natural disasters, including earthquakes, flash flooding, landslide, heavy rain and avalanches. As a result, it requires additional caution and measures to reduce the severity of the disasters in the country.

Soon we will have sufficient domestically produced electricity: Mullah Baradar



KABUL (Agencies): Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, Economic Deputy of the Prime Minister, on Thursday said that soon Afghanistan will have sufficient electricity, produced locally, to service the country.

Speaking at the opening of the Kabul International Expo on the occasion of “Industry Week” he said industry and production are the backbone of the country's economy.

“Electricity is necessary for industry and production, so I am giving good news

to all citizens and especially industrialists that soon we will have sufficient domestically produced electricity,” Baradar said.

Baradar also said a country can develop when it has a strong industry and from this aspect, it is not only self-sufficient, but also exports its products to the rest of the world.

“Due to the unfortunate long wars and the lack of commitment and unwillingness of the rulers, Afghanistan has not been allowed to move fast economically, but Alhamdulillah,

with the arrival of the Islamic Emirate, basic steps have been taken for the country's economic growth, he added.

He also assured manufacturers and producers that if they guarantee quantity and quality of domestically manufactured goods, the IEA will raise tariffs on the same products that are imported so as to boost the local market.

Baradar called on Afghan investors living abroad to return to their country, invest in Afghanistan and take an

active role in the recovery of the country's economy.

“The Islamic Emirate stands by all industrialists and considers any kind of support as its responsibility,” Baradar said. Baradar also thanked manufacturers who have already invested in various sectors.

The Kabul International Expo opened on Thursday and is showcasing domestic products in support of local businesses. A total of 550 local manufacturers are exhibiting products that encompass about 50 different sectors.

FAO warns of devastating locust outbreak in wheat basket

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has warned of a large-scale outbreak of the Moroccan Locust across eight provinces in North and Northeast Afghanistan, the country's wheat basket.

The sightings of locusts at different development stages have been made in Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Kunduz, Samangan, Sar-e-Pul and Takhar, with fresh reports coming in from Herat and Ghor provinces.

This comes amid a dire humanitarian crisis in the country. The report says, “Afghanistan remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis in 2023, and the large-scale outbreak of the Moroccan Locust across the above-mentioned provinces will deteriorate the situation.

“The reports of Moroccan Locust outbreak in Afghanistan's wheat basket is a huge concern. The Moroccan locust eats more than 150 species of plants, including tree crops, pastures and 50 food crops, all of which grow in Afghanistan. It represents an enormous threat to farmers, communities and the entire country,” said Richard Trenchard, the FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

“The last two big outbreaks, 20 and 40 years ago, cost Afghanistan an estimated 8 and 25 % of its total annual wheat production. Harvest forecasts this year are the best we have seen for the last three years – but this outbreak threatens to destroy all these recent gains and dramatically worsen the food insecurity situation later this year and into next year,” Trenchard added.

The Moroccan Locust is ranked among the most economically damaging plant pests worldwide. The FAO said a full outbreak this year could result in crop losses ranging from 700,000 to 1.2 million tonnes of wheat — up to a quarter of the total annual harvest. This would translate to between \$280 million and \$480 million in economic loss.

North and Northeast regions of Afghanistan are prone to Moroccan Locust outbreaks. This year has seen “perfect” conditions for a locust outbreak: drought, over-grazing, minimal locust control and just the right amount of rainfall in March and April for locusts (approximately 100 mm). These conditions created the ideal environment for locusts to hatch and swarm.

“We’ve used our cash-

for-work methodology to put money into the pockets of farmers most at risk while accelerating mechanical control in communities across the North and Northeast regions. We have also seen a strong, rapid and encouraging response from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. However, their capacity to respond is heavily constrained by a lack of resources,” an FAO representative said.

In response to the threat, funding is urgently needed to support mechanical and chemical control measures alongside on-the-ground surveys to monitor and map locust hatching sites, Trenchard said.

Meanwhile, this comes amid an ongoing dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan which more than 20 million people need food and life-saving assistance.

UNICEF warns of critical funding gap in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): UNICEF in Afghanistan warned of a critical funding gap to provide essential medical food for severe acute malnutrition in the country.

Thousands of malnourished children in Afghanistan face severe consequences because of a critical funding gap, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Melanie Galvin, UNICEF's Chief of Nutrition, said on the organization's official Twitter account on Thursday that it urgently needs additional funding to provide severe acute malnutrition children with ready-to-use medical food (RUTF) and life-sav-

ing treatment. Galvin noted that this year, 875,000 children in Afghanistan suffer from severe acute malnutrition. Without treatment, thousands of children are life-threatening.

Severe malnutrition can be treated with RUTF, a “highly efficient and effective” treatment, “in as little as eight weeks,” Galvin said. However, she noted that UNICEF lacked the \$21 million necessary resources to purchase RUTF and train health workers across Afghanistan.

This comes a day after the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) expressed concern

over running out of funding for humanitarian assistance in the country.

With adequate funding, humanitarian partners can reduce large-scale hunger, prevent disease outbreaks & reduce the chances of women dying giving birth, OCHA said in a tweet.

Meanwhile, the organization called for timely funding to support people in need. “The price of doing nothing has never been higher. Timely funding is needed to support people in need,” it added.

The UN estimates that 28 million people in Afghanistan require humanitarian aid, and the Taliban's restrictions on women have worsened the situation.

Implementation of TAP project MoEW step up to start side talks



KABUL (Agencies): Acting Energy and Water Minister, Mullah Abdul Latif Mansoor, met with the ambassador of Turkmenistan, vowed to start tripartite talks between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on the construction of the TAP project.

Acting Energy and Water Minister, Mullah Abdul Latif Mansoor, met with the ambassador of Turkmenistan, vowed to start tripartite talks between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on the construction of the TAP project.

the construction of the TAP and substation projects of Noor-ul Jihad Herat.

The two sides, stressed joint cooperation to accelerate TAP project plan, and pledged to hold a tripartite meeting to start the work of the TAP project.

ANSA returns 15 low quality oil tankers

HERAT (Agencies): The Afghanistan National Standard Authority (ANSA) has returned 15 oil tankers to Iran, after assessing them as low-quality.

“At least 15 low-quality oil tankers had been stopped

at the ground port of the country's western province of Farah and returned to the neighboring country of the Islamic Republic of Iran for being low-quality,” said a statement.

The National Standard

Authority has recently taken necessary steps to prevent the import of low-quality oil and gas into the country.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan National Standard Authority (ANSA)'s offi-

cials said no one would be allowed to import low-quality oil into the country and asked all national businessmen to import quality goods or they will be dealt with by the law, according to the statement.

The Afghan National Standard Authority has earlier returned hundreds of tankers filled with low-quality oil in the country's western and northern ground ports to the neighboring countries.



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf presenting commemorative stamp and coin to Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at Parliament House.

President condemns ‘violent’ protests

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi strongly condemning the “violent” protests after arrest of Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan in Al-Qadir Trust Case and devastating of government and military installations by miscreants has urged the protestors to remain peaceful.

Taking to his social media handler twitter on Thursday, the President said that he was deeply shocked over the prevailing situation in the country and manhandling of the former prime minister. Dr. Arif Alvi said the mortalities and property damages in the aftermath of protest are heart-wrenching, regrettable, unfortunate and highly condemnable.

“Protest is a constitutional right of every citizen of Pakistan but should always remain within the bounds of the law,” he added. “The way some miscreants have damaged public property, particularly government and military buildings, is condemnable,” President Alvi said. The President proposed a re-think and look for political solutions, rather than coercion and arrests.

“I have conveyed my concerns to the political and military leadership and am hopeful that the situation can improve. I strongly appeal to all citizens of the country to remain peaceful,” he added. In a letter addressed to the

PM on Imran Khan’s arrest, he said, “Please do ensure that constitutional rights of Imran Khan are not violated and his life is fully secured.”

Alvi said; The Prime Minister is obliged under the Constitution and Rules of Business, 1973 to keep me informed about the current state of affairs in the country.” He wrote, “Your attention is drawn towards the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan on 9th May, 2023 from the premises of Islamabad High Court, the manner in which it was done and the consequences thereof. I and the people of Pakistan were shocked to see the video images of the incident which reflect manhandling of a former Prime Minister who is a popular leader and head of a political party substantially supported by the people of Pakistan. The law enforcement agencies forcibly entered the office where Mr. Imran Khan was seated while his biometrics were under process, inside the building of Islamabad High Court.”

“The clumsy hubris in which his arrest was carried out has tarnished the image of Pakistan in the international community, and the enemies of Pakistan are given an opportunity to mock and portray Pakistan as a country having little respect for rights of its citizens.” “All kind of incident should not happen with anybody, and the justification that such episodes have hap-

pened before does not make them ‘right’ today. The already tottering economy is badly affected and polarization in society is further exacerbated due to such ill-conceived and unwarranted incidents as above. Of course, he has a large number of followers who were emotionally charged after watching such scenes of his arrest and dragging of their leader by the security officials despite his injured leg due to an assassination attempt on him.”

“The painful event led to attacks by mobs on public assets including buildings of the Armed Forces. I believe that the people have a right to protest but they should remain peaceful and within the bounds of the law.” President Alvi said all are shocked because of the heart-wrenching, unfortunate and regrettable loss of lives which are highly condemnable. Besides the above, the rapidly polarizing body politic must be stabilized by reducing political temperature rather than the tit for tat, kneejerk reactions including the wave of arrests subsequently, that is continuously making the situation worst. “I am distressed over the damages to public assets and unlawful actions of miscreants. As the upholder of the Constitution and Law, I condemn such incidents. My country is passing through a difficult phase, let’s take a deep breath and salvage our destiny,” he added.

GB CM put under house arrest

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid was put under house arrest in the federal capital on Thursday. A notification was issued by the office of the Chief Commissioner Islamabad. The GB provincial chief executive has been detained at the GB Islamabad House. A good number of policemen have been deployed outside the GB House to prevent any untoward situation.

The detention follows deadly unrest in the country after the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan, who is also chairman of the PTI. The GB CM represents the PTI in the province. The GB police were also sent to Lahore’s Zaman Park residence of the PTI chief as ‘protective shield’ to prevent his arrest.

Court rejects Elahi’s plea

LAHORE (PPI): An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore on Thursday rejected the plea of former Punjab chief minister Pervaiz Elahi for exemption from personal appearance in the case of attacking policemen and resisting the police raid on his house.

Amir Saeed Ran, the lawyer for Pervaiz Elahi, had filed the plea for exemption from personal appearance. The court ordered Pervaiz Elahi to appear before the court after rejecting the plea. ATC judge Ejaz Ahmad Buttar had heard the case.

Omer Cheema sends to jail

LAHORE (PPI): An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore Thursday rejected the request for the physical remand of former Punjab governor Omer Sarfraz Cheema and sent him to jail on a 14-day judicial remand in the case of arson and attack on Askari Tower. The court also sent 11 other workers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to jail on seven-day judicial remand for the identification parade.

Earlier, 12 accused including former Punjab governor Omer Sarfraz Cheema were produced in the ATC. Omer Sarfraz Cheema was produced in the court handcuffed while other PTI workers were produced with their faces covered.

Bilawal urges Parliament, masses to safeguard Constitution

ISLAMABAD (APP): Foreign Minister and Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Thursday said political parties and masses should all act together to safeguard the constitution in all times either good or bad to ensure freedom of the nation and democracy. He was addressing the closing session of a two-day international convention held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Constitution of 1973 of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Bilawal said the country did not define itself by the challenges being faced by it rather how it faced the challenges. The country and the nation faced abrogation of the Constitution by the dictators and the people of Pakistan resisted every single usurper and dictator. The foreign minister accorded credit for the restoration of democracy and the constitution to the masses.

He added that the people of Pakistan had faced all forms of dictatorship and defeated all of them. The foreign minister apprised the convention that his family fought against dictatorship for three generations and never took law in their hands. He added that after losing Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto who was not only the nation’s leader but also his mother; he urged his supporters not to take revenge rather uphold democracy.

Bilawal Bhutto said his party faced the worst form of authoritarianism and suppression but never transcended the constitutional limits in response. “People of Pakistan have faced every dictator heads on. I

believe that they will confront every dictator and suppressor again. We all must act together to protect the constitution and have firm belief in the Parliamentarians and the people that you will preserve it,” he added.

National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf also said the Constitution is a cornerstone of collective and individual freedoms. “The Constitution is the best document which ensures the provision of all freedoms to each citizen irrespective of caste, creed and colour,” he said while addressing the closing Plenary Session “Building Inclusive and Equal Societies: Challenges and Opportunities” of International Constitutional Convention to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Constitution of Pakistan here at the Parliament House.

Prevez Ashraf paid rich tribute to the struggle of generations of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leadership for the continuity of democracy and supremacy of the Constitution. He said following the principles and struggle of two charismatic leaders – Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who had sacrificed their lives for furthering the cause of democracy in Pakistan, would bring the country out of socio-economic challenges.

He expressed gratitude to the parliamentary delegations of 14 countries for attending the convention. Convener of the International Constitutional Convention Committee Nafeesa Shah presented the outcome document of the convention and briefly outline its basics. The

participating countries resolved to ensure the provision of constitutional rights to all with a collective and consensus-based approach.

It was expressed to work together for enhancing and promoting democratic values. It was further reiterated to ensure the supremacy of the constitution, along with fundamental rights to all. Later, Speaker Prevez Ashraf and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari distributed prizes among the winners of declamation contests, which were organised across the country. It may be mentioned that the International Constitutional Convention culminated the month-long golden jubilee celebrations of the Constitution where a Constitution App was also launched, besides releasing of a commemorative coin by the State Bank of Pakistan and the issuance of a Rs 50 Commemorative Stamp.

A collection of historic speeches made by prominent parliamentarians on the floor of the house was also displayed. The Constitution was included in the educational curriculum to educate youth about the importance, role and rights guaranteed by it. A wall of unsung heroes of democracy was inaugurated by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to commemorate the role, and the fight of people to preserve, further and restore democracy in Pakistan. A monument was also inaugurated at the Constitution Avenue to commemorate the golden jubilee of the Constitution. The Old Assembly Hall at the State Bank building was declared as a national heritage on April 10 this year.

Pak to continue raising voice against HR abuses in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan will continue to raise its voice against grave and systematic human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Speaking during the weekly press briefing here on Thursday, the Foreign Office spokesperson said, “We will also continue to extend political, diplomatic and moral support to our Kashmiri brothers and sisters for the just and peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UNSC Resolutions.”

“The oppression in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) continues unabated,” she said adding, “Since our last press briefing, the occupation forces killed at least six Kashmiri youth in Rajouri, Kupwara and Baramulla districts. They continued their cordon and search operations in Rajouri and Poonch districts, harassing the local population. Six shops of a pro-freedom activist, Fayaz

Ahmed Magray, were attacked by India’s National Investigation Agency in Pulwama district. Two Kashmiri youth, Shahid Ahmad Lone and Waseem Ahmad Ganai, were arrested in Shopian district. Reportedly, 193 more Kashmiris have been identified, whose properties will be demolished as a punishment for their support to the freedom movement. These human rights violations must end.”

To a question, the Spokesperson said, “We believe that Pakistan made the right decision to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Council of Foreign Ministers’ meeting. It shows our commitment to SCO. You may have seen the statement that Foreign Minister made. He highlighted Pakistan’s viewpoint on all aspects of our concern about security, about economic development and about connectivity in this region. He also underlined, that terrorism should not be weaponized as a tool of foreign policy. You may have

also seen the interactions that Foreign Minister had with the Indian media and the Pakistani media.”

“Our position was consistent with our long-standing position on the various issues including on weaponization of terrorism and on the situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It should not have come as a surprise to anyone. Any statements that have been made in that respect criticizing our Foreign Minister’s statements are just unfortunate and baseless,” she remarked.

To another question, she said, “Pakistan unequivocally condemns all terrorist acts, including acts against foreign nationals in Pakistan. The Chinese nationals are our guests. Chinese companies in Pakistan are contributing to Pakistan’s development. The Government of Pakistan will continue to provide them with all the best possible facilitation and best possible security so that they are able to function in Pakistan without any fear or hindrance.”

Rupee on losing spree

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani rupee on Thursday witnessed a drop of an all-time low as it faced further devaluation of Rs. 8.71 against the Dollar in the interbank trading, mainly due to uncertainty caused by the PTI riots, and closed at Rs 298.93 against the previous day’s closing of Rs290.22.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of Dollars in the open market were recorded at Rs302 and Rs 305, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs8.89 to close at Rs326.85 against the last day’s closing of Rs 317.96, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen gained 07 paises to close at Rs 2.21, whereas a surge of Rs10.06 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs376.32 as compared to its last day’s closing of Rs366.26.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal went up by Rs2.37 and Rs2.32 to close at Rs81.40 and Rs79.70, respectively.

Financial pundits believe that the rupee has been depreciating due to political and social unrest caused after the arrest of PTI Chairman Imran Khan. Moreover, the dollar demand supply gap has also widened as the exporters have stopped selling US currency on speculations that rupee would depreciated further versus the greenback. On the other hand, importers are seen rushing to buy dollars. This gap in the demand and supply of the foreign currency in the interbank market have contributed to the rupee’s devaluation.

Disqualification of Imran: PHC orders FBR to submit reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Musart Hilali and Justice Shakeel Ahmad directed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to submit comments in cases regarding against former Prime Minister Imran Khan ineligibility for holding public office, on Thursday.

The counsel Qazi Jawad Ihsanullah Qureshi and Muhammad Waqas Advocates appeared on behalf of Awami National Party (ANP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Aimal Wali Khan before PHC. The

counsel argued that Imran Khan sold Toshakhana gifts illegally and didn’t declared in assets.

The counsel further added that Imran Khan didn’t declared his wife assets of Rs7 million in nomination forms for NA-45 while also didn’t disclosed his assets another six constituencies which is against Election Act 2017.

They argued that to disqualify Imran Khan from party’s chairmanship, declare his order null and void while added that denied from National Assembly seat. Qazi Jawad Ihsanullah advocate argued that Imran Khan has been disqualified for didn’t divulging precious gifts

obtained from Toshakhana (state treasury). He added that criminal proceedings are continued before court of law PTI chairman Imran Khan in this regard.

PTI chairman was ineligible at time by-election while stand at the similar today because he has plundered public interest and trust while requested to de-notify Imran Khan from National Assembly, the counsel argued. Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) has declared that disqualification from one position should be considered for all positions in former Nawaz Sharif case. PHC has ordered PTI chairman Imran Khan and FBR to submit reply after conclusion of arguments.

SC terms Imran’s arrest from IHC premises unlawful

(Continued from Page 1)

Here, Justice Minallah observed that Imran had indeed entered the court premises. “How can anyone be denied the right to justice?” he asked. CJP Bandial said that there was a certain “respect” for the courts. Recalling a past incident, he said, “NAB had arrested a suspect from the Supreme Court’s parking [lot]. The court had then reversed the arrest.” The CJP asked Imran’s counsel about the number of Rangers personnel who had carried out the arrest of the former premier. Imran’s lawyer responded that “100 rangers personnel entered court premises” in order to arrest the PTI chief. “What dignity remains of the court if 90 people entered its premises? How can any individual be arrested from court premises?” he asked.

“In the past, action has been taken against lawyers for vandalism inside the court,” he observed. “If an individual has surrendered to the court, then what does arresting them mean?” He further said that NAB had committed “contempt of court”. “They should have taken permission from the court’s registrar before the arrest. Court staffers were also subjected to abuse,” he added. CJP Bandial emphasised that courts should be accessible to everyone for

relief and that individuals should feel safe to approach the courts. Imran’s lawyer then demanded that his client be released from NAB custody, stating that the arrest was made without an investigation officer present.

The chief justice noted that the court was currently examining the manner in which the arrest was conducted and whether contempt had taken place. Imran’s lawyer then said that the PTI chief was on terrorists’ “radar”. Only after the arrest was made did it emerge that the warrant was issued on May 1, he said. Imran’s other lawyer, Advocate Salman Akram Raja, told the court that the interior ministry’s secretary had said he had not yet received the warrants for their execution. At this point, the CJP said that whatever had happened after Imran’s arrest should have stopped.

“This does not mean that we shut our eyes to an illegal action. Such a verdict should be given that applies to all. Access to justice is the right of every accused,” he said. “No one can be arrested from the Supreme Court, a high court or an accountability court,” the CJP said. Imran’s lawyer Hamid said that if that the party would not have approached the SC if the PTI chief had been arrested from outside his home or outside the court. Here, Justice Mazhar asked if Imran

had responded to the NAB notice, to which the lawyer replied in the affirmative.

“According to the law, an arrest cannot be made when an inquiry is still being carried out,” Hamid said. Justice Minallah then said that NAB had arrested elected public representatives in a humiliating manner, adding that this needed to come to an end. “The act of surrendering to the court cannot be sabotaged,” he said. “The real issue is not of the NAB warrant but of the manner in which it was executed,” he said. “NAB talks about the implementation of the law but does not act upon it itself.” Justice Mazhar then noted that the NAB warrant had not been challenged and asked, “Why did Imran Khan not take part in the investigation?”

The PTI chief’s counsel said that the PTI chief had responded to the notice issued by the graft watchdog. At this point during the hearing, Justice Mazhar observed, “It is clear that Imran Khan did not act upon the NAB notice. A NAB notice means that the receiver will be considered a suspect. Many people obtain bail upon receiving a NAB notice.” “A March notice was responded to in May. Did Imran not violate the law?” he asked. At this, Imran’s counsel said that the PTI chairman had only received one notice. Justice Minallah

then said that Justice Mazhar was talking about the implementation of the law, adding that the matter at hand concerned access to justice.

NAB Prosecutor General Asghar Haider said that the accountability bureau respected the country’s courts. But Justice Minallah said that NAB had “not learnt its lessons”. He observed that NAB had been accused of many things, including “political engineering”. “Had NAB taken permission from the registrar?” he asked, adding that a letter had been written to the interior ministry for the warrant’s execution. The NAB official responded to the judge’s queries by saying that he was not aware of the realities and had been posted at 1:30pm. Justice Minallah then said that a common citizen could also execute an arrest warrant. “Did NAB issue directives to arrest [Imran] from inside the court? How many notices were issued to Imran Khan?” he asked.

The prosecutor general responded by saying that only one notice had been issued to the PTI chief. “It appears that NAB’s warrant was not in accordance with the law. Was an attempt to arrest made after the warrant was issued?” Justice Minallah asked. CJP Bandial noted that the warrant was issued on May 1 and the arrest took place on May 9. “Why did

NAB not try [to arrest Imran] itself for eight days? Did NAB want to arrest Imran from court? Why was a letter written to the interior ministry on May 8?” he asked. He also asked who had carried Imran’s arrest. The NAB official replied that according to the IHC order, the arrest was overseen by the police. Justice Minallah then asked why NAB didn’t write to the Punjab government regarding the warrant, observing that the bureau had contributed to the country’s destruction.

Attorney General of Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Awan then appeared before the court at which the CJP remarked that they would hear his opinion on access to justice. The AGP said that what NAB had done with the ex-premier had “become a norm”. He asserted that NAB was an “independent institution”, adding that it had requested Rangers to be posted. He said, however, that NAB had requested Rangers to be present at the scene, not carry out the arrest. Justice Minallah observed that NAB had put all the blame on the federal government.

“If an accused surrenders before the court and is arrested, then the court will be an easy place to carry out arrests,” the CJP said. “In the mind of the accused, the courts will become a facilitator for making

arrests. The courts are free, a free court means to provide protection to citizens,” he said. Justice Minallah remarked, “It is becoming difficult for you to defend. Other political parties have also been treated very badly. Every citizen is being affected by the recent arrest. Justice Minallah went on to say, “Would it not be appropriate to restore the public’s trust in the judiciary? Would it not be appropriate that the court decides on Imran’s bail petition?”

“A lot has happened in the country. The time has come for the rule of law to be established. The arrest will have to be reversed from where it was made,” he added. Subsequently, the CJP said the court would issue an “appropriate order” today. He added that the court was “very serious” about the matter. Ahead of Imran’s arrival in SC, security was tightened outside the apex court, with contingents of the Rangers and police, and bomb disposal squads called in. Only lawyers and journalists already present in courtroom number 1 — where the hearing was held — are allowed inside the room. The media also reported that the Islamabad DIG (security) had reached the court to review the security situation. Meanwhile, the PTI asked its supporters to stay away from the top court.