



Hamza credits PML-N for making Pakistan's defence invincible

LAHORE (NNI): In a statement issued on Sunday, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) vice-president Hamza Shehbaz highlighted the significant role played by his party in bolstering Pakistan's defence capabilities, making it invincible.

The statement was released on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer (May 28), a day commemorating Pakistan's nuclear tests.

Hamza Shehbaz highlighted that May 28 holds great importance not only for Pakistan but also for the entire Muslim Ummah. He praised PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif for his unwavering commitment to national interests, as he took the courageous step of approving nuclear tests, thereby transforming Pakistan into a nuclear power. This decision by Nawaz Sharif, according to Hamza Shehbaz, symbolizes national security, defence, and honour.

Asserting unity among PML-N members, Hamza Shehbaz expressed their unwavering dedication to national defense, development, and prosperity.

PTI women leaders' identification parade completed in Jinnah House attack case

LAHORE (NNI): The identification parade of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Alia Hamza, Sabuhi Inam, and Maryam Mazari in the Jinnah House attack and arson case was successfully concluded on Sunday. After the completion of a seven-day judicial remand, the police will present Alia Hamza, Sabuhi Inam, and Maryam Mazari in the anti-terrorism court tomorrow (Monday) following the completion of the identification parade in the Jinnah House attack case.

In the previous hearing, the investigation officer requested additional time to complete the identification parade of the suspects.

The investigating officer stated in court that the identification parade could not be conducted earlier due to the unavailability of the judicial magistrate. The jail warrants for the three women were presented in court, and Alia Hamza and the others were subsequently sent on judicial remand by the special court for their alleged involvement in the attack on Jinnah House. The Jinnah House, located in Lahore, was targeted in a violent attack and subsequent arson incident.

CS Sindh grieves over death of Dr. Semi Jamali

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Secretary (CS) Dr. Mohammed Sohail Rajput has expressed his grief and sorrow over the death of former executive director of JPMC Dr Semi Jamali.

He also condoled with the bereaved family members. He said that Dr Semi Jamali's services to the field of health would be remembered. He prayed for a higher place of the departed soul in Jannah.

Negotiations with Imran not possible: Saad

LAHORE (PPI): In connection with the negotiations with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique on Sunday made it clear that there was no way to negotiate with the embattled party following the events that transpired on May 9.

Speaking to media outside the Jinnah House in Lahore, Mr Rafique took a swipe at former prime minister Imran Khan over forming a seven-member committee in a bid to negotiate with the incumbent government. "Who's going to talk to them," he questioned. Mr Rafique claimed that Mr Khan had asked his team to end negotiations with the government, which were held last month on the orders of the Supreme Court.

In line with the May 9 vandalism, Mr Rafique had urged Mr Khan and the PTI leadership to admit their mistake and apologise to the entire nation.

"They [PTI] should issue a public apology. What the PTI did was not under the guise of politics," Mr Rafique added.

On Sunday, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif ruled out any possibility of holding talks with the PTI.

It comes minutes after PTI chief Imran Khan had formed a seven-member committee to hold negotiations with the PDM-led government.

Taking to Twitter, he wrote, "Talks are held with politicians only. No talks will be

held with the group that desecrated martyrs' graves, and terrorists who burned the country." The PTI committee includes senior vice president Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Parvez Khattak, Asad Qaisar, Haleem Adil Sheikh, Aon Abbas Buppi, Murad Saeed, and Hammad Azhar. Some of the leaders Mr Khan named are either in jail, hiding from arrests, or being speculated about leaving the party amid PTT's mass exodus. Earlier, PTI chief Imran Khan appealed the political stakeholders to hold "immediate talks" as the party had been seeing scores of its members parting their ways. Mr Khan said whenever he called for dialogue, he began to face mounted pressure. "Do not dare think that I am weak because whenever I call for it, police come outside my home, and warrants are issued," he added.

He went on to say that crackdown was launched against the party without investigating the attacks on Lahore's Commander House. He asked if anyone would like to harm the army, adding that attacking the army was akin to weakening the country.

Speaking to journalists earlier, Mr Khan said he could swear that he never asked his party activist to vandalise [national buildings], adding that how could he ask them to do so now even when he did not allow so after he survived an assassination attempt [in Wazirabad]. "If the PTI is popular with public, why will it adopt the policy of siege," he asked.

Lawyers' delegation calls on CM

LAHORE (APP): A delegation headed by President Lahore High Court Bar Association Rana Intizar Hussain met with the Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at CM office in which the delegation apprised him about the problems being faced by the lawyers community.

The CM assured to resolve the problems of lawyers community on preferential basis. He stated that treatment facilities in the hospital would be improved being established for the lawyers community and remarked that he would himself visit the hospital soon.

Mohsin Naqvi stated that construction of a parking plaza outside Aiwan-e-Adal to resolve traffic and parking problems would be reviewed. He directed Deputy Commissioner to allocate a land for the parking plaza and assured that every possible step would be taken for the lawyers community.

The delegation comprised Senior Vice President Asif Amin Goraya, Vice President Nadeem Anjum Khan, Vice President Model Town Courts Hadi Hussain Bhatti, Vice President Cantt Courts Farrukh Ahmad Khan, Secretary General Malik Kafel Khokhar, Secretary Omar Waqas Warriach and others.

Provincial Information Minister Amir Mir, Additional Chief Secretary, Secretary Law, CCPO Lahore and Deputy Commissioner were also present.

Child death: CM visits Children Hospital: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi visited Children Hospital after the death incident of a female infant due to overheating of incu-

bator in the nursery. The CM inspected the site of the incident and sought details from the doctors. Secretary Health and senior doctors accompanied him.

Mohsin Naqvi inquired about the well-being of other children admitted in the nursery and issued necessary directions with regard to properly looking after the children. He expressed his deep sense of sorrow and grief over the death of the infant and directed to follow medical protocol in the nursery. He asserted that no negligence would be tolerated with regard to looking after the infant children.

He also visited other wards and reviewed facilities being provided for the treatment of children over there.

Mohsin Naqvi directed the hospital administration to allocate one bed for one child for providing them proper treatment.

The CM constituted a 4-member inquiry committee in this regard to investigate the matter. The committee comprised Additional Secretary Health (Establishment), Doctor Muhammad Azhar, Doctor Amir Naseer and Director Punjab Healthcare Commission Doctor Mushtaq Ahmad. The committee after reviewing all the circumstances and incidents will submit its report within 24 hours. The committee after ascertaining those who committed negligence will put forth its recommendation to take action. Mohsin Naqvi directed to provide best treatment facilities to the children and asserted that zero tolerance would be shown on any further incident and an indiscriminate action would be taken against those for committing negligence.

Essarani assures safe recovery of 3 year old Samrat Kumar

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Minorities Affairs Minister Giyan Chand Essarani has strongly condemned the incident of kidnapping of 3-year-old Samrat Kumar from Kandhkot, saying that it is the extreme form of cruelty and brutality, the oppressors did not even spare an innocent child.

The minister said that Sindh government stands with the victim's family.



Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has also taken notice of this sad incident. He added that he is in contact with Sindh Police and especially Inspector General of Sindh police for the safe recovery of innocent child. Giyan Chand Essarani assured the family of Samrat Kumar that the innocent child will be recovered soon and culprits involved will be brought behind the bars.



KARACHI: Minister Information Sharjeel Inam Memon addressing during a press conference held at the Sindh Archives Complex in Clifton.

Nasir Shah, Sharjeel jointly inaugurated SWEEP project

KARACHI (NNI): Minister for Local Government Syed Nasir Hussain Shah and Minister Information Sharjeel Inam Memon inaugurated web series created for the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board under the SWEEP project, besides an anthem, an ost song and a video of two awareness messages have also been released.

Additional Chief Secretary Syed Najam Shah, MD Solid Waste Syed Imtiaz Shah, Project Director Sweep Zubair Ahmed Chana, Water and Sewerage Board Vice Chairman Najmi Alam, ZK Phils Director Zeeshan Khan, actor Ahsan Khan, actress Kanza Hashmi and other dignitaries were present in the ceremony. A large number of dignitaries and media representatives attended.

Minister LG address that the purpose of the web series is to inform the public so that they understand their responsibility in cleaning the city.

He added that there are still complaints of poor sanitation in some areas and that the situation should be

improved as soon as possible. With regard to awareness, he said that with the cooperation of citizens, we will be able to further improve the quality of cleanliness in the city. Today, a 4-episode web series, an anthem and 2 web awareness commercials have been launched in collaboration with SWEEP Project. I pay tribute to Zubair Ahmad Chana and his entire team, I hope that positive results will be achieved with their hard work and effort. This is the vision of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, for the fulfillment of which continuous efforts are going on and Sindh is being led towards development. He added that the scope of sanitation is being widened, apart from Karachi, Sindh Solid Waste has taken over the sanitation arrangements in other cities of Sindh as well.

Minister Information Sharjeel Memon said that first of all, I would like to pay tribute to the Minister of Local Government that it is his good initiative that the sanitation work was started in Karachi and other cities of Sindh after Karachi. As a Muslim,

cleanliness is part of our faith. Institutions do not succeed without the support of the people anywhere. There is a dire need for awareness to change social attitudes.

MD Solid Waste Syed Imtiaz Ali Shah said that since cleanliness is a continuous process, it is a challenge for us to keep the city clean and attract people towards it. Through the series we will be able to explain to the masses, He added that while expanding the scope of sanitation in Sindh, they are also surveying other cities to ensure sanitation arrangements there as well. He said that a strategy has also been formulated in connection with the arrangements for Eid-ul-Azha. Project Director SWEEP Zubair Ahmad Chana said in a briefing regarding the web series that many issues related to sanitation have been discussed in this series and the public, stakeholders and other civic agencies and organizations have been engaged to solve them. An anthem is created so that people can listen and through it we can convey our message to them.

Bilawal establishes organising committee for PPP labour wing

KARACHI (NNI): In a significant move, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has formed a six-member organising committee for the party's Labour wing on Sunday. The committee comprises prominent political figures from different regions of Pakistan.

The newly appointed committee members include seasoned politician Raza Rabbani, Chaudhry Manzoor, Saeed Ghani, Haji Talha Mehmood representing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

and Malik Ashiq Bhutta hailing from South Punjab.

Additionally, Iqbal Shah from Balochistan has been appointed to represent the province on the committee. The notification announcing the formation of the committee was issued under the directives of PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, demonstrating his commitment to strengthen the PPP's outreach to the labor community.

The committee's members, chosen for their political acumen and experi-

ence, are expected to play a crucial role in formulating and implementing policies aimed at protecting and advancing the rights of workers.

Their extensive involvement in regional politics is likely to contribute to the committee's ability to address specific labor-related challenges faced in their respective areas.

With the establishment of the organising committee, the PPP aims to further solidify its position as a political force that champions the rights of the working class.

Dr Seemin Jamali laid to rest in Karachi

KARACHI (PPI): Former Jinnah Hospital Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) executive director Dr Seemin Jamali was laid to rest in the DHA Phase VIII graveyard on Sunday. On Saturday, Ms Jamali passed away at 61 after prolonged illness. According to family sources, she was suffering from intestinal cancer and was admitted to Agha Khan University Hospital almost a week ago. She could not be resuscitated to life.

Her funeral prayers will be offered at Jinnah Hospital mosque after Asr prayer. Among his heirs are his husband Dr AR Jamali and two sons Omar Jamali and Babar Jamali.

After completing her medical education from Nawabshah, and attaining a degree of public health from Thailand, she joined the JPMC in 1988 as medical officer. She was appointed head of the emergency department in 1995 and was elevated to JPMC joint executive in 2010 before being appointed as the executive director in 2016. She retired from the post in 2021.

Faisal urges CJP to take notice of 'plight' of women prisoners

LAHORE (NNI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senator Faisal Javed on Sunday demanded the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial to take action on the "plight of women in jails across the country" and that women prisoners be released. Taking to Twitter, Mr Javed said, "People in other political parties, especially women and the media, should take a stand and raise their voices for women's rights. Where are the champions of women's rights today? Will they not at least raise their voice?"

On the other side, the identification

parade of PTI leaders Alia Hamza, Sabuhi Inam, and Maryam Mazari in the Jinnah House attack and arson case was successfully concluded on Sunday.

After the completion of a seven-day judicial remand, the police will present Alia Hamza, Sabuhi Inam, and Maryam Mazari in the anti-terrorism court tomorrow (Monday) following the completion of the identification parade in the Jinnah House attack case. In the previous hearing, the investigation officer requested additional time to complete the identification parade of the suspects.

Al-Khidmat, GCT to work for enrollment of out-of-school children

KARACHI (PPI): Al-Khidmat Foundation Pakistan, and Green Crescent Trust (GCT) have agreed to work together to jointly tackle the challenge of out-of-school children and illiteracy in backward areas of Sindh and Balochistan. The agreement to this effect was reached as the chiefs of the two non-profits attended the inauguration of a combined charitable school in the underprivileged town of Winder in Balochistan. The school has

been handed over to GCT by Al-Khidmat Foundation Women Wing (AKFWW). This is the second joint activity by the two charities.

Al-Khidmat Foundation Pakistan President, Dr Hafeez ur Rehman, who was the chief guest on the occasion, said that building quality schooling facilities in Balochistan would go a long way in tackling the issues of backwardness and mass poverty in the largest province of the country. He said that enrollment of out-

of-school children in Sindh and Balochistan had become such a gigantic task that the concerned charities working in the education sector had no option but to combine their resources and efforts for jointly tackling this pressing problem.

He said the concerned non-governmental organizations should collaborate with each other for the schooling of the children from deprived families instead of any competition for such a noble cause.



LAHORE: Youngsters jumping in to the canal to beat the heat in Provincial Capital City.

In the court of Jhangir Khan Judge Banking court II KPK Peshawar Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar Camp Court at D I Khan case No 31/1 Institution 18/05/2023 Date of Hearing 12/07/2023 NBP Main Branch DIK VS Muhammad Numan Babar S/o Fazal ur rahman Babar Qoam Babar R/o Haseeb Street Near Margala Merage Ladan Sheikh Yousaf Road DIK where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs, 2283974/- against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finances) Ordinance 2001, You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an expert decree shall be passed in favor of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issued today on 18-05-2023 under my signature and seal of the court.

Judge Banking II Peshawar

In the Court of Jhangir Khan Judge Banking court II KPK Peshawar Federal Judicial Complex Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar Camp Court at D I Khan Case No 24/1 Institution 18/05/2023 date of Hearing 11/07/2023 Bok Sarkalar road Branch DIK VS 1) Syed Umas Raza Shah S/o Syed Ghulam Jafar Shah R/o Blot Paka P/o Blot Sharif Tehsil Bahawalpur District DIK 2) Javed Iqbal S/o Ghulam Server R/o Ghagan Pur P/o Blot Sharif Tehsil Bahawalpur Distt DIK 3) Muhammad Iqbal Tehsil S/o Allah Dewaya R/o Jok Hayat walee Blot kacha P/o Blot Sharif Tehsil Bahawalpur where is the plaintiff Bank has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs, 1332986/- against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institutions (Recovery of Finances) Ordinance 2001, You are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspaper filling which an expert decree shall be passed in favor of the plaintiff Bank with costs. Issued today on 18-05-2023 under my signature and seal of the court.

Judge Banking II Peshawar



Govt to provide relief to people in upcoming budget

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali has said that the country is facing a serious financial crisis at the moment, adding the policies of the previous government have brought the financial affairs of the province to the verge of collapse.

Talking to former chief ministers, Chairman Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Pir Sabir Shah, provincial chairman QWP Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao, provincial president Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP), Mohammad Ali, former Governor, Iqbal Zafar Jhagra and others at Governor's House, he said that the current caretaker government and the federal government despite economic crisis are sincere to provide relief to the people of the province at newly merged districts in the upcoming annual budget.

Meanwhile, a 60-member delegation of the business community compris-

ing presidents and other officials of Waziristan, Bajaur, Dir, Swat chambers of commerce also met with the Governor and discussed various economic, social issues including, tax levies in the newly merged districts and former provincially administered tribal area (Pata) and other problems faced by the industry.

On this occasion, the joint delegation of the chambers presented their suggestions for the improvement of the country's economy, industry and business sector and requested for extension in the tax-concession period for the region.

Talking to the delegation, the governor said that the secret of the development of developed countries is unity in serving the interest of the country.

He said that our nation also has to adopt a common strategy for the development and prosperity of the country and collectively move ahead in domestic and national affairs.

May 28 momentous day in national history: Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Sunday said that 28th May is a momentous day in the national history of Pakistan, on this day, Pakistan emerged as the first Islamic nuclear power in the world. In a message on the eve of May 28 Yaum-e-Takbeer, Haji Ghulam Ali expressed his pride in this achievement. He said that it was Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who initiated the nuclear program, and Muhammad Nawaz Sharif made Pakistan an invincible nuclear power through atomic explosions.

Haji Ghulam Ali while highlighting significance of this day, said that on May 28, 1998, the successful nuclear tests conducted at the Chaghi showcased Pakistan as the first Islamic nuclear power to the world.

Haji Ghulam Ali emphasized the bravery, unmatched courage, and national pride associated with Yaum-e-Takbeer. He said that Yaum-e-Takbeer serves as a message to the enemies of the nation that those who display aggression against Pakistan will face disastrous consequences.

On 9th May, the enemies of peace and Pakistan set fire to the model of the Chaghi, a symbol of Pakistan's nuclear power, said Governor Ghulam Ali.

On Yaum-e-Takbeer, the entire nation should announce its separation from those who attack the country's defense installations on the Black Day of 9th May, the Governor added.

The Governor said that on Yaum-e-Takbeer, it is essential to demonstrate our determination to ensure national defense and security, and to stay united for the collective welfare of the nation.



PESHAWAR: Former Governor Iqbal Zafar Jhagra, Pir Sabir Shah and provincial president PMAP Mohammad Ali meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali.

BRT service at risk of closure

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which caters to 300,000 commuters in the provincial capital on a daily basis, is at risk of closure over a shortage of funds.

The Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit authorities in a letter penned to the KP caretaker government have demanded of the government to pay the last three months' dues worth Rs450 million for the continuation of the service.

The North-South Travels Limited, and East-West Transport Limited, drew the government's attention to the issue of the non-payment of dues.

It adds that it could deprive more than 300,000 people of transportation services, affecting their livelihood and domestic activities.

The letter says that the government is bound to release payment against monthly invoices within each month.

The non-payment of Rs 450 million is causing a severe financial burden and if the same continues, it is afraid that the operation of buses may be halted, the letter added.

Last year, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) initiated an investigation into alleged corruption in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Peshawar.

CJ PHC chairs D&SJ meeting for swift disposal



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Musart Hilali chaired meeting of all the District & Sessions Judges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to discuss issues of the significant expectations of the public and reinforcing their trust in the judiciary.

The judges of administrative committee of Peshawar High Court also attended the meeting.

The prime focus of the Chief Justice was swift disposal of family cases and those of under-trial prisoners.

The Family Judges, she urged, should play a proactive role in consolidating the social fabric by making strenuous efforts to resolve family disputes between the parties amicably through persuasive conciliatory sessions.

Further, the Chief Justice underlined the urgent need for concluding family cases within the statutory timeline.

As a result of her personal visits to several jails of the province after assuming the office, she went on to say, she came to know of miserable conditions of the prisoners due to over-

crowding coupled with the lack of facilities.

She emphasised the compelling need for prompt conclusion of the cases of under-trial prisoners.

She exhorted the District & Sessions Judges to make surprise visits in addition to the regular jail visits in order to alleviate the sufferings of the inmates.

She expressed her resolve to purge the judiciary of corrupt elements by demonstrating zero tolerance for illicit practices.

Finally, the Chief Justice underscored the need for strictly observing the dress code as well Court timings.

Minor girl dead, eight wounded

PESHAWAR (INP): An 11-year-old girl was killed and eight people suffered multiple injuries after the roof of single-room house collapsed in Landi Kotal's Gagra area on Sunday, rescuers and witnesses said.

Among the injured are women and children. Locals with the help of rescuers pulled the victims out of debris and shifted them to a hospital. The collapsed roof apparently got structural weakness.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali addressing a public gathering after inauguration of Tehkal Khyber Colony Road.

Direct flights between Karachi, Kuala Lumpur soon: Malaysian HC

PESHAWAR (APP): Malaysian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mohammad Azhar Mazlan has said that the direct flight between Kuala Lumpur and Karachi will be started soon to strengthen the economic and people to people contacts between Pakistan and Malaysia.

The High Commissioner of Malaysia in Pakistan, Mohammad Azhar Mazlan said this during the meeting with KP Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Mr Adnan Jalil here in the High Commission of Malaysia at Islamabad, the other day, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

He said that after the restoration of direct air flight connectivity will make economic, trade and social integration between both countries stronger and more sustainable. Similarly, bilateral cooperation and development in the field of tourism between both friendly countries will also increase.

The ambassador said that direct flights are currently operating between Lahore and Malaysia and in the near future, direct flights will be extended to other countries including the port city of Karachi.

He said that various sectors including direct flights between Malaysia and Pakistan were affected due to Covid-19, which will be restored once again.

The Malaysian envoy

said that the current development of Malaysia is due to the long and medium economic plan which is adjusted after a period of every five years.

He said that his social reforms also played an important role in the development of Malaysia, after which a united society played its full role in the development of Malaysia.

On this occasion, he said that the volume of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Malaysia is less than its potential, which requires further increase.

The Malaysian High Commissioner said that he especially invites the businessmen of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to play their full role in this process and cooperation to build relations with them.

He said that the business community, trade bodies and private sector have crucial role in the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries, which needs to be further strengthened.

The envoy said that there is a need for further improvement in bilateral trade between Pakistan and ASEAN regions.

He further said that Pakistan and Malaysia enjoy historical, ethnic and cultural relations which cover many areas and we want to pass-on this heritage to our young generation.

The High Commissioner said that the two countries have cordial bilateral rela-

tions and while the people of both countries have also been bonded in strong mutual relations.

He said that many families of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have migrated to Malaysia long decades ago and now there are strong ties between the families of both sides.

He said that people in both Pakistan and Malaysia are fond of tasty food and there are similarities in the food and drink of both countries.

On the occasion, talking to both cultures and cosine, he said that there is a similarity in the use of spices in both countries, that's why the taste of the food of both countries is quite similar.

He thanked the Minister for inviting him for participate in the inauguration of ASEAN Trade Desk at Federation Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI)

On this occasion, Minister of Commerce and Industry KPK Adnan Jalil expressed his good wishes for the Malaysian High Commissioner for his posting in Pakistan.

He was invited to be the Malaysian Ambassador to participate in the inauguration of the ASEAN Trade Desk in the Malaysian Seafarers Federation Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry which was accepted by the Malaysian Ambassador.

On this occasion, Adnan Jalil also expressed his

desire to lead a trade delegation from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Malaysia.

Free eye medical camp held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: To provide basic health facilities to the locals of far flung areas of Khyber district, FC North organised a three-day Free Eye Screening Medical and Surgical Camp in Bazzar Zakhkhel, Khyber district.

As many as 2500 patients were screened with the support of Pakistan Institute of Community Ophthalmology. While 1242 patients suffering from various eye diseases were examined and immediately treated. Among them 589 men, 424 women and 229 children were included.

After screening and various blood tests, 75 male and female patients were screened for cataract surgery and underwent immediate surgery. On this occasion, an 11-year-old girl was diagnosed as a case of bilateral keratoconus and will undergo a corneal transplant in association with the Pakistan Institute of Community Ophthalmology.

The cost of which is five lakh rupees. Cataract surgery is not available in Khyber district and surrounding areas.

KP-HCC commences assessments of category 1 hospitals in Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Care Commission (KP-HCC) has initiated a comprehensive assessment process for all Category 1 hospitals in Peshawar, with the aim of granting licenses to those meeting the prescribed standards. This assessment is being conducted by specialized teams of assessors, consisting of clinical, management, pharmacy, nursing, and biomedical engineering specialists.

The main objective of these assessments is to evaluate the quality of patient care provided by hospitals and ensure compliance with the established standards. By conducting thorough evaluations, the KP-HCC aims at enhancing the overall healthcare services/quality and promoting a safe and conducive environment for patients.

In recent months, assessments have been successfully completed for five hospitals. These hospitals include:

1. Peshawar Institute of Cardiology



2. Prime Teaching Hospital
3. Mercy Teaching Hospital
4. Abaseen Hospital
5. Health Care Net.

The assessments were conducted meticulously, taking into account various aspects of healthcare services and infrastructure. The KP-HCC is pleased to acknowledge the commit-

ment and cooperation shown by these hospitals during the evaluation process.

The remaining hospitals are also scheduled for assessment in the near future. The KP-HCC assures the public and healthcare stakeholders that the assessment process will be conducted with the utmost professionalism and transparency, ensuring fairness and impartial-

ity throughout the process.

The KP Health Care Commission reaffirms its dedication to improving the healthcare system throughout the province. By granting licenses to hospitals that meet the prescribed standards, the KP-HCC aims at raising the bar of healthcare services and contributing to the well-being of the community.

Youm-e-Takbeer: A momentous day that makes Pak's defense invincible

PESHAWAR (APP): Like other provinces, Youm-e-Takbeer (day of greatness) to mark the successful nuclear test conducted 25 years ago at Chagi district in Balochistan, was celebrated with great national enthusiasm in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday.

From Chitral to DI Khan and Kohistan to Khyber, the residents of all districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials of the government departments, NGOs, civil society organizations, intelligentsia, labourers and students participated in rallies, seminars, declamation contest and walks to celebrate Youm-e-Takbeer with immense zeal and enthusiasm.

28th May this year, marks the silver jubilee celebrations of the historical moment when Pakistan successfully detonated

nuclear devices in the Chagi district, Balochistan, and joined the prestigious club of the nuclear weapon states in world.

The successful six nuclear tests made Pakistan as the 7th nuclear weapon state of the world and 1st country of the Muslim Ummah.

The day dawned with special prayers in mosques for progress and prosperity of Pakistan, independence of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and eternal peace of all the martyrs of Pakistan.

Rich tributes were paid to the political leadership including former Prime Ministers Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, scientists and officials of all the relevant organizations for making Pakistan an atomic power.

"Pakistan was compelled to test the nuclear weapon in response to a series of nuclear tests by India on May 11-13, 1998 and has successfully conducted six nuclear test on May 28 of the same year to restore the security balance and maintain deterrence equilibrium in the region," said Manzoorul Haq, former Ambassador of Pakistan while talking to APP.

He said the historic day was a source of immense pride for the whole Pakistani nation and Muslim Ummah. The country's atomic capability increased its stature and respect among comity of nations besides its voice was strongly heard internationally, he remarked.

Brigadier (Retd), Mehmood Shah, former Secretary Law and Order of the est-

while Fata said that May 28 was a historic day that frustrated the nefarious designs of the enemy countries.

After the creation of Pakistan, he said that India continued hatching conspiracies by waging four wars against Pakistan, showing its hegemonic and aggressive designs.

Depriving people of Kashmir of their in-birth right of freedom, he said India had illegally landed its troops in the Muslims majority Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) capital Srinagar on October 26, 1947 and deprived its people of the right of self-determination as promised to them by the UN Security Council till to date.

The people of Jammu and Kashmir stood up against the Indians illegal occupation and succeeded

to liberate Azad Kashmir from the Indian yoke.

To take revenge of the crushing defeat in Kashmir, he said the cowardly Indian occupational forces launched pre-dawn attack on Lahore and Sialkot sectors on September 6, 1965 without warning or declaration of war.

He said Pakistani military backed by PAF, Pak Navy and the strong determination of the nation, had repulsed the cowardly attacks and foiled the nefarious designs of the aggressor.

He said Pakistani forces had occupied over 1,600 kilometers Indian territory during 1965 War and was in strong position to capture Delhi if the imposed war continued for few more days. "Our forces had reached upto Sutlej River bridge India and was nearer

to capture Delhi as PAF and Pakistan Artillery had broken back of the enemy troops."

Brigadier Mehmood Shah said India continued conspiracies against Pakistan and again attacked our western and eastern borders in 1971. The enemy attacks on civilian population inside Azad Kashmir during Kargil War and IAF attack at Balakot in February 2019 were sufficient proof of the India's aggressive designs against Pakistan.

He said Pakistan was left with no option but to detonate its nuclear devices to restore the balance of power and maintained deterrence equilibrium in the region.

Ikhtair Wali Khan, PMLN KP spokesman and former MPA said that 28th

May was a historic day in the history of Pakistan when former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif set aside all the international pressures and successfully conducted six nuclear tests at Chagi Balochistan in 1998.

He said Nawaz Sharif government knew that Pakistan's failure to respond against Indian tests would have made it vulnerable to its aggressive neighbor.

He said Pakistan was a resilient nation that came out of the economic quagmire following international sections in the wake of nuclear tests.

"Even today, the anti state elements continued hatching conspiracy against Pakistan and putting on fire the Chagi mountains model constructed in memory of the nuclear explosions in

the premises of Radio Pakistan, Peshawar on May 10, 2023 was evident of it," he said.

He said attacks on the government properties and defense installations on May 9-10 exposed the negative designs and barbaric mindsets of the attackers.

He said elements involved in burning of Chagi model, Radio Pakistan and Jinnah House Lahore besides others deserved no mercy and strict action was required so that no one could dare to repeat such vandalism in future.

The experts praised the services and contributions of the country's political and military leadership, scientists, engineers and all those who worked untiringly to make Pakistan a nuclear power in world.



In brief

Three outlaws arrested

D.I.KHAN (APP): Dera police arrested three outlaws during a crack-down against anti-social elements. Station House Officer (SHO) Nawab Shaheed Police station Umar Iqbal Khan while conducting a successful operation against the drug dealers arrested the accused namely Kaleemullah, son of Inayatullah, resident of Paniyala and recovered 111 grams of ice from the possession of the accused. While SHO Paharpur Attaullah Khan arrested one accused namely Samiullah, son of Haq Nawaz, resident of Dhalla. The accused was wanted in different heinous cases by local police. Another wanted criminal Shaf-qat Ullah, son of Aslam, resident of Larr was appeared at the police station after granted bail by the courts. Police registered the case against the arrested accused.

Two killed in accident

SARGODHA (APP): Two people were killed while another was injured in an accident in Laxian police limits near here on Sunday. Police said Usman, 42, Imran, 47, and Khalil, 38, of 76 SB were travelling on a motorcycle when a speeding vehicle hit them on Lahore Sargodha Road. Resultantly, Usman and Imran died on the spot while Khalil received injuries. Police concerned reached the spot, shift the bodies and the injured to a local hospital.

Encroachments removed

FAISALABAD (APP): The Municipal Corporation Faisalabad (MCF) removed encroachment from 72 sites in the city and imposed a fine of Rs76,000 on 180 violators. A spokesman for the district administration said on Sunday that a vigorous campaign was launched against encroachments in the city. During the operation, the MCF staff removed encroachment from 72 sites and imposed a total fine of Rs76,000 on 180 shopkeepers over encroachment.

15 arrested, arms recovered

SARGODHA (APP): Police arrested 15 criminals, including four proclaimed offenders, and recovered weapons and narcotics. Police on Sunday said the accused were identified as Faisal, Adil, Abid, Kashif, Aziz, Ali, Intiaz, Dilawar, Hussain, Umair, Hamza, Amir, Aslam, Sultan and Mohsin. Police also recovered 12 pistols, nine guns, 459-litre liquor and 1-kg hashish. Cases have been registered against the accused.

Two persons abducted

WAH CANTT (APP): Two persons including a teenage girl were abducted in two different incidents in the limits of Wah Saddar Police station on Sunday. In the first incident, Amjad Ali reported to police that his 14 years old daughter was going to school when she was abducted by an unknown person. In another incident, Nighat Bibi informed to same police that her husband named Asif Khan was abducted by unknown persons. Wah Saddar Police registered two separate cases.

Three police cops suspended

FAISALABAD (APP): Three cops of Thikriwala police station were suspended on charges of negligence and abuse of power. A police spokesman said on Sunday that the city police officer received a complaint that three officials, including ASI Ali, Muharrar Rana Zawar and Naib Muharrar Adnan Basra, involved in negligence and abuse of powers.

Nawaz Sharif made country's defence invincible, says Asif

SIALKOT (APP): Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Sunday said 25 years ago on May 28th, Pakistan became a nuclear power and our leader, former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, made the country's defence invincible by detonating nuclear weapons.

"Our defence has become very strong due to achieving nuclear deterrence", he expressed while addressing the ninth convocation of a private college in Sialkot as the chief guest.

Khawaja Asif said that it was a matter of pride that the daughters of our nation were going ahead to start their working life after completing their educational degrees. "I heartily congratulate all these daughters and their parents for their success. I do and pray that May Allah bless them with many successes in the future," the Minister said.

He said that it should not be the goal to get only BA, MA degree, adding, "but I advise all students to get a purposeful education because only getting a purposeful education can help us to move forward. We can deal with the challenges we are facing."

The minister said that in the present era, getting purposeful education including IT was very important because development was not possible without it.

He added that political parties or political leaders were not our red line, but the soil of this country and our martyrs should be our red line, who have defend-

ed this dear country and our safety and did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for it.

He said that the former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto started to make the country a nuclear power, but it was completed by the Pakistan Muslim League (N), the Pakistan Army has also played a very important role in the nuclear assets of the country.

"Our Pakistan Army today is also protecting its borders as well as its nuclear assets for which we pay tribute to them."

He said that we should value our martyrs and ghazis because nations that forget their martyrs and desecrate their monuments cannot flourish.

He said that the progress we saw in the country from 2013 to 2017, after 2018, was again pushed towards destruction, adding, "which we are trying day and night to manage, but no significant success has been achieved so far. Nevertheless, we are determined that under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, we will be able to take the country on the path of construction, development and prosperity very soon."

While exhorting the youth, he said that our young generation should show patience and tolerance, develop patience and respect each other's opinion.

He said that May 9th events were the worst violent form of dissent in national life, which was hardly condemned, while also targeting the very insti-

tutions that protect us.

He said, "our martyrs are our benefactors to whom we salute, thanks to the sacrifices of martyrs we are breathing in free air today, soldiers of Pakistan Army are fighting against terrorism with their lives on the palm of their hand and so we should appreciate their sacrifices."

Khawaja Asif said that it was our forces who were sacrificing their lives to provide us a peaceful life.

He said that there were government employees all over the country who did not agree to be transferred from one city to another and start telling their compulsions. "But I never heard of it because these soldiers don't have this facility, this facility is only for other government employees and they are the soldiers of our Pakistan Army who cover the borders of the country. Sacrificing their lives for defense."

At the end of his speech, he thanked the residents of Sialkot and said that since 1991 till today, the people of his city have blessed me and always honored me.

He said, "I have been a Member of Parliament seven times which is a great honor for me in which the people of my city have a role after Allah Almighty and I will always be indebted to the love of the people of my city."

At the end of the ceremony, Chief Guest Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif distributed certificates and credentials to the students.



SIALKOT: Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif addressing 9th Convocation of Shadab Girls College.

Father and son gunned down

SHIKARPUR (INP): A man and his son were gunned down by rivals over residential property dispute in Shikarpur district on Sunday.

As per detail, the incident was reported from Mangat Wah village located within the jurisdiction of Nabi Bakhsh Waggan police station.

On receiving information about the incident, police reached at the spot and took the dead body into custody and shifted them to hospital for autopsy. The killers managed to flee the scene.

Police said the victims have been identified as Phalwan Mandhrani and Mehar Mandhrani. The killings were seemingly a result of an old rivalry between two groups of Mandhrani tribe, however they had started investigating the matter, the police added.

The upper parts of Sindh are notorious for the killings related to tribal and family conflicts as well as family honour. In one of such incidents that gained media attention, Dr Mohammad Ajmal Sawand, a teacher associated with the Institute of Business Administration, was gunned down over "honour" in April this year.

At that time, the police said the killing followed a rivalry between two groups of Sundrani and Sawand clans on a matter of honour in Kandhkot district.

Expired food items discarded

ATTOK (INP): The food safety team of Punjab Food Authority Attock Sunday discarded huge quantity of expired, substandard and adulterated food items besides imposing fine worth of rupees lacs to the food outlets in tehsil Pindigheb and Fatehjang.

According to a spokesman of PFA Attock, the food safety teams conducted testing and checking in the shopping centres of the tehsil Pindigheb and Fatehjang to ensure provision of hygienic and qualitative food stuffs to the consumers.

During the checking, they seized 281 litres of substandard cold drinks, 37 liters milk, 24 liters rancid oil, 05 kg sweets which were injurious to public health. The owners of the outlets were also imposed fine under Punjab Food Authority Act with the stern direction to maintain their standard as per SOPs of the Punjab Food Authority failing which further legal proceeding will also be initiated against them, accordingly.

'Reforms in cleanliness, sanitary system imperative'

FAISALABAD (APP): Commissioner Silwat Saeed said that necessary reforms were imperative in cleanliness and sanitary system of the city.

Chairing a meeting of the Faisalabad Waste Management Company (FWMC) here on Sunday, she directed the FWMC to activate monitoring officers in all zones of the city so that they could properly check sanitation and cleanliness.

In this connection, steps were also being taken on a war-footing for arranging machinery for the FWMC so that it could improve its overall performance.

She also directed the FWMC authorities to immediately develop a Mobile App for the company and took briefing about cleanliness plan regarding Eidul Azha.

The commissioner directed to prepare about 100,000 collection bags for Eidul Azha and said a comprehensive roster should be evolved and implemented during Eid days. Chief Executive Officer FWMC Azeem Shaukat Awan briefed the commissioner about Eid plan.

Deputy Commissioner Ali Anan Qamar and others were also present in the meeting.

May 9 vandalism paralyzed life: Muqam

— exposes barbaric mindsets of roiters

DIR UPPER (APP): Adviser to the Prime Minister for Political and Public Affairs and National Heritage, Engr Amir Muqam here Sunday said that May 9 vandalism have paralyzed life after violent attacks on the motorways toll plazas, putting on fire of the government buildings and private properties besides ransacking of the defence installations.

Addressing a big public gathering here, Engr Amir Muqam said Jinnah House, Radio Pakistan Peshawar, Swat Motorway toll plaza and others properties were burnt down, defense installations attacked and routine traffic was disrupted on May 9-10 by the attackers.

He said that Chagi mountains model that was constructed in memory of May 28, 1998 nuclear explosions were also burnt down at premises of Radio Pakistan Peshawar.

Engr Amir Muqam said the loot and plunders on May 9-10 have exposed the wicked face of the aggressor and law would take it's own course in these cases.

Amir Muqam said that the dream of Imran Niazi to



make politics on dead bodies was not fulfilled. He highly appreciated the maximum restraint showed by our law enforcement agencies and security forces during May 9-10 vandalism despite the provoking attitude of the attackers.

He said that strict action was being taken against attackers, abettors and planners of the May 9-10 vandalism under the law.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Pakistan Tahrik Insaf has disappointed people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on all

fronts and that PTI would face people wrath in the upcoming general elections. He said the time of PTI was over and Pakistan Muslim League N would form next government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the basis of performance in centre.

Later, the Adviser to the Prime Minister said that Grid Station has been completed at a cost of Rs1 billion that would help address problems of electricity voltage besides reduce load shedding significantly in Dir Upper.

Youm-e-Takbeer celebrated in Dera

D.I.KHAN (APP): The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Dera Ismail Khan on Sunday organized a grand ceremony in connection with Youm-e-Takbeer here at District Secretariat of the party.

The ceremony was presided over by PML-N District President Rehan Malik Advocate and attended by party's district General Secretary Chaudhry Riaz Advocate, Dr Abdullah Zafri, Roshan Zameer Leghari, Zeeshan Raj, Hashmat ur Rahman, Danish Mujahid and Rizwan Saeed.

The nation celebrates every year as it was a historic day when the country conducted successful nuclear tests 25 years ago.

The speakers said that Pakistan became the first Islamic nuclear power due to the brave leadership of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, who made the country's defense impregnable.

Commenting on the May 9 incidents, they termed the day as one of the black days in the country's history.

They said it was terrorism and extremism done

large number of workers.

The event was addressed by Rehan Malik, Chaudhry Riaz, Dr. Abdullah Zafri, Roshan Zameer Leghari, Zeeshan Raj, Hashmat ur Rahman, Danish Mujahid and Rizwan Saeed.

The nation celebrates every year as it was a historic day when the country conducted successful nuclear tests 25 years ago. The speakers said that Pakistan became the first Islamic nuclear power due to the brave leadership of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, who made the country's defense impregnable.

Commenting on the May 9 incidents, they termed the day as one of the black days in the country's history. They said it was terrorism and extremism done

under the shadow of a political party. On that day, the Jinnah House was burnt while GHQ, Masajid and government property were attacked.

They said the party leaders were kept inciting each other on the telephone. The speakers demanded that the people involved in these horrific acts must be punished by registering cases against them under Army act.

Moreover, they demanded that a complete ban should be imposed on the party involved in May 9 incidents.

The whole nation was standing with the Pak Army and other national institutions. Pakistan Army and other security forces rendered many sacrifices for the sake of the country.

Rally held to show solidarity with Pak Army

QUETTA (APP): Tribal and political leader Hamza Khan Nasir on Sunday said that the Pakistan Army was our red line and the people who attacked military and national installations on May 9 and desecrated mar-

tyrs' memorials did not deserve any concession.

Action should be taken against such persons according to the law, the Pakistan Army and other security agencies have sacrificed their lives for the establishment of law and order in the country and the end of terrorism, he added.

He expressed these views while addressing the participants of the rally held in favour of the Pakistan Army here.

Earlier, the rally was taken out from Airport Road under the leadership of Hamza Khan Nasir and other tribal elders which reached the Press Club after marching different roads.

The participants of the rally carried banners and placards which described that legal action would be taken against those involved in the May 9 incidents.

Addressing the participants of the rally, Hamza Khan Nasir said that on May 9, under the guise of protest, the way miscreants attacked military and

national facilities, the Commander's House, Radio Pakistan and other facilities and desecrated the martyrs' memorial, it was not acceptable in any way.

He said that they should be brought to justice by registering cases against the people who attacked military installations and desecrated martyrdom memorials so that no one could dare to do such a move in the future.

He said that Pakistan Army, FC, Police, Levies and other forces sacrificed their lives for the establishment of peace and the elimination of terrorism from the country, due to which terrorists were erected in the country.

But the protestors did not leave the memorials of the martyrs who did not care about their lives, due to which the families of the martyrs and millions of Pakistani people have been hurt, such people should be arrested immediately and punished severely, he maintained.

Journalists hold protest for release of kidnapped child



Allahdad Chandio

LARKANA: The journalists of Warah Taluka of Qamber Shahdadkot district hold protest demonstration in front of press club for release of kidnapped child Kandakot Samrat Kumar.

Senior journalist Muzaffar Qazi Ahmed said that there are conspiracies

against the Hindu community while they are also insecure from looters and dacoits.

They requested the Chief Minister Sindh and Chief Justice Singh High Court to help in release kidnapped child from the kidnappers.

Meanwhile, Sindh United Party (SUP) hold a protest against the deteriorating law and order situa-

tion and unrest in Taluka Warah. The protestors said that for the past several months peace has been lost from Warah Tehsil, while the law and order situation has worsened.

They further said that there is not a single day in which there is no crime. They appealed to IGP to improve law and order situation in Warah.

Tahir: Non-state MLAs undermined state's dignity

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): Central leader Muttahida Qaumi Movement Azad Jammu and Kashmir and former minister of tourism and transport, Muhammad Tahir Khokhar has said that it is high time to make non-state and non-Kashmiri elements a lesson and set an example for these elements so that no one can use influence and money.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that non-Kashmiri and non-state MLAs have undermined the state's dignity and Kashmir identity. We have given all the evidence for justice and protection of Kashmiri in the Supreme Court, more things are coming, they will provide very soon. They divided the Kashmiri identity and the resident state by making it

the fiefdom of the ancestors and kept licking the pleasures of power and the state treasure as a lion mother.

Tahir Khokhar said that now is the time to take account of everything, all privileges and resources will be taken back from the fake and non-Kashmiri MLAs who are looting state resources and will be deposited in the government treasury.

He said that they continued to take interests from government resources and state treasury so boldly as if they thought of them as mother lions.

The MQM AJK leader said that the Supreme Judiciary should take action against those elements and departments including these fake MLAs, who issue them state subjects

without any evidence and without any Kashmiri papers, how their fake residents are made a fake state, he said. He said that these black sheep will also be brought before the people who keep creating a fake state for the non-Kashmiri elements and playing with the state. Now everyone will be accounted for.

He said that the MLAs who created fake resident state and the black sheep who made them resident state who sold their faith and made Kashmiri identity to fake elements. Now no Kashmiri will remain silent MLAs with fake resident state and other fake residents will make an example to the state-owning elements so that no one can look down upon the Kashmiri identity.

Event regarding women empowerment held

SARGODHA (INP): The Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries Sargodha on Sunday organized an event regarding women empowerment.

The purpose of the event was to highlight problems and issues faced by the women and the role of the

woman chamber to resolve their issues.

In this regard, the women chamber was imparting skills to women for running their businesses and enable them to earn themselves and their families.

This was said by Shazia

Bangash, Manza Goindi, Dr Nusrat, Sadia Khan, Madam Shahnaz, Madam Tanzeela and other members of the women chamber in the event.

They said the women chamber was actively working for welfare of women.



Spain’s local elections set to put PM on the back foot

MADRID (AFP/APP): Spain votes Sunday in local and regional polls which will be a barometer for a year-end general election that surveys suggest Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will lose, heralding a return of the right.

The stakes are high for Sanchez, whose Socialist party governs the eurozone's fourth-largest economy in coalition with the far-left Podemos.

Voters will cast their ballots for mayors in 8,131 municipalities across the country while also electing leaders and assemblies in 12 of Spain's 17 regions -- 10 of which are currently run by the Socialists.

Voting opens at 9:00 am (0700 GMT) and closes at 8:00 pm with some 35.5 million voters eligible to cast ballots in the local elections and 18.3 million eligible to vote in the regional elections.

Spain does not issue exit polls, with the initial results due out around 10:00 pm.

If the left "exceeds expectations and manages to retain control of most regional governments in play... this would suggest the national elections will be very closely fought, and bode well for the left's chances of staying in power", Eurasia Group analyst Federico Santi said this week.

But if the polls -- which forecast a shift to the right -- are correct, success at a regional level will provide opposition leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo, head of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), with the "momentum" he needs to win the

end-of-year election, Santi said.

Sunday's vote finds Sanchez, in office since 2018, at several disadvantages.

He faces voter fatigue with his left-wing government, soaring inflation -- even though the rate is lower in Spain than other EU nations -- and the resulting fall in purchasing power.

He has also struggled to contain the fallout from the repeated crises that have shaken his left-wing coalition. Feijoo has done everything in his power to turn these elections into a national referendum on Sanchez.

In campaigning he has denounced the prime minister as not only pandering to the far left, but also to the Basque and Catalan separatist parties on which his minority government has relied for parliamentary support to push its reforms through.

"I have come to ask for the votes from the Spain that wants to overthrow 'Sanchismo' this coming Sunday," Feijoo said closing his campaign on Friday night, using a derogatory term for Sanchez's policies. In his own closing remarks, Sanchez focused on his government's record in bolstering the economy, fighting a drought and managing Spain's water resources -- an increasingly important issue as climate change gathers pace.

"Social democratic policies suit Spain a lot better than neoliberal policies, because we manage the economy a lot better," he said.

Of the 12 regions where new lead-

ers will be elected, 10 are currently run by the Socialists, either alone or in coalition.

The number of regions that the PP manages to wrest from the Socialists will be important in determining the public perception of whether Feijoo has won this first round -- and whether his election as premier at the year's end is a foregone conclusion.

But Feijoo has his own problems -- namely the far-right Vox, the third-largest party in parliament, which hopes to become an indispensable partner for the PP.

Since last year, the two parties have governed together in just one region, Castilla y Leon, which will not be voting on Sunday.

Aware that key to winning the general election is conquering the centre, Feijoo has sought to moderate the PP's line since taking over as leader last year, while also keeping Vox at a distance. A strong regional showing by Vox would put him on the back foot. The election campaign, which ended on Friday, was marred in its final week by allegations of fraud involving postal votes, which have largely implicated individuals allied with the Socialists.

Although the impact remains hard to assess, the allegations pose yet another hurdle for Sanchez, who has made good governance a priority for his administration, in contrast with the corruption of various former right-wing governments.

Sudanese army chief asks UN to dismiss envoy

KHARTOUM (AFP/APP): Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has accused UN special envoy Volker Perthes of stoking a brutal conflict with paramilitaries, the latest in a series of apparent moves to bolster his war effort.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said he was "shocked" by Burhan's letter, which requested "the nomination of a replacement" to Perthes and accused him of committing "fraud and disinformation" in facilitating a political process which broke down into six weeks of devastating urban warfare.

Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, were meant to meet for negotiations facilitated by the UN on April 15, the day they turned Khartoum into a war zone.

The meeting aimed to restore a transition to civilian rule disrupted since 2021 when Burhan and Daglo together seized power in a coup before falling out. As their feud worsened, the international community tried to get them to reach a deal on integration of Daglo's RSF into the regular army.

Since late last year Perthes and the UN mission in Sudan, which he heads, have been the target of several protests by thousands of military and Islamist supporters who accused

Perthes of "foreign intervention" and demanded his dismissal.

Similar protests have taken place in the eastern city of Port Sudan since the war started.

Perthes had maintained his "optimism" and said the war took him "by surprise".

In the letter, Burhan accused Perthes of bias and of not respecting "national sovereignty."

He said Perthes presented a misleading picture "of consensus" in his reports to the UN, and "without these signs of encouragement, the rebel leader Daglo would not have launched his military operations".

It has never, however, been possible to verify who fired the first shots.

The fighting across Sudan has killed more than 1,800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations says more than a million people have been displaced within Sudan, in addition to 319,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries, raising concerns for regional stability.

George Clooney, the actor and longtime advocate for human rights in Sudan, called on the international community to "up its focus".

"We cannot look away," he said.

In a statement from UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric, Guterres said he was "shocked by the letter" from

Burhan and "proud of the work done by Volker Perthes and reaffirms his full confidence in his Special Representative".

The US State Department voiced its "strong support" for Perthes and its "concern" over Burhan's letter calling for his resignation.

A one-week ceasefire brokered by the US and Saudi Arabia expires Monday night.

The two nations called on the warring parties to continue talks on extending the ceasefire to help in the "delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance" to civilians, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

In a joint statement on Friday, the mediators "noted improved respect for the agreement" but said there was nevertheless "isolated gunfire in Khartoum".

Burhan last week officially sacked Daglo as his deputy in the ruling Sovereign Council, replacing him with former rebel leader Malik Agar.

But even after reports of Burhan's letter emerged, Agar said he had spoken to Perthes about "ways to resolve the crisis and end the war".

The army is now also seeking to reinforce its ranks. On Friday the defence ministry called on "army pensioners" and reservists to head to command units, which the RSF called a "dangerous decision".

Over 1,500 arrested at climate protest in The Netherlands

THE HAGUE (AFP/APP): More than 1,500 people were arrested during a protest by the Extinction Rebellion climate group in The Hague on Saturday, Dutch police said.

Activists blocked a section of a motorway during the afternoon in protest against Dutch fossil fuel subsidies.

Police said they had used water cannon to disperse activists blocking a major road in the city, and arrested "a total of 1,579 people... 40 of whom will be prosecuted" on charges including vandalism.

One of the activists bit a policeman during his arrest, police said.

According to Extinction Rebellion, some 7,000 people gathered to join the demonstration.

Anticipating the water cannon, some wore swimsuits or carried umbrellas as they sat in protest across the A12 motorway, holding banners and signs.

The protest marks the

seventh organised by Extinction Rebellion in the same section of motorway at The Hague, close to the parliament and main ministry buildings.

But Saturday saw the highest number of people arrested at a protest yet, according to Dutch news agency ANP.

"We're going to stay here until they drag us away," said postgraduate student Anne Kerevers, 31.

"Climate change is an unfolding crisis and we know the cause and it's still being subsidised by our government and it needs to stop," she told AFP.

Several Dutch celebrities were among the protesters, including actor Carice van Houten, best known for her role as Melisandre in the hit TV series "Game of Thrones".

Van Houten posted a video on Instagram showing herself wearing a red poncho, getting drenched from a water cannon.

ANP reported that she

was arrested and later allowed to return home, but did not specify whether she was among those who will be prosecuted.

Police said they had repeatedly "given activists the opportunity to end their action and leave" before using the water cannon and making arrests.

"We've been coming back every month, or every two months, and every time the number (of protesters) has doubled," said Aaron Pereira, a spokesman for Extinction Rebellion.

"There is broad popular support for real climate action and people are waking up to the fact that the government is actively going against this by subsidising the fossil fuel industry." The environmental campaign group, shortened to XR, has become known for the disruptive and headline-catching stunts which have become their trademark. In recent years the group has caused huge

disruption, hitting roads, airports and other public transport networks with direct action protests against climate change.

But in January it called a temporary halt to its high-profile stunts, and instead promised to mobilise huge numbers against what it sees as government inaction against global warming.

In April it held four days of action in London, including mobilising thousands to rally outside the UK parliament.

In recent months it has also rallied at airports across Europe, including protests at Eindhoven airport in The Netherlands in March. This week it joined other groups in demonstrating against Europe's biggest private jet sales fair in Geneva.

Some activists chained themselves to the planes on display, and air traffic was briefly disrupted at the airport due to people on the tarmac.

70 years after first summit, Everest keeps giving

KHUMJUNG (AFP/APP): When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa first climbed Everest 70 years ago, they paved the way for thousands of foreign climbers to try to follow in their footsteps.

The eight-day trek to the Everest base camp is among the most popular multi-day hikes in Nepal, with tens of thousands of tourists making the journey every year.

What were small agrarian villages when the British expedition passed through in 1953 have since been transformed into tourist hubs with hotels, tea houses and equipment shops, boosting the livelihoods of local communities.

In many homes, three generations have found employment in mountaineering -- a far more lucrative occupation than farming or yak-herding. The work is hazardous by definition, but in a climbing season of about three months, an experienced guide can make up to \$10,000 -- several times the country's average annual income. And other Sherpas and Himalayan community members have opened restaurants and guest-houses that line Everest's guide trail.

Veteran mountain guide Phurba Tashi Sherpa was born and raised in Khumjung, a village about 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) from base camp.

He grew up watching his father

and uncles go to the mountains for work, and soon joined them on expeditions, eventually climbing Everest 21 times before he retired.

"There would be just a few expeditions before but now there are so many every year," he said.

"That means an increase in income. It has helped improve the lifestyle here. A lot has changed."

Since the first British teams set their sights on summiting Everest in the 1920s, Nepali climbers -- mostly from the Sherpa ethnic group -- have been by their side.

"Sherpa" became synonymous with high-altitude guiding as they became the backbone of the multimillion-dollar industry, bearing huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

Now local expedition groups -- instead of playing second fiddle to foreign climbing agencies -- bring the bulk of paying clients into Nepal.

And a younger generation of Nepali climbers is slowly being recognised in their own right.

Renowned Italian climber Reinhold Messner told AFP in a 2021 interview that it was a well-deserved climb up the ladder.

"It is an evolution," he said. "And this is also important for the future economy of the country."

The first ascent of Everest brought

Nepal to the world's attention and its mountains have since captivated adventurers and tourists alike.

That has played a crucial role for Nepal's branding as a destination, according to tourism writer Lisa Choegyal.

"Through Covid and earthquakes and all the other setbacks, the insurgency even, that Nepal has suffered over the decades, mountaineering has really endured," she said.

The Khumbu region welcomes more than 50,000 trekkers a year.

"It is a gift of the mountains and we have to thank the first summit for opening this region to tourism," said Mingma Chhiri Sherpa, chairman of the local municipality.

"Education and modern amenities have come here because of it." Driven to help the community he worked with, Hillary funded the region's first school in Khumjung and is said to have hauled timber himself to help build it. One of its first students, Ang Tsering Sherpa, now owns an expedition company. "It is because of mountaineering that the young Sherpas today have higher education," he said. "It has brought a wave of economic prosperity." More than 10 percent of Nepal's are employed in tourism and the government this year collected over \$5 million in Everest permit fees alone as a record number of summit hopefuls arrived.

Planet-friendly farming takes root in drought-hit Tunisia

CAP NEGRO (AFP/APP): Saber Zouani lost his job as a waiter when the Covid pandemic ravaged the Tunisian tourism sector, so he decided to try something new and started a permaculture farm.

Now he grows all the food he needs and has become a pioneer of the style of ecological agriculture that is gaining fans worldwide, including in his North African country.

Many hope it will help Tunisia weather the impacts of climate change and wean it off its reliance on global supply chains, including grain and fertiliser imports from war-torn Ukraine and Russia.

In his western home town of Cap Negro, Zouani, 37, proudly showed off his three-hectare (seven-acre) farm, set up to mimic natural ecosystems in line with ideas popularised in the 1970s by Australian ecologists.

Permaculture, as an alternative to industrial agriculture, aims to work in harmony with the environment, keep soil structures intact, and do without artificial inputs such as chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

"No, these are not weeds," said Zouani, a biotechnology graduate, pointing to nettles and dandelions growing wild all around his rows of onions, peppers and radishes.

When he harvests his vegetables, he said, he puts the excess green matter back onto the soil to slow evaporation -- hoping to keep the ground as moist as a forest floor covered with fallen leaves.

Such methods are especially useful in Tunisia where an unprecedented drought has parched the



countryside and left water reservoirs at dangerously low levels this spring.

At his farm, Zouani captures precious rainwater in a pond and only sparingly waters his plants, which are all grown from his own seeds. Zouani also keeps cows, sheep, goats and chickens and composts their droppings to create soil enriched with the nitrogen-rich natural fertiliser.

"We need to create living soil, attract earthworms, fungi and all the nutrients for our plants and trees," said Zouani.

Permaculture, he said, draws on farming methods and wisdoms of centuries past -- "returning to our roots, to the traditional methods used by our grandparents".

Zouani said he earns around 300 dinars (\$100) a month from selling farm produce, with enough left over to make him, his brother and their elderly parents self-sufficient.

In two or three years, he hopes to make "a decent income" and turn his farm, named "Om Hnia" in honour of his late grandmother,

into an eatery and eventually a rural eco-lodge.

Zouani started off more than two years ago with the help of the Tunisian Association of Permaculture, which gave him initial training and then financial support for basic equipment.

The group's "Plant Your Farm" project aims to create 50 micro-farms over five years, of which around 30 are already up and running, said its president Rim Mathlouthi.

The goal, Mathlouthi said, is to "demonstrate to the authorities and other farmers that permaculture is a profitable and efficient agricultural system which brings back biodiversity when the soil is depleted from ploughing and chemical inputs".

She said the initiative, with funding from Switzerland and others, even covers Tunisia's sun-baked arid regions and aims to entice jobless young people to cultivate abandoned family land.

It also hopes to help change a model "where the Tunisian farmer loses

money because he is constantly spending, for a very small yield, on seeds, fertilisers and pesticides", said Mathlouthi.

Permaculture also aims to help Tunisia adapt to the searing drought that has badly impacted a farm sector centred on wheat, barley and other water-intensive cereals.

"Crises such as water stress or the Ukraine war are opportunities to promote solutions such as agro-ecology and permaculture," said Mathlouthi.

To help Tunisia's new eco-farmers sell their organic produce and spread the word on permaculture, the association has promoted farmers' markets and created a "citizen food" label.

Families flocked to a recent workshop at a school in the northern city of Bizerte, where they learnt green farming techniques and sampled their tasty produce.

"These are healthy products," enthused father-of-three Salem Laghouati, 44. "It's important to know what you're eating."

Indian Olympic wrestlers detained as latest protest escalates

DELHI (BBC): Two Olympic wrestlers have been detained by police in India during the latest protest against the alleged sexual abuse of female athletes.

Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik were among those trying to march to Delhi's new parliament on Sunday.

They were stopped by hundreds of police, who were on duty for the building's inauguration.

Footage showed protesters climbing over barricades and being carried away by the authorities.

Two-time World Championship medalist Vinesh Phogat and her sister Sangeeta were also among the country's top wrestlers to be detained.

"This is wrong," Ms Malik told reporters after she had been placed on a bus by the authorities.

"We were walking quietly, they dragged us forcefully and detained us and they're not even telling us where we will be taken."

"Our people are not being allowed to march," said Mr Phogat, adding that the protesters "requested with folded hands" that police let them go and that they would go peacefully.

The incident happened as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was officially opening the new parliament nearby, which has replaced the

British-era building.

Most opposition parties boycotted the ceremony after criticising the government for not asking President Droupadi Murmu, who is head of state, to open it.

Police claimed the protesting wrestlers had not followed their directions and that they had detained those who had tried to break the barricades. "They broke the law," Delhi's Special Commissioner of Police, Dendrapa Pathak told local media.

"Regarding further action, we would ascertain what rules have been violated and then take action by following due legal process."

The police also removed tents and other items from the site where the protesters have been camped out for weeks. Their handling of the march has been criticised by a number of opposition politicians. "Strongly condemn the way Delhi Police manhandled Sakshi Malik, Vinesh Phogat and other wrestlers," tweeted West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee from the All India Trinamool Congress party. "It's shameful our champions are treated in this manner."

Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is from the Aam Aadmi Party, called the police's behaviour "very wrong and con-

demnable". Ms Malik - the first Indian woman to win an Olympic wrestling medal in 2016 - later tweeted that once she and her fellow protesters were released they would begin their "satyagraha", a form of non-violent resistance, again. The demonstrators accuse wrestling officials of sexually harassing women in the sport. That includes the head of its governing body, Brij Bhushan Singh, who denies the claims. Their protests began in January but were called off the same month after Mr Singh was stripped of his administrative powers by the sports ministry and the government promised to investigate their complaints. The wrestlers restarted their protests in April, calling for his arrest. Earlier this month, they claimed they were abused and assaulted by Delhi police. The Indian Olympic Association set up a committee to investigate the allegations against Mr Singh, which submitted its report weeks ago. The committee's findings haven't been revealed yet.

Police in Delhi were also on guard on Sunday as a group of farmers tried to enter the city to support the wrestlers. That was after dozens of farmers broke down police barricades in Delhi to join another protest earlier this month.

Venice canal patch turns fluorescent green

MILAN (BBC): Venetians woke up on Sunday morning to an unusual sight, as a patch of water in the city's central waterway appeared to have turned fluorescent green. Local authorities have collected water samples and opened an urgent investigation.

Speculation is rife as to what might have caused the water around the famous Rialto Bridge to change colour. Theories range from the release of dye to a protest by envi-



Environmental activists. Italian media reported

that local police were examining CCTV to determine whether the release might have been a stunt to coincide with the Volgalonga regatta taking place this weekend.

Many social media users said the images coming out of Venice were remindful of the 1968 stunt by Argentine artist Nicolás García Urriburu, who dyed the waters of the Grand Canal green in order to raise awareness of ecological issues.

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Youm-e-Takbir and call of the day

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif felicitated the nation on the silver jubilee of Pakistan’s Nuclear Tests on Sunday and declared that the country’s defense, sovereignty, national dignity, and freedom were above everything to the nation and no one would be allowed to take away this divine blessing. During his message on the occasion of Youm-Takbir, the Prime Minister noted that the historic day reminds us of the same spirit to attain economic sovereignty and self-dependence in all fields of our national life.

On 28 May 1998, Pakistan successfully tested five nuclear weapons at the Chaghai Nuclear Testing Site in direct response to India’s nuclear explosions and Hindutva’s van-gloriousness and warmongering. In the aftermath of India’s unprovoked nuclear testing in Pokhran, Indian leaders came up with serious nuclear intimidation and war hysteria that compelled Pakistani leadership to preserve strategic balance in South Asia and demonstrate the resolve of the Pakistani nation to safeguard Pakistan’s territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty through the practical display of its nuclear capability at that highly crucial time of the country’s history.

After the independence from British rule, the Pakistani nation started its journey from scratch with scanty fiscal and material resources, ill-resourced and poorly organized institutions, and without essential government infrastructure. The newly formed state of Pakistan had an inborn staunch enemy at its Eastern front that was wary of Pakistan’s existence from day one and had waged four full-fledged wars against its weak neighbor, together with water aggression, multiple territorial disputes, endless conspiracies, and propaganda. Ironically, India sparked the nuclear smoke in South Asia during the early years of its independence by laying the foundation of the Bhabha Atomic Nuclear Reactor in 1956. The followers of Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence successfully tested their first nuclear weapon at Pokhan in 1974, shattering the regional peace and trashing the strategic balance in the South Asian region. Pakistan, who already lost half of its part during the 1971 war with India, was compelled to expedite its nuclear program with a renewed commitment and national resolve. Pakistan’s history of acquiring modern nuclear technology for purely peaceful purposes, entails commitment, patriotism, and strong obligation on the part of Pakistani leadership, armed forces as well as common Pakistanis, who worked unbelievably out of patriotism for the territorial integrity of the country. Those heroic efforts harvested fruit with the successful testing of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal on May 28, 1998, and are now a golden topic of our national history.

Today, Pakistan is the seventh nuclear power in the world, and no enemy can dare invade Pakistan or glance at it with bad intentions because of our powerful military along with nuclear and missile deterrence. The nation is celebrating the 25th anniversary of Pakistan’s nuclear testing, which was a historic action that led to the achievement of invincible defense capabilities and maintained power equilibrium in South Asia. Having said that Pakistan still lacks the true spirit of independence and sovereignty because of its economic meltdown, and persistent economic and political instability. Youm-e-Takbir reminds us about the commitment and resolve of our elders who made history by achieving the most difficult status that was otherwise not possible for a third-world and poor nation like Pakistan. There is a dire need for a national approach by all stakeholders including the incumbent rulers, opposition, and national institutions such as the judiciary and military to shed off their party and institutional interests and work for the greater benefit of the country. This day underlined the need for national solidarity and unified efforts that could turn Pakistan into a major economic power. It is not only a call of the day but a compulsion of the entire Pakistani nation if it desires to live a prestigious life in the world.

How the ultra-orthodox are creating fissures in Israeli society

Yossi Mekelberg

The social and political tumult that Israel has been enduring since last November’s general election has many aspects, all of which have exposed some deep divisions within Israeli society that have been airbrushed over for many years. However, no social cleavage is more fervent and incendiary as that between the ultra-orthodox and, mainly but not exclusively, the country’s secular-agnostic Jews. Earlier this week the Knesset passed the annual budget bill, which will only exacerbate this deep and destructive social-political source of polarization whose roots run deep and go back to the early days of Zionism and the aftermath of the creation of the Jewish state in 1948.

In the new budget, \$3.78 billion has been allocated to increased support for ultra-orthodox institutions and programs. These are discretionary funds that will be spent on increasing stipends at religious yeshiva student institutions or as an allowance for a food voucher program and many other religious initiatives. In the 21st week of the protests against the government, the theme at the moment is less about the judicial overhaul but more about opposition to this daylight robbery of the public coffers.

As much as the leaders of both ultra-orthodox parties represented in the coalition government — United Torah Judaism and Shas, the Ashkenazi and Sephardi parties respectively — disingenuously would like to portray the criticism of this budgetary increase as anti-religious or even antisemitic, the protest is about good governance, accountability in government, fairness and the future of the country. In the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, which is badly hurting many families, ultra-orthodox education, constructing religious buildings and supporting Haredi Jewish culture and identity

are all enjoying a bonanza that others lacking access to political power can only dream of.

With the exception of a few mindless and obviously regrettable comments that crossed the line by attacking religion itself and besmearing the entire ultra-orthodox population, the objection is about unscrupulous politicians blackmailing a prime minister who is using the state

economy, deprives its students of the opportunity to fulfill their potential, and in many cases condemns them and their families to a life of poverty.

Figures don’t lie. Only half of ultra-orthodox men are in employment, and while 80 percent of women in their communities may be active in the labor market, most of them work

domestic product is nine times larger than that of Haredi households.

During a recent visit to Jerusalem, I walked through the stronghold of the Haredi community in the city, the Mea Shearim neighborhood, one of the oldest Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem outside of the Old City. Poverty and underdevelopment were

a country where military service is a value and a duty, and is also regarded as a social equalizer that creates networks for life, the refusal of most ultra-orthodox to serve, which has become a condition set by their representatives in the coalition to remain in government and thus prop up Netanyahu’s administration, is probably the most infuriating and offensive issue for the majority of

in the ancient land, yet at the same time in today’s Israel, which is the very product of Zionism, they enjoy political power and the fruits granted by the state while making almost no contribution to it.

The finger must not be pointed at religion, or even at the ordinary devoted Haredim, but at their leaders, who for the sake of maintaining their political power are ready to deprive them of a proper education, and with it social mobility and prosperity. Instead, they rely on a network of charities and handouts that creates a vicious cycle of dependency on their representatives in the Knesset, and poverty.

A letter signed by 280 senior Israeli economists encapsulated the danger in the budget bill, which “would result in significant and long-term damage to Israel’s economy and its future as a prosperous country.” However, the issue is not only about the economy per se but the very character of the state, hence it has become emotive, creating and harboring mutual anger and scorn that becomes difficult to bridge.

As the Haredi community expands, and with that their political representation and influence on decision-making, but without fulfilling their part of the social contract that allows societies to exist and prosper, malaise among those who pay taxes and serve in the military is becoming detrimental to the existence of the state. Some of these disenchanted might either leave the country in significant numbers, or refuse to shoulder all the responsibilities, seeing the current situation as increasingly unfair.

At this crucial watershed in Israel’s history, the behavior of the current government and the greed of some of its members who want to have it all, and have it now, poses a greater danger to the survival of the Jewish state than any number of external threats.

Figures don’t lie. Only half of ultra-orthodox men are in employment, and while 80 percent of women in their communities may be active in the labor market, most of them work part-time and earn a minimum wage, which perpetuates poverty within their community. This harms the economy as much as it hurts these people and their families. Currently the ultra-orthodox comprise 13.5 percent of the Israeli population and are the country’s fastest-growing population group, with a growth rate of 4 percent, yet they contribute a mere 1 percent of the country’s income tax revenue, while the contribution of non-ultra-orthodox households to the country’s gross domestic product is nine times larger than that of Haredi households. During a recent visit to Jerusalem, I walked through the stronghold of the Haredi community in the city, the Mea Shearim neighborhood, one of the oldest Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem outside of the Old City. Poverty and underdevelopment were apparent at every corner, but so also was the defiant insistence on distinguishing themselves from the rest of the Israeli population, while relying on that population for their livelihood and security. A major issue of contention for most Israelis is that only 9 percent of ultra-orthodox youth serve in the army, in a country where service is compulsory — 32 months for men and 24 months for women, not to mention annual reserve service after they have completed their service.

budget as if it were his private bank account to pay them off to stay in power while he stands trial.

To begin with, the discretionary nature of these funds clearly invites corrupt practices in their distribution, with hardly any oversight by the state. In many cases the recipients of these funds are non-supervised educational institutions that do not teach core subjects such as maths, science and foreign languages, resulting in an education that is irrelevant to a modern society and its

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Israel’s Jews.

It is the ultra-orthodox’s tiny contribution to the modern society that is Israel, their demand for big budgets from the public purse to maintain their lifestyle, and their refusal to serve in the military, that has caused such deep and widespread resentment. It might also be the case that the long collective memory of Israel’s Zionists holds a grudge against the ultra-orthodox because their rabbi’s opposed the very idea of Zionism, of the revival of Jewish self-determination

Europe’s strategic negligence in the Mediterranean

Hafed Al-Ghwel

The EU has long been grappling with the issue of irregular migration across the Mediterranean. Each year, thousands of people embark on perilous journeys in an attempt to reach Europe, often fleeing conflict, poverty and persecution in their home countries — contrary to stereotypical, dismissive assessments of them being opportunistic economic migrants. Unfortunately, many journeys end in tragedy, with countless lives lost at sea.

Despite the EU’s “best” efforts to address this crisis, its current approach, which focuses on the security dimension rather than humane, pre-emptive interventions, adds to claims by critics that Europe has adopted a policy of “strategic negligence” — a deliberate or inadvertent failure to address a critical issue, resulting in negative consequences. Not only have interceptions at sea become more deadly, rescue operations for distressed or cap-sized boats are delayed, which leads to more tragedy.

A prime example of this is the EU’s obsessive, short-term focus on border control and deterrence measures. In 2020, the EU allocated €23.8 billion to its border management agency, Frontex, for the period of 2021-27, a significant increase from just €6.4 billion in the previous period. While border control is an important aspect of migration management, this overemphasis on security has come at the expense of not addressing the root causes of irregular migration, such as conflict, poverty and lack of economic opportunities in countries of origin.

Calls to prioritize tackling those root causes consistently fall on deaf ears, which only exacerbates the very risks Europe is seeking to avoid, such as increased instability, worsening social tensions and the growth of criminal networks involved in human smuggling. A very security-oriented approach has clearly not worked. If anything, it only tries to alleviate the symptoms by inadvertently fueling additional troubles.

Another example is the EU’s cooperation with third countries, such as Libya and Tunisia, to build a virtual wall to deter boats leaving North African shores. This “cooperation” typically comes in the form of financial and technical assistance to assist the Libyan Coast Guard intercept and return migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean. However, this approach has been heavily criticized for trapping migrants in a cycle of

have helped to fuel a rise in far-right, anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe, or at least kept it mainstream by framing migration as a security threat. This inadvertently fuels xenophobia and racism, which are easily exploited by far-right parties to gain political power, polarizing European societies and undermining social cohesion. Unchecked, it could go on to spawn even more extreme ideolo-

forced migrants to continue setting out on what are now increasingly dangerous routes to reach Europe. One Somali poet, Warsan Shire, succinctly described why that could be the case in her poem, “Home” — “... No one puts their children in a boat/unless the water is safer than the land ...”

So, what can Europe do differently to prevent what is quickly becoming inevitable?

To address the crisis of irregular migration in the Mediterranean effectively, the EU must shift its focus from security-focused policies to a more comprehensive and humane approach. This should include investing in long-term development programs in countries of origin to address the factors that drive irregular migration, such as poverty, conflict and lack of economic opportunities. This should be done in partnership with local governments, civil society organizations and international agencies to ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of each country. Secondly, the EU should expand legal pathways for migration, such as humanitarian visas, family reunification and labor migration programs. This would not only provide migrants with a safer and more dignified way to reach Europe but would also help to address labor shortages in various sectors of the European economy. The EU should also work with third countries to establish and expand safe migration routes. This would require granting legal status to migrants who have traveled through these routes, as well as providing them with the opportunity to apply for humanitarian visas. These measures would help to reduce the number of migrants taking dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean, and in other areas where human smuggling is prevalent, profiting transnational criminal organizations.

violence and abuse in Libyan detention centers, where they face inhumane conditions, torture, and even death.

This not only violates the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the return of individuals to countries where they may face persecution. It also perpetuates the same conditions and desperation that drives migration in the first place. Besides, it also undermines the EU’s professed commitment to human rights and humanitarian principles.

The EU’s glaringly flawed policies have created an awful tragedy that endangers both migrants and their host communities. To drum up support for exclusionary, knee-jerk responses, governments

gies that have little to do with migration but everything to do with giving a platform to warped world-views, of which rabid Euroskepticism is a part.

The dogged focus on deterrence and border control has already led to an increase in the number of deaths at sea. According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 20,000 migrants have died in the Mediterranean since 2014, thousands more are still missing. This year alone, there have already been more than 400 deaths, according to the organization.

It is not difficult to spot a direct correlation between Europe doubling down on its policies and the worsening death tolls. Curiously, tougher policies have only

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the rights of migrants are respected and protected. This includes guaranteeing access to health care and education, as well as legal aid in cases of abuse or trafficking.

Furthermore, the EU needs to provide more humanitarian assistance to countries that are hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants, including by increasing funding for the refugee crisis in Europe. This can be in the form of providing additional humanitarian assistance to countries that typically host large numbers of refugees and migrants, while also setting aside adequate funding for addressing the knock-on effects of a sharp rise in arrivals. Throughout, the EU must emphasize the respect for and protection of the rights of migrants by guaranteeing access to health care and education, as well as legal aid in cases of abuse or trafficking.

Finally, Europe must reform the Dublin Regulation, which currently places the responsibility for processing asylum applications on the first country of entry. This has led to a disproportionate burden on frontline states, such as Italy and Greece, and has contributed to the fragmentation of the European asylum system. A more equitable distribution of responsibility among EU member states is needed to ensure a fairer and efficient asylum process.

It is unlikely that there will ever be a sustained “lull” in arrivals to buy time for EU member states to adjust policies, implement new approaches or even examine the feasibility of some new “compact” on irregular migration. Thus, Europe will have to change on the go and find new ways of burden-sharing, especially targeting sustainable search-and-rescue operations and other similar interventions onshore or at sea. The heavily security-focused case-by-case “solutions” today need to be replaced by a more permanent system that emphasizes solidarity and ensures EU member states all contribute to support “front-line” countries which are under growing pressure.

State of Saudi-Philippine labor cooperation is ‘all good’

In 2013, I wrote several columns for the Arab News, mostly on issues and stories surrounding Filipino workers that have made the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia their second home. My editor back then was Shahrukh Jamshed, who I am pleased to know is still with this highly respected news organization, working on its business desk.

Ten years after, May 23 to be precise, I visited the Arab News main office in Riyadh, with Faisal Abbas, its editor-in-chief, giving me a grand tour while pointing out previous and current editions, representing a sea change in style and substance. Today's Arab News is truly global in scope, open and diverse in the coverage of subject matters, and visually pleasing — in a way reflecting the transformational journey of the Kingdom itself.

From writing a column in Manila for Arab News to representing our country on matters involving international labor cooperation as the head of a newly created department — the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) — I have my own journey to reflect on. For whom and on what I used to write about, I now have direct responsibility for, as a member of the Cabinet under the leadership of President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.

Lifting the deployment ban

In September 2022, I came over to discuss with my counterpart, Minister Engr. Ahmed Al-Rahji of the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development (MHRSD), the lifting of the Philippine government's deployment ban of workers to Saudi Arabia, a ban that took place under the watch of then labor secretary Silvestre Bello III.

The reasons for the nearly two-year ban were twofold; the unpaid wages and other monetary claims of about 10,000 Filipino workers who worked for Saudi construction companies that declared bankruptcy in 2015-2016; and the rise in welfare cases involving Filipino domestic workers.

The first issue is now on the final stretch of being resolved. It was no less than HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman who spoke to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. about the Saudi government's commitment to address these financial claims when they first met at the margins

of the APEC Summit in Bangkok, Thailand, last November. The MHRSD, through Minister Al-Rahji, reiterated this commitment in our recent formal talks.

The second issue continues to be a work in progress, but both countries now agree on a common course — a unified effort — to enhance migrant workers' rights, particularly for the most vulnerable workers employed in households across the

Susan V. Ople

described over the years as the Philippine labor export policy. Yet, times have changed, and even in the Philippines, our workers choose to work where they wish, aligned with dreams that they have every right to possess.

Those who look down at the work that foreign domestic workers do conveniently overlook a simple fact: It takes a variety of

concerns such as ease of doing business and how digitalization can help address this, a pending joint agreement in the fight against human trafficking, the significant progress being made in addressing the unpaid claims of thousands of Filipino construction workers and other relevant issues. There was a sincere effort on both sides to reach out, understand the contextual realities behind every concern raised, and

the leadership of Charges' de Affaires Rommel Romato plays a critical role in advancing our labor diplomacy efforts.

Two words to characterize Philippine-Saudi labor relations: "All good." Not because all issues have been resolved, but because when there is mutual respect and trust, the solutions we seek together are almost always within reach.

Human connections

My late father, Blas Fajardo Ople, was the longest-serving labor minister under President Ferdinand Marcos, at a time when the Philippines started sending Filipino workers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the 1970s. Today, I continue his work as head of the Department of Migrant Workers, keeping watch over the process and circumstances that lead our citizens to households and companies not just across the Kingdom, but throughout the world.

My father started as a journalist, too, and I loved listening to him tell stories about the people he made friends with during his political career.

One of the most memorable moments of my visit was my informal meeting with Saudi Minister of Investment Khalid Al-Falih. He was the CEO of Saudi Aramco, one of the biggest employers of Filipino workers, (between 2009 and 2015). He spoke about the Philippines with nostalgia and affection, having once lived there with his family. I hope to count on him as one of my mentors on Saudi-Philippine relations.

It was also inspiring to meet Hala bint Mazyad Al-Tuwajiri, the first woman to head the Human Rights Commission. She and I agreed to work jointly at cases involving the trafficking of Filipino migrant workers. She impressed me as a rising star in global efforts to combat modern slavery.

Whatever our circumstances in life, we wake up to a common sun, and come home to families that await our safe return. We are all people, imbued with dignity and rights, and stories of our own to tell or keep as secrets. At the end of the day, and yes of life itself, what matters most are not titles, but acts of kindness consistently done to make for a better world.

Thank you, Arab News, for this opportunity to share a little bit about my own personal journey.



Japan's warmer relations with the West

Andrew Hammond

One of the standout features of international relations since Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been the warming of Western relations with Japan. This was showcased again at last week's G7 summit, hosted in Hiroshima, which saw a well-organized event lead to a series of key diplomatic outcomes, including in the geopolitical arena.

Moreover, last year Fumio Kishida became the first Japanese prime minister to attend a NATO leadership meeting, and there is even some speculation about Tokyo being invited into Western intelligence forums such as the "Five Eyes" alliance of the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand.

These examples illustrate that much of the attention around warming ties has focused on the defense and intelligence arenas. In part, this reflects Japan's ambition, since the Ukraine war began, to try to tie together the threats from Russia in Europe with its own concerns about the rise of China in Asia Pacific where it wants to ensure Western support vis-a-vis

government will lead a delegation to Japan this autumn, and Japanese firms interested in areas such as electric-vehicle battery components plan to visit Canada next spring.

However, the most recent, significant agreement in this area came only last week with the announcement by Kishida and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of a new UK-Japan "sustainability energy partnership." London now has a blossoming relationship with Tokyo, with the Japanese government one of the strongest supporters of the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership trade and investment agreement.

The new UK-Japan sustainability deal will not just deepen bilateral political ties, but also economic ones, too, triggering a new wave of investment between the two markets. Take the example of the UK, which has huge incentives to drive this agenda forward with Japan and other key nations following the US Inflation Reduction

legal targets for reuse and recycling, which are not obviously supported by the reality of supply infrastructure, nor business appetite for investment at scale. The UK is generally more pragmatic with its implementation of "better" rather than "ideal" solutions that take account of current economic pressures since the pandemic and the beginning of the Ukraine conflict.

The high level of wind power generation capacity already installed in the UK also means it could be a great proving ground for Japanese and wider international innovation in power distribution infrastructure, and large-scale storage to balance and manage the intermittent nature of wind power. This may even lead to the emergence of differentiated UK-based technology and/or the need for such technology to be brought by Japanese firms.

The UK also benefits from strength and flexibility in its financial industry, via the City of London, which is of interest to Japan given that it sometimes struggles to attract money from overseas. The energy transition requires much

The new UK-Japan sustainability deal will not just deepen bilateral political ties, but also economic ones, too, triggering a new wave of investment between the two markets. Take the example of the UK, which has huge incentives to drive this agenda forward with Japan and other key nations following the US Inflation Reduction Act and counter subsidies from the EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net Zero Age. There are growing concerns from UK stakeholders that the nation could miss out on an increasing wave of green investment as the global economy grows from about \$90 trillion today to a forecast \$190 trillion by the mid-21st century when the world may hit net-zero emissions. Even the UK government's own Skidmore Net Zero Review, released in January, highlights that Britain risks losing out on significant tranches of new green investment. Despite these challenges, however, the UK does have some long-standing strengths in this arena that Japan recognizes and appreciates. For instance, London tends to have a more pragmatic approach than Brussels to sustainable and green issues, including technology implementation in energy and chemical platforms.

Beijing.

Below that security policy radar screen, however, another far less commented-upon area of enhanced cooperation since the Ukraine war began is centered around the sustainability agenda. Just months after Russia's invasion in May 2021 when energy markets were still spiking, for instance, Tokyo and Brussels agreed on a "green alliance" to accelerate the transition of both economies diversifying away from fossil fuels toward becoming climate-neutral, circular and resource-efficient in coming decades by better protecting the environment, doing more to conserve biodiversity, and vigorously fighting climate change.

In recent weeks, too, Japan and Canada have held talks around this green agenda with Kishida meeting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa to explore how the two sides can better help each other with their energy transitions, including working together to make their nuclear supply chains more resilient. The Canadian

Act and counter subsidies from the EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net Zero Age.

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Despite these challenges, however, the UK does have some long-standing strengths in this arena that Japan recognizes and appreciates. For instance, London tends to have a more pragmatic approach than Brussels to sustainable and green issues, including technology implementation in energy and chemical platforms.

In the case of the circular economy in plastics, for example, the EU is pressing forward toward binding

capital and Japan could learn from UK best practice, and vice versa. For instance, the UK has a good track record in using fintech to support development of innovative green technologies.

Wider examples where such Japan-UK corporate collaboration could well be mutually complementary, in Asia and other areas, is in the energy transition, including carbon capture and storage, nuclear power and the digital solution fields. It is difficult for Japan to have all the technologies necessary for nuclear power supply chains on its own, and there is potential to join nations such as the UK with common values, including potentially around small modular reactor development.

Taken together, the West's warming relationship with Japan is therefore the highest profile in the "hard" security area. However, the scope of these better ties is broader, including "softer" green issues that could help drive a significant new wave of clean energy investment in the years to come.

The climate ‘loss and damage’ fund is coming

Last November's UN Climate Change Conference, COP27, in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, concluded on a historic high note with the last-minute agreement to establish a "loss and damage" fund. The decision to offer financial support to vulnerable countries suffering the worst effects of global warming was a remarkable achievement that has resonated worldwide. But as we move from establishing the fund to implementing it, important questions remain.

What is a realistic funding target? Who will receive financial assistance? Which entities will have final say over the fund?

As we near the halfway mark between COP27 and COP28 in Dubai, the international community must address these critical questions in the spirit of constructive multilateralism that animated the proceedings in Sharm El-Sheikh. Governments, activists and affected citizens were able to agree on this key plank of climate justice, and we must now demonstrate the same level of collaboration in making it a success.

In March, the COP27 presidency held the first Transitional Committee meeting in Luxor, Egypt, to begin addressing the operationalization of the fund. The composition of the committee ensured a diverse range of voices, and complex issues were discussed in a constructive spirit of cooperation.

The three-day meeting concluded with the adoption of a work plan containing substantive and procedural milestones to deliver actionable recommendations well in advance of COP28. The plan also out-

lines how the committee will focus on all elements of its mandated recommendations at each gathering, gradually working toward consensus.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change defines loss and damage as the harm caused

Sameh Shoukry

rising temperatures.

The Transitional Committee meetings are designed precisely for this purpose — to discuss effective methods and modalities that will turn the concept of the loss and damage

short-, medium- and long-term effects of climate change on developing countries. It will supply financial and technological resources for responding to loss and damage caused by both immediate and slow-onset events. That could mean early-warning sys-

tem den of climate change is unequal, and we have the chance to create a much fairer and stability-enhancing balance.

The loss and damage fund represents a major step forward, but it is not enough. We must continue to work tirelessly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — the root cause of climate change. This can be achieved by accelerating the transition to clean energy, empowering communities to adapt their livelihoods, and adhering to scientific recommendations in line with internationally agreed principles.

At the same time, the need to create a working loss and damage fund that delivers on the promises made at COP27 is acute. East Africa and the Sahel are currently experiencing severe droughts caused by human-induced climate change, which has resulted in meager rain levels as well as increased evapotranspiration in plants and soil. Plagued by food insecurity, many people in the affected countries are internally displaced or have been forced to migrate, underscoring global warming's disruptive effects and the increasingly limited ability of both nature and humanity to adapt to them.

The newly created fund will remain a top priority in climate discussions, and it is crucial to enter COP28 with a clear strategy for its effective implementation. We must approach the task with a unified sense of purpose — only by working together and getting the details right can we begin to address the vast inequities of the crisis. But given the significance of the task at hand, I am confident that we will succeed.

Backed by a broad range of government, civil society and private sector stakeholders, the fund is designed to consider the short-, medium- and long-term effects of climate change on developing countries. It will supply financial and technological resources for responding to loss and damage caused by both immediate and slow-onset events. That could mean early-warning systems, disaster-risk reduction or ecosystem restoration. As the architect of the fund, Egypt is committed to ensuring its effectiveness, transparency and accessibility. We strongly believe that all stakeholders must fully collaborate to fulfill its objectives and make a significant change in the communities hit hardest by global warming. The burden of climate change is unequal, and we have the chance to create a much fairer and stability-enhancing balance. The loss and damage fund represents a major step forward, but it is not enough. We must continue to work tirelessly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — the root cause of climate change. This can be achieved by accelerating the transition to clean energy, empowering communities to adapt their livelihoods, and adhering to scientific recommendations in line with internationally agreed principles.

by human-generated climate change. Solutions to postpone, minimize or prevent such harm to vulnerable communities worldwide must also be human-generated. It is our collective responsibility to implement effective policies to combat global warming, as well as to alleviate suffering and provide financial support to people whose lives have been upended by

fund into a tangible reality while identifying gaps in the existing climate-finance system. Requests and demands are currently being analyzed and considered before finalizing the mechanics to ensure proper implementation.

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Pakistan to export juicy cherries to China

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan is all set to export juicy cherries to China in the coming weeks as the harvesting season started in the country.

A 14-member Chinese business delegation visited Gilgit-Baltistan where they signed multiple memorandums of understanding (MoUs) this week to facilitate cherry trade, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro on Sunday.

The delegation assessed the local cherry production, and inspected cherry orchards, packing units, and cold storage facilities, aiming to explore the potential of importing cherries to Chinese markets, said an official statement.

Pakistan and China have also launched two new air

cargo routes to strengthen connectivity between the two countries. The new routes will link Nanning, the capital of China's Guangxi autonomous region, with the Pakistani cities of Karachi and Lahore.

These flights aim to facilitate the transportation of Pakistani fruits and seafood to China while also delivering Chinese clothing accessories and other goods from Nanning to the Pakistani market.

This year, the cherry farmers anticipate doubling their incomes and profits as China has indicated opening its doors to importing cherries for the first time from Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) which shares borders with China, added the statement.

Mohammad Ali Quaid, the special assistant to the GB chief minister, said that the key approval would come from the Chinese quarantine department which is planning a visit to GB to pave the way for exports.

Export of cherries from Pakistan to China would commence once all necessary procedures are met. China is the leading importer of cherries with imports valued at \$2.66 billion in 2021, according to data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC).

In recent years, cherry has emerged as GB's main cash crop. Around 8,000 metric tonnes of cherries are harvested each year in the scenic region, generating around Rs700 million

in revenue annually, according to Javed Akhtar, deputy director at GB's agriculture department.

The cherry season spans from May to July. Some of the cherry varieties grown in the region are Bing, Chelan, Rainier, Lepin and Tulare, according to a government study.

Hazif ur Rehman, project director of Khashal Cherry Farm in Gilgit-Baltistan's Ghanche district, is hopeful that the market access to China will be "much more beneficial for local farmers" due to GB's proximity to the world's largest cherry market and the perishable nature of the fruit.

Besides GB, the other major cherry-growing region of Pakistan is the Balochistan province.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman SECP Akif Saeed meeting with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar at Finance Division.

Chairman SECP calls on Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) Akif Saeed Sunday called on the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar.

Chairman SECP and Mohammad Ishaq Dar discussed the arrangements of the first international conference on the Islamic Capital Market to be held in Islamabad from tomorrow, said a press release.

The Chairman SECP also informed that the delegations had already arrived to participate in the conference. This conference would help Pakistan in implementing the Federal Shariat Court's judgment to make our financial system Riba free.

Apart from the arrangements of the conference, other matters related to the SOEs were also discussed in the meeting.

Cotton, leather sectors set to receive boost from Guangzhou enterprises

ISLAMABAD (INP): The cotton and leather sectors in Pakistan are set to receive a much-needed boost from Guangzhou enterprises, as Chinese entrepreneurs have expressed interest in investing in these sectors during a meeting with the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP).

Representatives from Chinese enterprises in Guangzhou met with Muhammad Sualah Ahmad Faruqi, Secretary of Commerce in Pakistan, and ensured to assist Pakistan in the textile sector through investment.

According to a Gwadar Pro's report, this investment is expected to bring in new technologies, increase

production capacity, and create new jobs.

Faruqi said that Pakistani enterprises are looking at the potential of the textile and leather industries in Pakistan, which have been growing steadily over the past few years, added that with Chinese investments and support, these sectors can reach even greater heights.

This will also help the local economy by creating job opportunities for many people. During a sideline meeting with a delegation from Guangzhou, Fareed Iqbal Qureshi, Secretary of TDAP, said that Pakistani enterprises are seeking to establish long-term partnerships with Chinese businesses to ensure mutual

benefits from their invest-

ments in both countries. He added that with this investment, Pakistan can look forward to a brighter future for its cotton and leather sectors.

He also ensured Chinese enterprises that they will be provided with the best business environment, including safety for Chinese citizens.

"Our banks also allow trading in RMB, you don't need to gain other currencies. RMB is now as good a currency for opening letters of credit (LC) just like any other currency."

The overall environment is very conducive to growth and trade in both countries, and we earnestly hope that you're able to find the opportunity here", Fareed added.

Govt working on priority basis to promote exports: Motiwala

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Trade Development Authority Pakistan (TDAP) Mohammad Zubair Motiwala has said that the government was working on priority basis to promote exports from Pakistan.

There is a special focus on trade relations with regional countries, the solution to Pakistan's economic problems lies in reducing imports and increasing exports, he said. He said that the role of the business community was key to get Pakistan out of the current economic problems and added, the TDAP will provide full support in projects like construction of Expo Center in Islamabad, a display center in the Chamber and FM radio.

In a meeting with the President of the Chamber Ahsan Zafar Bakhtavari on

the occasion of his visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry the other day, Zubair Motiwala said that the performance of Islamabad Chamber during the last one year was an example for other chambers, said a press release issued here on Sunday.

He said that the main objective of TDAP was to solve the problems of the business community and ensure access of Pakistani goods to every market in the world. The economic problems will be solved only if Pakistan's trade increases.

Islamabad Chamber has taken many revolutionary steps in the last one year. Being the representative chamber of the federal capital, Islamabad Chamber is fulfilling its responsibilities, he expressed.

Speaking on this occasion, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that Trade and Development Authority of Pakistan had a key role in the promotion of Pakistan's trade relations. As a business leader, Zubair Motiwala understands well all the problems that the business community of Pakistan is facing, he said and added that like other big cities, Islamabad Chamber is trying to establish Expo Centre.

In this regard, he said CDA has agreed to provide land. The government should cooperate with the Chamber for the construction of the Expo Centre. He said that Islamabad Chamber was also working on the project of FM radio station which will play an important role in awareness

for the promotion of business. He said that FM radio broadcasting would be extended to schools, colleges and universities and the importance of events would be highlighted in public.

On this occasion, TDAP Director General Muhammad Naseer said that the Islamabad Chamber should play a key role in promoting trade and cooperation with regional countries besides doing research work to promote trade with these countries including Iran, Afghanistan and China for which the Trade Development Authority Pakistan would provide guidance to the Islamabad Chamber.

Atif: Tax policies encouraging businesses to join informal sector

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former Vice President of FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh on Sunday said the tax-to-GDP ratio is below 10 percent in Pakistan which is below the level required for any proper economic growth. There have been no serious efforts to expand the tax base and tax machinery relief on increasing collection through indirect taxes and burdening taxpayers which has never worked, he said.

Atif Ikram Sheikh who has also served as President of ICCI and Chairman PVMA said in a statement issued here today that over-reliance on imports and turning businesses into withholding agents was a policy which was not supposed to work from the very beginning and it encouraged many businesses to move from formal to informal economy.

The concept of higher taxes on non-filers persuaded businesses to remain outside the tax net and pay a higher tax in the shape of withholding tax in order to escape documentation and scrutiny by taxmen, he noted.

The business leader said that businesses absorbed the higher tax in their cost of doing business and priced their products accordingly which also increase the cash in circulation.

He observed that the government is still not learning from its mistakes and the focus continues on extracting more tax from the existing tax base which will shrink the base even further. There are plans for imposing taxes on banking transactions which have not worked in the past, he said, adding that the tax burden is tilted towards the documented manufacturing sector.

There was a super tax imposed last year that may continue in the coming year as well. Then there is a proposal to tax reserves of companies which were built up after paying due taxes which will incentivising businesses to move towards the informal sector.

Rupee likely to weaken in open market on dollar shortage

KARACHI (INP): A shortage of the dollar is likely to keep the rupee under pressure in the open market next week, while the local unit is expected to trade range-bound in the interbank market as rates appear to be kept in check by administrative measures, it learnt. During the outgoing week, the local currency fluctuated in the interbank market, falling to 287.15 per dollar on Tuesday before rising to 285.15 by the end of the week.

With Pakistan's economic position worsening with each passing day and its foreign

exchange reserves running out,

default risks are also rising. Even though the country is making desperate attempts to resume the stalled \$6.5 billion bailout with the International Monetary Fund, the chances are dwindling every day, primarily because the current programme is set to end on June 30.

"Due to import curbs, the demand for dollars from importers is likely to remain regular. In the upcoming week, we do not see the rupee breaking beyond the 288 level versus the dollar [in the interbank mar-

ket]," said a forex trader.

"However, due to a lack of dollars and increased demand, the rupee appears to be weaker in the open market," the trader added. On Friday, the rupee's value versus the dollar dropped to an all-time low of 310 in the open market. In relation to the dollar, it decreased by Rs5 during the outgoing week.

The exchange rate difference between open and interbank markets swelled to around Rs25, which could encourage overseas Pakistani workers to use illegal means to send money home.

E-commerce drives Pak's furniture industry growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Furniture Council, Mian Kashif Ashfaq on Sunday said that the e-commerce sector in Pakistan continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, with furniture manufacturers and retailers experiencing a significant boost in sales.

Speaking to a delegation of Furniture manufacturers led by Nabeel Arain he said through online marketplaces and home decor websites, manufacturers have been able to expand their reach and tap into new markets, leading to a surge in demand for Pakistani furniture, said a press release.

Kashif said the furniture industry in Pakistan has been experiencing steady growth over

the past few years with a large population, increasing urbanization, and a growing middle class, which are all positive symptoms for the furniture market.

He said additionally the rise in disposable income and changing lifestyles have contributed to the increased demand for modern and stylish furniture.

Real estate and construction activities in Pakistan have also fueled the demand for furniture adding that as more housing projects, commercial buildings, and offices are being developed, the need for furnishing and interior design services has risen.

This presents opportunities for furniture manufacturers, retailers, and interior design companies, he said. Kashif Ashfaq said, howev-

er, there are also some challenges faced by the furniture industry in Pakistan which include a lack of skilled labor, inconsistent quality standards, limited access to modern technology and machinery, and competition from imported furniture.

He said addressing these challenges will be crucial for the industry to reach its full potential. Overall, with the favorable market conditions and increasing consumer demand, the prospects for the furniture industry in Pakistan appear positive, he added. However, it is essential for businesses to adapt to changing trends, improve quality, invest in design and innovation, and establish strong distribution networks, he concluded.

Huge potential remains untapped as trade among SAARC countries just 5%

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The FPCCI's Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, who has taken the charge of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) vice president, has said the intra-trade among SAARC countries continues to remain in the low range of just 5% of the total trade of the region while this trade in NAFTA region is over 40%, 68% in EU and 27% in ASEAN, laying emphasis on exploring the vast untapped trade potential in SAARC region.

Mian Anjum Nisar, who is also the FPCCI former president, will serve the SCCI as its vice president for the term 2023-24. The new vice president of SAARC CCI said that

South Asia with its diversified resources and skilled workforce has tremendous potential to be the fastest-growing exporting region to the globe.

Anjum Nisar said that other regional associations like EU, ASIAN, NAFTA are doing very well and they are getting regional benefits but it's still unfortunate for us, that we couldn't utilise SAARC till now.

We have huge potential in the area of tourism, agriculture, fisheries, industries, human development and many more. It's time we push the government of each country to seize the untapped opportunity in this region, he added.

The SCCI new vice president said that it is imperative for all to draw lessons from the successes achieved by other regional

agreements, and channel their experiences of regional identity and solidarity into our efforts to propel SAARC towards new heights. It is our responsibility to find innovative and sustainable solutions to these challenges, and to work together to create a brighter future for the people of our region, he opined.

The priority will be given to enhance collaboration on sectors with high growth potential such as information technology, manufacturing, energy, tourism, and agribusiness that derive tangible results, he added.

South Asia is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. We have a lot of potential, but unfortunately, we are still lagging behind to seize all the

opportunities, he said.

Pakistan is situated in a geostrategic position in South Asia. It has a vital location because it can connect to other South Asian countries along with the Central Asian countries which are landlocked geographically. The rest of the South Asian countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The formation of the regional economic bloc has become an important route for the economic growth of nations. South Asia is the region with a population of 1.2 billion. Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh have greater economies as compared to other South Asian countries. According to World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) country profile, Pakistan's total

export to Asian countries is 2385650 in thousands of US\$ out of a total 23,748,680.25 in thousands of US\$ in 2019 which is 10.05% of the total export. The greater share of Pakistani export in South Asian countries goes to Afghanistan (14.48%), followed by Bangladesh (8.42%), India (5.35%), and Sri Lanka (3.51%). Pakistan has a minimal share of its exports to other South Asian countries like Nepal, Maldives, and Bhutan. Apart from this, the close borders with India and Afghanistan have also not achieved their potential.

He said that Pakistan's growth trajectory can offer several complimentary advantages to our South Asian counterparts. The private sector is keen to explore business collabora-

tions in manufacturing, agro-processing, industrial machinery and clean energy among others with value chain linkages and market prospects, he added. He said that with promising ties among the 8 member countries, SAARC has the potential of being one of the most dynamic and emerging regions in the world. Cross-border investments, simplifying customs procedures, and developing efficient logistics networks would be important for the economic cooperation and capacity building of our SME's sector and tapping the potential of women-led SMEs for regional trade, he added.

He said that SAARC CCI is the only platform for the South Asian Business Community to network, collaborate and foster partnerships with the common business people of the region.

For inclusive economic growth in the SAARC region, SAARC CCI has the responsibility to identify the existing bilateral and multilateral tariff and non-tariff barriers, connectivity, and other challenges.

It is more important that we must recognize the significance of using our regional strengths and working together towards a common vision in a rapidly changing world, he opined.

He said the private sector holds the key to unlocking this opportunity by venturing into new markets, diversifying product portfo-

lios, nurturing cross-border business collaborations, and removing trade barriers including NTBs.

Setting up a B2B mutual trade facilitation committee of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry may be established for support, he added.

He mentioned that the world is witnessing significant shifts in the global economic landscape.

South Asia has a unique opportunity to position itself as a major player in the global trade and investment arena. The region is also blessed with immense resources, a young and talented workforce, and a growing consumer market. By rethinking our regional integration strategies, we can leverage our relationship to new heights, he added.



In brief

‘Development of softball’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Softball Federation (PSF) Secretary General (SG) Asif Azeem believes that educational institutions could play an important role in the development and encouragement of softball at the grassroots level in the country. "There is no shortage of softball talent in the country, but there is a need to provide facilities and resources to the players," he told APP on Sunday. Azeem said women's softball was held in the National Games in which six teams including Wapda, Pakistan Army, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan and Sindh participated. In the final match, Wapda won for the first time by defeating Pakistan Army. He said, "The women's softball event in the National Games has seen a lot of new talent and eight to ten women players have been invited to the upcoming national training camp for advanced and skilled training." To a question, Azeem said, "If the relevant authorities financially support the softball federation, then the players can make the nation proud at the international level." He said, "The International World Games Association (IWGA) has added men's and women's softball events to the World Games to be held in 2025." This decision was taken after the proposal of the World Baseball Softball Confederation in the meeting of the International World Games Association, he said.

Celtics beat Heat

BOSTON (Agencies): Derrick White scored a dramatic buzzer-beater as the Boston Celtics continued their remarkable fightback from 3-0 down to level the Eastern Conference semi-finals against the Miami Heat. With the Celtics trailing 103-102, Marcus Smart's last-gasp three-point attempt bounced off the rim but White tipped it in moments before the buzzer. No NBA team has come from 3-0 down to win a best-of-seven play-off series. The decisive final game takes place on Monday (01:30 BST Tuesday) in Boston. The winners will face the Denver Nuggets in the finals, which start on Thursday (01:30 BST Friday). Although the Celtics led for most of the contest at the Kaseya Center in Florida, the Heat looked to have secured the win - and the series - after Jimmy Butler was fouled by Al Horford when attempting a three-pointer with three seconds remaining. Butler kept his cool to sink all three free throws and give Miami a one-point lead before White's late intervention. "Ball came to me, I made the shot. That's what I saw," said White. "It felt good. Everybody was asking me, 'did you get it off?' And I was like, 'yeah, I think so,' but it was so close, you never know. "I'm happy we won. Whatever it takes. We got our backs against the wall." Jayson Tatum scored 31 points and made 11 rebounds and five assists for the Celtics with, while Jaylen Brown ended with 26 points and 10 rebounds. "It gives you a supreme boost in confidence," said Brown. "It doesn't get too much worse than being down 0-3. We feel like we've been to hell and back. "We feel like we can face any adversity that gets thrown at us in the duration of the game or the duration of the season or in the post-season.

Pakistan hold India to 1-1 draw in Junior Asia Cup

SALALAH (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan held India to a 1-1 draw and continued their unbeaten streak in the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2023 hockey tournament in Salalah, Oman on Saturday. Sharda Nand Tiwari scored the opener for India in the 24th minute before Pakistan's Basharat Ali equalized in the 44th. Both India and Pakistan have accumulated seven points each from their respective three-game in Pool A but the latter leads the tally with a better goal difference. Japan, who beat Chinese Taipei 10-1 earlier on Saturday, are third with six points from three outings. Playing at the Salalah

Sports Complex, the Pakistan team defended the Indian attack quite brilliantly in the first quarter which ended without a goal despite men in blue enjoying the bulk of possession. India took the lead via a penalty corner with Sharad Nand Tiwari flicking the ball in the net to help his team go 1-0 before halftime. Pakistan, however, unleashed a counterattack in the third quarter and put the Indian defence under pressure. India won a couple of penalty corners but failed to score. Pakistan, on the other hand, equalized through Ali Basharat, who netted from a close distance to make it 1-1. The final quarter also

witnessed a see-saw contest with both teams battling for a winning goal but the deadlock persisted till the final whistle. Pakistan have a fair chance to qualify for the event's semifinal and also earn a spot in FIH Junior Hockey World Cup 2023 when they face Japan on May 29. The Men in Green only require to avoid a defeat in their last group encounter. Malaysia, as hosts, have already qualified for the World Cup. Since they have also qualified for the semi-finals of the Junior Asia Cup, this means that all the other three teams making it to the last four will gain entry into the World Cup as well.

DG, SBP inaugurates Punjab Junior Badminton Championship

LAHORE (APP): Director General Sports Punjab Dr Asif Tufail inaugurated Punjab Junior Badminton Championship 2023 at a largely attended opening ceremony at Nishtar Park Sports Complex (NPSC) Gymnasium Hall here on Sunday. Director Sports Nadeem Qaiser, Chief Sports consultant SBP Hafeez Bhatti, Punjab Badminton Association Secretary General Tayyab Sohail, senior badminton coach Zareena Waqar, administrator NPSC Gymnasium Hall Mustafa Shah and other

officials were also present on this occasion. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Asif Tufail said that the 4-day Championship is an ideal platform for young male and female badminton players to exhibit and polish their game skills ahead of major events. "Basically the 4-day Punjab Junior Badminton Championship is a part of our talent hunt scheme. The top players from this championship will be further groomed at a camp to be held in early June for the preparation of the upcoming

National Junior Badminton Championship," he added. He informed that around 150 boys and girls of Under-15, Under-17 and Under-19 age groups will feature in the Punjab Junior Badminton Championship being organized under the auspices of Sports board Punjab and Punjab Badminton Association from May 28 to 31, 2023. "Sports Board Punjab is fully supporting all games, especially the Olympic sports to prepare a bunch of talented athletes for major international sports competitions".

Babar wants to groom players through his academy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Former world champion Babar Masih wants to encourage the youth of Islamabad and Rawalpindi towards the world of snooker through his academy. Babar, who has established a snooker academy at Satellite Town, Rawalpindi aims to promote snooker talent in the country and bring the brilliant youth of the twin cities into the game. Masih said that the youths' love for the game was the reason for establishing 'Babri Snooker Academy'. "I am sure through this academy, the best snooker players will emerge in future, who will

make the nation proud at the international level," he told APP on Sunday. He was of the view that the academy would promote healthy activities among the youth of the twin cities. Babar's top international performances include the 2019 Asian Championship in Doha, Qatar (gold, silver, bronze medal); Asian Championship 2018 in Doha Qatar (gold medal); World Championship Egypt 2017 (gold medal, bronze); Asian Snooker Championship 2017 at Kyrgyzstan (silver medal); 2016 Asian Billiard Sports Championship Fujairah (gold medal) and 2015 World Team Event Pakistan

(gold medal). His national pinnacle performances include the 2013 Punjab Champion, 2016 Punjab Ranking Champion and 2018 Punjab Ranking Champion. Babar said sports play a key role in the physical and mental development of a person. "The academy was the need of the hour to promote and encourage the snooker talent of the twin cities. Young people should benefit from the academy." "There is a lot of talent in the youth of the country. There is a need for the district administration to encourage healthy activities like sports for the youth," he stressed.

Cheema happy with Pak Shaheens performance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Head Coach Aizaz Cheema was delighted with performance of young players in the Pakistan Shaheens team who showcased their skills and potential during the tour against Zimbabwe Select. Shaheens would depart from Zimbabwe after featuring in the two four-dayers and six 50-over match series played from May 3 to 27. Cheema, reviewing the performance of the team, said, "I am extremely proud of the young players in the Pakistan Shaheens team who showcased their skills and potential during the tour. In the two four-dayers, players like Mehran Mumtaz, Omair Bin Yousuf, Mohammad Huraira, and Haseebullah displayed exceptional performances, contributing significantly to our victories. It was a great testament to their talent and dedication to the game, said a press release. "However, I am disappointed with our performance in the six-match 50-over series against Zimbabwe Select, where we lost 4-2. As a team, we couldn't perform to our full potential and failed to capitalise on the opportunities presented to us. Had we seized those chances, the outcome could have been different. It was a missed opportunity, and we will work on rectifying our mistakes and improving our team cohesion.

"I must acknowledge the impressive performance of our fast bowlers, who consistently picked up wickets during the 50-over series. Their contributions were instrumental in keeping us in the game and putting pressure on the opposition. In the batting department, Omair Bin Yousuf, Mubasir Khan, and Qasim Akram stood out with their run-scoring abilities, showcasing their potential for the future. "We will analyze our performances, identify areas for improvement, and work tirelessly to strengthen our team's performance. The Zimbabwe tour has provided valuable lessons and experiences for our young players, and we will use these as stepping stones towards future success. Pakistan Shaheens team is determined to bounce back stronger and continue to develop and groom talented players for the senior national side." In the first four-day match, Shaheens defeated Zimbabwe A by eight wickets. The highlight of the match was centuries by Omair Bin Yousuf and Mohammad Huraira and 11 wickets from left-arm spinner Mehran Mumtaz. In the second four-day match, wicketkeeper-batter Haseebullah's second first-class century and seven wickets from Mohammad Ali helped Shaheens to an impressive inning and 41-

run win over the hosts. At the end of two four-dayers, Shaheens' 24-year-old Omair led the batting charts with 348 runs from three innings, which included his highest first-class score of 250 not out in the first four-dayer. Huraira - who has featured in 24 first-class matches - finished second on the batting charts with 242 runs from two innings at an average of 121. In the bowling charts, 20-year-old Mehran bagged 15 wickets from two matches, which included two five-fers in an innings. He was equally supported by right-arm fast Mohammad Ali, who remained second on the bowling list with 11 wickets from two matches. Zimbabwe Select won the hard-fought six one-day match series 4-2, several Shaheens' batters and bowlers stood out with strong performances in the series. Omair, who was the top run-getter in the red-ball series, stood second on the batting charts in the white-ball series with 275 runs from four matches, which included 153 in the fourth one-day - his maiden List A century. Mubasir Khan, the 21-year-old right-handed batter finished with 238 runs from five outings in the series, which included a valiant 115 that went in vain during a steep 386-run chase in the sixth one-day match.

ICC Chairman and CEO to visit Pakistan next week

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): ICC Chairman Greg Barclay and Chief Executive Geoff Allardice will reach Lahore on Tuesday morning on a two-day visit to meet the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) top officials. According to the details, International Cricket Council's high-ups will meet the Chair of the PCB Management Committee Mr Najam Sethi (also an ICC Director), PCB Chief Operating Officer Barrister Salman Naseer and other board officials during the visit. "While Mr Allardice has regularly visited Pakistan, first as ICC General Manager - Cricket and then as ICC Chief Executive, this will be Mr Barclay's first visit to Pakistan," said the PCB media release on Sunday. "Mr Barclay will be the first ICC Chairman to tour Pakistan since ICC President Ray Mali's visit in 2008. This will also be the first time since October 2004 that both the top two ICC officials will together visit the Pakistan cricket headquarters," it added.

6th National Mas-Wrestling Championship from June 3

MULTAN (APP): Two days 6th National Mas-Wrestling Championship 2023 will start in Gujranwala from June 3. President Pakistan Mas-Wrestling Federation, Nawab Furqan Khan told APP here on Sunday that the National Championship will take place at Sports Gymnasuim Gujranwala In Collaboration with Sports Department Gujranwala and WAPDA Town Society. He said that as many as 22 teams including Pak WAPDA, Pak Army, Police and others from across the country would participate in the Championship. Mr. Furqan said that the Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to Pakistan would be the chief guest of the ceremony. Rs 10,000 would be the first prize while Rs 7,500 for runner up and Rs 5,000 for third position. He said that Mas-Wrestling Federation was taking steps to promote healthy sports activities among youth.

Pak contingent to feature in World Taekwondo Championship

ISLAMABAD (APP): A seven-member national Taekwondo contingent would feature in World Taekwondo Championship (G-14) scheduled to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan from May 29 to June 4. According to details, South Asian Games gold medalist Haroon Khan, Hamza Umar Saeed, Shahzeb Khan and Arbaaz Khan would take part in four different weight categories -58kg, -87kg, -54kg, and -68kg respectively. Men's competitions include feather weight (-54 kg), flyweight (-58 kg), bantamweight (-63 kg), feather weight (-68 kg), light weight (-74 kg), welter weight (-74 kg, -80 kg), Middle weight (-87 kg) and Heavy weight (-87 kg) while women's categories comprise Finweight (-46 kg), Flyweight (-49 kg), Bantamweight (-53 kg), featherweight (-57 kg), lightweight (-62 kg), welterweight (-67 kg), middleweight (-73 kg) and heavyweight (+73 kg). Lt Col Raja Wasim Ahmed (R), President Pakistan Taekwondo Federation has also joined the team to attend the World Taekwondo General Assembly. Omar Saeed and Yousef Karami would act as Head of Team and Coach, respectively. President PTF would also meet the South Asian President and Secretary to discuss the modalities of their participation in upcoming Asian Open Championship in Pakistan later this year.

34th National Games Huzaifa causes upset to meet Aqeel Khan in tennis final

ISLAMABAD (APP): Unseeded Huzaifa Abdul Rehman of Pakistan Army caused a major upset on Sunday when he eliminated second seed Muhammad Shoaib of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) to move to the final of the Men's Singles tennis event of the 34th National Games at the PTF Complex Islamabad. The 21-year, Huzaifa produced an almost faultless performance to shock his opponent 6-2, 6-0. In the final, he will face Pakistan No.1, Aqeel Khan of Pakistan Wapda, who in the other semifinal beat Yousaf Khalil of PAF 6-2, Retd. Yousaf retired after losing the first set, due to pain in his elbow and illness. In the first Women's Singles semifinals, top-

seed Sarah Ibrahim Khan of Wapda saw off Punjab's Labika Iqbal 6-0, 6-0, whereas in the second semifinal, Ushna Wapda's Ushna Suhail toppled Army's Amna Ali Qayum 6-4, 6-0. The finals will be held on Monday. In the Men's Doubles finals, the pair of Huzaifa Abdul Rehman and Abdullah made history when they claimed first-ever gold medal for Pakistan Army in tennis, beating Muhammad Shoaib and Yousaf Khalil of PAF 6-4, 6-0. In the Women's Doubles finals, Sarah Ibrahim Khan and Ushna Suhail of Wapda toppled Meheq Khokhar and Esha Jawad, 6-1, 6-0 to win the gold medal.

Results: MEN'S SINGLES -Semi-Finals
Aqeel Khan (Wapda) beat Yousaf Khalil 6-2, (Retd) Huzaifa A.Rehman (Army) beat Muhammad Shoaib 6-2,6-0
MEN'S DOUBLES-Finals
Huzaifa A.Rehman/ Abdullah Adnan (Army) beat Muhammad Shoaib/Yousaf Khalil(PAF) 6-4,6-0
WOMEN'S SINGLES Semi-Finals
Sara Mahboob (wapda) beat Labika Durab (Punjab) 6-0,60
Ushna Sohail (wapda) beat Amna aAli Qayyum (Army) 6-4,6-0
WOMEN DOUBLES Final Results
Sara Mahboob/Ushna Sohail (wapda) vs Mehaq Khokhar/Esha Jawad (wapda)6-1,6-0.

PSG win 11th French title as Messi breaks European goal record



PARIS (Agencies): Paris Saint-Germain have clinched a French record 11th league title as Lionel Messi scored in a 1-1 draw away at Strasbourg and broke the scoring record for Europe's top five leagues, but questions remain over the Argentinian's future at the club. Messi's opener on Saturday was cancelled out by a Kevin Gameiro equaliser, but the result gave PSG an unassailable four-point lead over second-placed Lens with one match of the season remaining. PSG moved ahead of the previous record of 10 titles set by Saint-Etienne in 1981 and which they equalled a year ago under former coach Mauricio Pochettino. It is PSG's ninth title in the last 11 seasons, a period in which they have dominated French football under the ownership of Qatar Sports Investment. PSG started the penultimate weekend of the season six points clear of nearest rivals Lens with just six

points to play for, and with a far better goal difference. In the end, they needed only the draw to be officially confirmed as champions with a game to spare, as Lens eased to a 3-0 win over already-relegated Ajaccio. Kylian Mbappe set up Messi to put PSG ahead just before the hour mark with his 16th Ligue 1 goal this season. It was also Messi's 496th league goal in Europe and broke Cristiano Ronaldo's scoring record for Europe's top five leagues. Ex-Paris striker Gameiro equalised with 11 minutes left, bundling in the rebound after Gianluigi Donnarumma had saved from Morgan Sanson. The draw ultimately suited both teams as it enabled Strasbourg to guarantee their top-flight survival. Unhappy days PSG's triumph was secured despite Christophe Galtier's team losing six games in 2023, while nearest challengers Lens have taken most of the plaudits. PSG

were unbeaten before the FIFA World Cup, when Mbappe, Messi and Neymar appeared driven by the prospect of the approaching tournament in Qatar. However, they lost six of their first 17 league games in 2023 and were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich and in the French Cup at the same stage. PSG's holy grail is the Champions League, in which the club has regularly come up short at the crucial moment - including crashing out in the last 16 five times in seven seasons. The mood around the club in recent weeks has appeared sullen with fans disaffected. Neymar, now 31, has suffered more injury problems and Messi was suspended for missing training after taking an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia. When results were going poorly, some of the fans' anger was targeted towards Messi, who was seen to be underperforming after his return from winning the World Cup with Argentina. Marco Kirdemir, a football agent, told Al Jazeera earlier this month that it is clear Messi - who is out of contract at the end of the season - wants a change of scenery. "He could go with Al Hilal, or Inter Miami or Barcelona ... but what is certain is that Messi will not be with PSG next year because there is already a rupture, including one with the fans," he said.

Need to raise the bar as per int'l standards: Ex-Olympians

ISLAMABAD (APP): With rapid changes taking place in international hockey, Pakistan's hockey legends believes there was need to educate players with modern techniques and skills, as to bring the national game back on track. There were times when Pakistan was the most successful team in World Cups, Olympics and Champions Trophy with winning four World Cups in 1971, 1978, 1982 and 1994. Pakistan also has three gold medals in Olympic Games field hockey tournaments in Rome 1960, Mexico City 1968 and Los Angeles 1984. Then the downfall began and an always-winning team that played all World Cup editions, could not qualify for 2014 and 2023 mega events. Star Olympian Shahnaz Sheikh pleads to blend young players with experienced hands for forming a squad that owns the potential to beat any team in the world. "Players need to improve their movements and points marking in the D area. They should avoid counterattacks and improve the conversion of penalty corners. If we get three to four penalty corners at least two must be utilized," Shahnaz told APP. "We need to strongly

work on all these things if we want to improve our game. Our players must play with unity and avoid individual point scoring in any game," he commented. At present, the Pakistan national hockey team holds the 16th spot in International Hockey Federation (FIH) rankings. Further suggesting measures for improvement, he said, there were around 28 Education Boards in the country with hundreds of schools affiliated with each Board. "Therefore, if each government school is allowed to participate in tournaments, the total number of participating teams would be in hundreds. This practice would be a sort of talent hunt bringing new players to the national squad." He also suggested designated hockey fields to promote the game as he recalled, "in our times plentiful of national and district tournaments were held annually for improvement of players mental and physical strength." "Then there were different departments, offering jobs to players. But, rapid changes in the hockey setup affected the game badly," he said. Meanwhile, legendary hockey player and Olympian Shehbaz Ahmed Senior emphasised the need

to educate players with modern techniques and skills and provide them jobs that would help in bringing the national game back on track with proper planning from the grassroots to the top level. "There is also a need to build four to five hockey centres in the country directly operated under the federation," he said. "Youth must be spotted from grassroots, educated and fed properly and trained at these centres according to international standards." Shabbaz further pleaded that Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) must have a proper annual budget. "Every time we have to request for grants to participate in national and international championships or preparation of training camps abroad." He said, "Young players must also be offered regular jobs as was happening during our times when all players had jobs in different departments." Shabbaz advocated organizing Pakistan Hockey League (PHL) as he believes it would prove a key step towards reviving the national game. "Besides providing financial support to PHF, the league will help explore new talent for regaining our lost glory," he said.



In brief

IRSA releases 176,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 176,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 199,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1428.91 feet and was 30.91 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 69,600 cusecs and 68,000 cusecs respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1123.00 feet, which was 73.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 56,400 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 80,400, 73,300, 41,500 and 14,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 38,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 19,100 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ICT admin seals two shops

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration sealed two shops, arrested four, and imposed fines totalling 15,000 rupees on shopkeepers involved in profiteering. According to the ICT spokesperson, the operation was carried out on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon with the assistant commissioners (ACs) conducting raids in their respective areas to combat price increases, encroachment, hygiene issues, and professional beggars. During the operation, the ACs carried out inspections at 116 places and imposed a fine of Rs 15,000 for price gouging, and sealed two shops. Four shopkeepers were also arrested and subsequently taken to the local police station. Furthermore, 22 professional beggars were apprehended and handed over to the police for further legal action. In addition to addressing price increases, the ICT administration also took action against illegal clinics and sheesha cafes, aiming to maintain order and safety within the city. The use of polythene bags was also inspected during the operation, resulting in the confiscation of over 15 kg of polythene bags. The administration also took notice of unauthorized fly agencies as well, leading to the closure of an illegal Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) filling station, and an illegal petrol filling agency.

Three held during police crackdown

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested three members gang involved in stealing iron rods and recovered iron weighing (two and a half tons) worth of lacs of rupees from their possession during a crackdown here on Sunday. The arrested accused were identified as Imran, Ahmad, and Abdul Rehman. Taxila police have registered separate cases against all of them and started an investigation. According to police officials, the accused had stolen an iron rod from an under-construction house. Superintendent of Police (SP) Potohar Muhammad Waqas Khan hailed the police performance and said that the arrested accused were challenged with concrete evidence. "The culprits who deprive the citizens of their valuable assets cannot escape from the grip of the law," he added.



ISLAMABAD: Machinery being used for extension work of Park Road during development work in Federal Capital.

Mushaal urges PM, FM to raise voice for Yasin Malik's safe release

ISLAMABAD (INP): Mushaal Hussein Mullick, the Chairperson of Peace and Culture Organisation and wife of jailed Kashmiri leader, Muhammad Yasin Malik, has urged the government of Pakistan to raise the issue of senior Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik's detention at all fora globally because the notorious Narendra Modi fascist regime is hell-bent to silence the most powerful voice of Kashmiri freedom movement for ever.

According to Kashmir Media Service Mushaal in a statement expressed alarm that the fascist government would eliminate Yasin Malik, chief of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), as India's infamous National Investigation Agency (NIA) again sought the death sentence for him, after he was given life in prison in a concocted and politically motivated case on May 25 last year for his crime to raise voice for right to self-determination

of Kashmiris.

She demanded that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari should take up the case of Yasin Malik before the world leaders and at relevant UN forums and in human rights organisations to protect his life.

The Hurriyat leader stated that her husband's life was in danger because the Indian authorities could not buy his loyalty; hence they were now resorted to hang him to silence the most popular leader of contemporary Kashmiri freedom fight.

She said that it was high time for the Pakistani government to play a proactive role to not only save his life but to build maximum pressure on the Indian government to ensure his release from illegal detention.

Mushaal said that Modi is actually hanging his entire political career down the drain. However, she vowed that the notorious Indian authorities should not think this would ever

silence the brave Kashmiris. She warned that Yasin was not an ordinary leader and if anything happened to him the entire region would be engulfed in war flames for which the Indian notorious government would be responsible.

The Chairperson recalled that Kashmiri people had been struggling peacefully to break the shackles of Indian slavery and always discourage violence; however, she warned that if they approved his death sentence, then the situation might go out of control; hence the Indian authorities should not only reconsider their decision of life imprisonment but should set him free because he was incarcerated in fake and fabricated cases.

Mushaal urged that the United Nations bodies, world powers and human rights organisations should raise their voice for safeguarding the life of Yasin Malik and ensure his release from jail who was put in death cell despite fast deteriorating health condition.

Shaikh vows to keep supporting PTI chief Imran Khan

RAWALPINDI (NNI): Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid has said he will keep supporting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan through thick and thin.

In a video clip posted on his official Twitter handle, he said as long as Imran Khan is 'fighting this battle', he will stand with him. "And when Imran Khan is in power, then I will not have any responsibility, I will keep the flag of truth high even if my life is lost," he hinted. "I am not a coward, I maintain friendships and enmities till death," he vowed.

Shaikh said that the police have been raiding the houses of his sisters, nephews, brothers, and his mother, who died 30 years ago for the past 20 days. He claimed that the government has hired three assassins (hitmen) to kill him.

"I want to tell you that I have the right to defend myself and I have also written to the authorities of Pakistan's actual government that there is a limit to abuse."

The AML chief said that although he was not in the country, he condemned the events of May 9, saying that he considers the "Pakistan Army great and protector of the country".

"I have only been tweeting for the past 20 days and have not even been on a TV talk show. If they are afraid of my Twitter, I will continue tweeting until I am arrested," he said.

Chairman Senate calls on CM Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani called on Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo.

According to the details, an important meeting was held between CM Balochistan and President Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), Abdul Qudus Bizenjo and Chairman Senate Mir Sadiq Sanjrani. The two leaders discussed the political situation in the country and the affairs of BAP in the prolonged meeting. Organizational matters of the party were also discussed during the meeting.

Both leaders denied reports suggesting that Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) will be merged into any other party. "The BAP will participate in the upcoming elections as an independent party," the meeting agreed. They also agreed that the party will consider seat adjustments with other parties after taking into consideration regional political scenarios.

Party cadres at the grassroots union council level will be formulated and strengthened. It was decided that party workers who are the real assets and driving force behind the party will be supported and given the utmost value and respect. They also agreed that party workers will be taken into confidence before taking any major decisions vis national and regional politics and alliances.

The two leaders resolved to make BAP a dynamic force not just at the provincial level but also in the national mainstream political scene. The CM added that BAP is the biggest political party in the province and it will emerge once again as the biggest force in the province in the next general elections.

Both leaders also agreed that those party workers who left will be welcomed if they join again and doors for rejoining are always open for annoyed members.

Pak Railways set to restore Bahauddin Zakaria Express

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways was all set to restore the 'Bahauddin Zakaria Express' train en route from Multan to Karachi from June 1, aiming at facilitating the passengers and providing opportunities to small businessmen of the area. "The department had suspended the operation of Bahauddin Zakaria Express as the railway track was badly damaged in the flash floods triggered by above-normal monsoon rains during the last year across the country," an official told APP.

He said the train was being restored on the direc-

tions of Minister for Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique and the department had already issued notification in that regard.

The official said the Bahauddin Zakaria Express would run from Karachi City to Multan. "It will be restored after nine months, and the department had also advertised restoration of the train on the route through different means."

He said the train would be restored as per the timing and schedule as per the current summer timetable and the train's two stoppages including Jungshahi

and Jhimpir would also be eliminated.

The official said Pakistan Railways was planning to upgrade two passenger trains to provide maximum facilities to passengers and generate more revenue for the department aiming to drive its self-sufficiency. "Khawaja Saad Rafique has already issued directions to the relevant officials to make all necessary arrangements in this regard for renovating Karachi-bound trains to facilitate the masses," he said.

Commissioner seeks proposal for construction of parking plazas

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta has directed the authorities concerned to submit a detailed report for construction of two parking plazas at suitable locations in Murree. According to a Commissioner Office spokesperson, the Commissioner had formed a committee comprising members from PMU, local government to finalize Murree master plan within shortest possible time frame.

She informed that chairing a meeting held here at Commissioner Office regarding Murree contingency plan, the Commissioner directed the authorities concerned to finalize Murree master plan as soon as possible.

The Director Development and Xen Building were instructed to visit Murree and submit a detailed proposal in next meeting for construction of two parking plazas at suitable locations in Murree.

The Commissioner directed the officers to give an updated report about progress on three bypasses of Murree - Dadyal,

Bustan Mor, and Bansara Gali to Kali Mitti in the next meeting.

The National Park of Murree and Kotli Sattian should be made the center of attention for the tourists, the Commissioner said adding, the Forest Department should launch a strategic tree plantation campaign for Murree.

Best possible arrangements should be made to facilitate the tourists and while finalizing the arrangements, special emphasis should be given on the convenience and ease of movement of the local people, the Commissioner said and directed the Meteorological Department to timely send weather forecasts to the departments concerned and all the departments should develop close liaison with each other. There should be up-to-date information, warning boards and latest weather forecasts at all places for the convenience of tourists, the commissioner added. As a precautionary measure, people should also be advised to avoid unnecessary travel during rainy season, Liaquat Ali Chhatta said.

Oil imports from Russia; a ray of hope for cheaper fuel

ISLAMABAD (APP): Fluctuating global oil prices, devaluation of the currency, taxation on oil imports and very low local oil exploration put a heavy strain on the fragile economy of a country like Pakistan which heavily relies on oil import for power generation industrial production and transportation.

The soaring prices of petroleum products have a trickle-down effect on each and every segment of society from a daily wage to a farmer, and from a government servant to a businessman. When petroleum prices are increased, the cost of transportation rises, taking the rates of daily-use items to a new height, thus affecting the buying power of consumers which has already gone down a lot in recent years.

Similarly, the majority being run on oil, the power plants generate high-cost electricity which ultimately put a burden not only on consumers but also affects industrial production costs bringing a new wave of inflation. Recognizing the magnitude of this challenge, the incumbent government took some measures to alleviate the impact such as providing subsidies to public transportation and food producers. However, it was clear that these measures alone were insufficient to fully mitigate the effects of the price hike.

Then, in a game-changing move, the government struck a deal with one of the biggest oil exporters, Russia, not only to alleviate

people's suffering but also to stimulate national economic growth and expansion. The deal aims at ensuring a continuous supply of crude oil from Russia at discounted rates.

"The first shipment of discounted oil from Russia is on its way and is expected to dock at the Karachi Port sometime in May," this encouraging news was shared by State Minister for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik, during a press conference here on May 18.

In April, he informed the media that Pakistan had placed its initial order for discounted Russian oil as part of a signed deal with Moscow. The announcement of the agreement provided a ray of hope for the masses, who had been grappling with inflation and increased oil prices since the ouster of Nawaz Sharif from the government in July 2017.

The development also started off debates with some arguing that importing crude oil from Russia would not benefit Pakistan due to the lack of refineries here, but they were unaware that the petroleum ministry and the Prime Minister (PM) office had already addressed this issue. On April 29, after confirming Pakistan's first order of discounted Russian crude oil on April 20, Dr Musadik revealed that PM Shehbaz Sharif had approved the construction of an oil refinery worth \$10 to \$14 billion.

Faheem Khawaja, an

Economics professor, believed that the current government's efforts to obtain Russian oil would play a significant role in putting the country back on track. He emphasized the pivotal role energy, especially petroleum products, play in fostering socio-economic development in any country and regarded Pakistan's decision to turn to Russia for meeting its oil demands as a much-needed step and a victory for the present regime.

Shahzad Paracha, a business reporter and analyst, said that importing Russian oil would also address the balance of payment crisis faced by the country.

He explained that energy imports constitute the majority of Pakistan's external payments, and importing Russian oil would help maintain the foreign exchange reserves, which had been depleting over the past few years.

According to Musadik Malik, Pakistan, "Under the signed deal with Moscow, we will only purchase crude oil not refined fuel."

"If the initial transaction goes smoothly, imports are expected to reach 100,000 barrels per day," he added.

When asked about the potential benefits of the oil deal with Russia, an official from the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) stated, "We are a net importer of oil and spend billions of dollars each year on oil imports. The discounted Russian oil can help us save money and

reduce the trade deficit, which can boost the economy and create jobs."

He said importing Russian oil could help end Pakistan's energy crisis, adding by importing discounted oil from Russia, the oil supply in Pakistan would increase, leading to a reduction in the prices of petroleum products thus ultimately improving the lives of people and strengthening the national economy. Despite the positive aspects of the Islamabad-Moscow oil deal, some analysts believed that there were risks involved especially regarding Pakistan's relations with the United States (US). However, these risks were dismissed by Ambassador to the US Masood Khan during a conference at the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute in Washington on April 27.

He made it clear, "We have placed the first order for Russian oil, and this decision has been made in consultation with the United States government. There is no misunderstanding between Washington and Islamabad regarding this matter."

It was a bold and tough decision to struck a deal with Russia at this critical moment when the Russia-Ukraine war was at its peak, but the courageous leadership of the government took the decision solely for the welfare of the masses and to take the country forward.

Weapons Handed to WCP
WARDAK (Agencies): Police officers of Maidan Wardak handed over dozens of weapons to the weapons collection process. These weapons were recovered during security operations from parts of Maidan Wardak, mainly Behsud district, the police of province said. The provincial director of counter-terrorism of Police Department, Mawlawi Zamrak Obeida, said that during this round, they handed over sixty-two light and heavy weapons to the weapons collection process.

Police performance stressed
KABUL (Agencies): Acting Prime Minister of IEA, in a meeting with the security commanders of Zabul and Laghman said, the professionalism of police is a need and full attention should be paid. The provincial chief police of Zabul Qari Salahuddin, and Mawlawi Najibullah, the police chief of Laghman, shared detail on the security situation in the mentioned provinces and police training to the political deputy and sponsor of the ministry, a statement said.

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

Work on Pashdan Dam resumed

HERAT (TOLONews): After a nearly two-year halt, the initial work on Pashdan Dam of Herat province has begun; however, the full construction of the dam is waiting for the order of the government.

The dam is located in Karokh district, 25 kilometers to the northwest of Herat City.

The reason for stopping the construction was said to be a lack of budget.

“We have made all preparations. Our foreign and national engineers are in the area. We are waiting for the instruction of the Islamic Emirate officials,” said Nematullah Hakimi, head of the project.

Meanwhile, the residents of Herat urged the government to resume work on the Pashdan Dam.

“Herat is currently not in good condition due to low water. The underground water is decreasing. This dam can be very effective for storing water for farmers,” said Abdul Hadi Qani, a resident of Herat.

Earlier, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) said that it has been considering resuming work on 11 unfinished projects.

“We ensure our beloved nation, particularly our people in Herat, that the Pashdan dam is included in the 1402 fiscal budget and we hope there will be no change during its approval,” said Nisar Ahmad Elyas, a spokesman for the Herat governor.

According to officials, the construction of Pashdan Dam is 85 percent complete and with the resumption construction, the project will be completed within five months.

“In addition to producing 2 megawatts of power, it will irrigate the area. There could be good entertaining areas constructed,” said Mohammad Rafiq Shaheer, head of the expert council.

It is reported that the dam was damaged due to consecutive floods over the past several years.

5.2 magnitude earthquake strikes Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): An earthquake of magnitude 5.2 jolted the Faizabad district of Badakhshan province of Afghanistan on Sunday morning.

The quake’s epicentre was 36 km southeast of the Jurm district of Badakhshan, and the tremors were felt across the region, including Pakistan, India, and Southern Tajikistan, Indian National Center for Seismology reported.

Based on the preliminary information, the earthquake was reported to be of magnitude 5.9 and was felt 70 km east-southeast of Faizabad, the capital city of Badakhshan, the European Mediterranean Seismological Center (EMSC) said.

Earlier, an earthquake of magnitude of 4.3 rocked Badakhshan province of Afghanistan on May 25, 2023.

The earthquake epicentre was the Zebak district of Badakhshan province, Afghanistan, with a latitude of 36.49 N and a Longitude of 71—58 E, NCS said.

So far, no casualties have been reported due to the earthquake. Further details are awaited.

Afghanistan is the region’s most natural disaster-prone area, including earthquakes, landslides, floods, avalanches and heavy rain.

Recently, the frequent earthquake in the country, particularly in Faizabad’s capital city of Badakhshan province, has increased people’s concerns.

Additional safety measures and safeguards are needed to lessen the severity of the disaster due to the frequent natural disasters, especially earthquakes, that affect the nation, including northeast and northern regions.

Takhar residents want salt mining resumed



TALOQAN (Pajhwok): Residents of Namak Aab district of northern Takhar province complain the suspension of extraction works at the Taqcha Khana salt mine has rendered hundreds of people jobless and want the government to resume the mining.

Haji Gull Mohammad, a resident of Namak Aab district, told Pajhwok Afghan News extraction works at TaqchaKhana salt mine were suspended some months ago by the government, rendering hundreds of laborers jobless.

He said: “We would be happy if works at the salt mine are legally resumed because hundreds of laborers would get employment opportunities”.

Abdul Basir, another resident of NamakAab district, said: “All the people are living in abject in poverty, there is no work for them to do, we want the government to resume the salt extraction as soon as possible”.

He said annually thousands of laborers had been working in the mine to earn and support their families, but now they were desperate to find work.

Maulavi Abdul Nasir Haqqani, head of provincial Mines and Industries Department, admitted that mining works at the salt deposit had been suspended by the government.

But he said the government had taken steps to legalize the mining work and signed agreements with three mine companies who would soon start extraction works. He said Taqcha Khana was one of the biggest mines in the country and mining works would be legally resumed and thousands of unemployed laborers would be re-employed.

Takhar is mineral rich province in the north of Afghanistan. Besides huge salt mines, there are numerous mines of coal and gold as well. Experts believe if these mines are legally exploited, it will create jobs and earn good revenues for the government.

Armed robberies increasing: Residents

KABUL (TOLONews): Some Kabul residents criticized the surge in armed robberies in parts of the capital by irresponsible armed individuals. They asked the Islamic Emirate to make an effort to ensure the security of the people.

“Everyone abuses the Islamic Emirate’s name and uniform. They stop the people wherever they want, they are responsible for the robberies,” Mohammad Zubair, a resident of Kabul, told TOLONews.

“We ask the Islamic Emirate to ensure security; robberies and car theft should be reduced,” Javid, another resident of Kabul, told TOLONews.

This comes as the former governor of Nuristan province, Mohammad Omar Shirzad, said that armed individuals wearing the uniform of Islamic Emirate forces took away his armored car five days ago in PD5 of Kabul.

“Last Monday at 1:30 pm several armed Taliban who identified themselves as the Taliban of PD 5 came to our house located in Khushal Khan Mina, in the fifth district, and took my armored car, for which I had a national security card,” Shirzad said.

“They entered the house by force with weapons, and told us to give them the car keys or they will shoot at us. They started the car and drove off,” said Nazifullah, a relative of the former governor of Nuristan.

The Kabul Security Command, however, denied a rise in armed robberies and said that more than 30 irresponsible armed individuals have been arrested in the previous month.

Kabul Security Command spokesperson Khalid Zadran noted that work has been ongoing with the case of the former governor of Nuristan.

“We had 11 armed cases in the last month, 31 criminals connected to them were arrested and handed over to the law,” he said.

The Kabul Security Command added that armed robberies have decreased significantly compared to the past.

42 dead in natural disasters in past month

KABUL (Agencies): Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) has reported that over the past month, at least 42 people died and 45 were injured in 13 provinces due to natural disasters.

Shafiullah Rahimi, a spokesman for the ministry, said in a video that during this period, 341 houses were completely or partially destroyed, 19,573 acres of agricultural land was destroyed, and 1,354 livestock were lost in these provinces, mostly in flash floods.

According to Rahimi, these incidents took place in the provinces of Kapisa, Maidan Wardak, Takhar, Badakhshan, Ghor, Kandahar, Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman, Paktia, Khost, Daikundi and Nangarhar.

Afghans enjoy equal rights in country, says Deputy PM

KABUL (Agencies): The Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs of the Islamic Emirate Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi met with a number of Shiite elders and religious scholars, a statement said Sunday.

In the meeting, Dr. Jafar Mahdavi spoke on behalf of others and expressed hopes over significant achievements and development of the IEA in various fields including ensuring country-wide security and rooting out of administrative corruption, the statement said.

“There may be some challenges in some fields, but firm determination and complete honesty of the IEA towards a progressive and prosperous Afghanistan, is obvious to everyone, and it has given great hope to Afghans,” the statement quoted Dr. Mahdavi as saying.



He also asked expansion of education and implementation of development projects in the central regions of the country, the statement further said.

Meanwhile, Deputy PM Hanafi, while expressing pleasure over their meeting,

said that the IEA will use any possible option towards building a progressive and prosperous Afghanistan and will not spare any efforts in this regard, according to the statement.

“The people of Afghanistan are each other

brothers and enjoy equal rights in the country including citizenship and employment opportunities rights, as well as the IEA is making efforts to equally implement development projects across the country,” the statement added.

2 deaths from Congo-Crimea Haemorrhagic fever reported

KABUL (TOLONews): The health department of Balkh province reported that in the past week 10 positive cases of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF) have been recorded in north region of the country, and two people have died.

Local Balkh officials said that incidents of this illness were rising in the country’s north, and they urged religious leaders and the media to warn people about the dangers associated with the disease’s spread.

According to the US’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), transmission to humans occurs through “contact with infected ticks or animal blood,” and CCHF “can be transmitted from one infected human to another by contact with infectious blood or body fluids.”

“We try and tell all the scholars to inform the people about the Congo disease,” said Saifuddin Azizi, head of the department of Hajj and Islamic Affairs of Balkh.

A resident of the province of Balkh, Ahmad Zubair, said that one of his relatives who kept livestock, recently became ill with Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF).

“He was gushing blood from his mouth and nose.

They told us that the patient had Congo when we brought him to the hospital,” said Ahmad Zubair.

“A person who acquires Congo disease will often have fever, pain, headache, exhaustion, and weakness as a result of the illness. The patient then experiences mental health issues,” said Nabiullah Amiri, head of the 50-Bed Antani Hospital in Balkh.

The symptoms of Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF), according to physicians, include a high fever, headache, bodily discomfort, nausea, stomach pain, and occasionally bleeding.

However, some residents of Herat urged the government to help the needy and poor families. They said it must be a priority for the government and other humanitarian institutions to help such poor and needy people.

Abdul Qadir, a resident of Herat, said the government should collect the beggars and give the needy ones assistance and should prevent habitual beggars.

Rohullah, another resident, said some of the beg-

gars were professional and they begged despite having a good life.

He asked the government to identify professional beggars and prevent them from such activities.

MaulaviFazel Rehman Fayazi, head of Afghanistan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) in Herat, admitted the number of beggars had increased. He said they had so far identified 50 deserving beggars in Heratcity.

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Beggars swarm Herat roads, people want them aided

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): The presence of beggars on crowded roadsides has become a great source of disturbance for local residents of this western city of Herat as they intercept passersby to give them alms.

Some of these beggars told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had no one to support them and they turned to begging due to joblessness.

Ruqia, 63, one of the beggars of Herat city, said begging was an easy job because she was sick and could not do other works and lack of caregiver forced her to beg every day in the city.

She claimed she had never received any assistance from any governmental or charitable organizations.

She said she was blind in one eye and had no breadwinner.

Mah Jabin another beggar, told Pajhwok: “I lost my husband 15 years ago, my only son left our family as he became addicted to drugs, I feed my family, I am begging for my family including my daughter in law and my two grandchildren.”

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He said they had

launched a drive in cooperation with other provincial authorities to identify deserving people and round up habitual beggars.

It is worth mentioning due to the deterioration of the economic situation in the country, the number of beggars has been increasing in most parts of the country.

ARCS officials said some time ago had said out of one hundred beggars in Herat city, only fifteen were deserving.



18 people killed, 19 injured in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some countrreis last week renewed their call for the formation of an inclusive government and removal of curbs on women in Afghanistan, but Afghan acting government responded that its government was inclusive and women rights were enact.

Casualteis:
Last week, 18 people were killed and 19 others injured in Afghanistan.

According to reports, unidentified gunmen have shot dead a tribal elder in Uruzgan province, crime branch chief in Samangan’s Hazrat Sultan district, a child in Baghlan province a young man in Logar province and the body of a man recovered in Kapesa province.

A hand grenade blast left 13 people killed and injured in Baghlan province,

according to local officials.

Reports showed that an Explosive Ramnant of War (ERW) blast left one child killed and one injured in Ghazni province, a child was killed in a similar blast in Maidan Wardak, in Kandahar, a Kochi man was killed in a rocket war-head blast and injured two children, and two children were killed and one injured in a landmine blast in Nuristan province.

Defence Ministry said that two pilots were killed in a helicopter crash in Samangan province whiel a notorious robber was killed during exchange of fire with security forces in Laghman.

Sources said tha previous week 19 people were killed and four injured in Afghanistan.

However, before the

regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians, government forces and insurgents would get killed and wounded every week.

Ashqabad meeting:
According to a Voice of America report, the special envoys of EU and central Asian countries for Afghanistan gathered for the fourth time in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.

Besides EU special envoy Tomas Nicklasson, Special Representative of Secretary General of the United Nations Roza Otunbayeva, World Bank country director Melinda Good, the special envoys of Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also took part in the meeting.

The representatives in a joint statement said they had an in-depth discussions about the current economic

and development situations of Afghanistan.

The representatives once again reaffirmed their strong commitment to the people of Afghanistan and to seeing Afghanistan develop into a stable, peaceful and prosperous country with long-term prospects for lasting peace.

This comes that Acting PM and Political Aide Mawlawi Abdul Kabir termed the incumbent government inclusive and said individuals in the past government had no place and they were not acceptable to them.

Also G7 nations asked the Islamic Emirate implement its commitment in fight against terrorism and respect women rights in line with the UN charter.

But the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) Spokesperson Zabihullah

Mujahid said that acting Afghan government being a responsible authority will never allow its soil to be used against any other nation.

He said Afghanistan want other nations to make sure their citizens did not enter Afghanistan for subversive activities.

Formal recognition:
Last week, US State Department Spokeperson Matthew Miller said that Washington will not recognize IEA government until curbs against women are not removed.

But IEA Deputy Spokeperson Bilal Karimi said: “IEA desired cordial ties with all nations and wanted formal and open ties but not at the cost of our values and national interest.”

Iran Foreign Minister

Hussain Amir Abdul Hiyan also said that Tehran will not recognize IEA government until an inclusive government is not formed.

Chines Ambassador to Afghanistan Wang Yu said that Beijing was against pressure tactics, sanctions and interference and stood by Afghanistan.

Respect to woment rights:
Volker Turk, UN Human Rights Commissioner, last week during a gathering in Geneva demanded the revocation of the IEA strategy regarding women rights and said curbs on women rights would push Afghanistan to poverty and disappointment.

Amnesty Interantional in its report said that besides the violation of women and girls rights, their abduction, imprisonment, harassment

and improper behavior with them was considered to be a crime against humanity on the bases of the international justice laws.

But IEA repeatedly said that government was committed to protect women and girls rights under the framework of Islamic Sharia Law.

Mujahid said: “This report is baised and we reject, they should understand the realities, women under the IEA government women and girls lived honorably, they are safeguarded from violence and harassment and work in the government structure. Our thousands of sisters are busy working in health, social and other sectors.”

UN Women Organisation said that fight against women rights was faced with challenges worldwide

but it was faced with serious challenges in Afghanistan. It added efforts were on to take effective steps for the improvement of women condition.

Norwegian Refugee Council Secretary General Jan Egeland during meetings with IEA officials in Kandahar demanded resumption of women work and asked a timetable should be set that when women should return to work.

Humanitarian Aid
The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has provided 16 landcruser ambulance vehicles to the Afghanistan Red Creasent Society (ARCS). UNICEF provided medical and non-medical aid worth \$7 million wiel the EU provided 98 tonnes medical and other aid items to Afghanistan last week.

Imran Khan exploits innocence of people, says Interior Minister

FAISALABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan has said that Imran Khan exploited innocence of the people and hoodwinked them with false accusation against his political opponents.

He was addressing a rally at Zila Council Chowk here on Sunday evening. This rally was taken out from his public secretariat near Chak No.65-JB Bypass in connection with Yaum-e-Takbeer-e-Pakistan and Takreem-e-Shuhda-e-Pakistan. A large number of the participants participated in the rally which marched on various city roads by holding banners, placard and chanting slogans.

The minister said that Imran Khan had cultivated seed of hatred among the nation due to which the nation had to face the mayhem of 9th May. He illusioned the youths who followed him blindly and vandalized Jinnah House Lahore.

They first looted and plundered the household items and then put it on fire, he said. They also damaged the sensitive military installations, he added. It was not only a corps commander house but was also his camp office where sensitive information for national integrity was present, he mentioned. It was now the responsibility of Pak army to recover these sensitive items by bringing the culprits to the justice, he added.

He said that the accused tried to weaken the national defense and they could be compared with the Kalbushan who trespassed in our territory. They must be nabbed and their cases should be sent to the military courts.

The minister said that only those individual would be granted forgiveness whose crime was lesser nature.

He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz

Sharif had issued clear instruction that no innocent people should be implicated and no criminal arsonist should be allowed to go escort free. He said that Imran Khan was reluctant to condemn the 9th May incident and now he was expecting from us to negotiate with him.

"We openly condemn this incident and support the families of martyrs and Ghazis who had devoted their lives to defend the geographical and ideological territories of Pakistan. If we accepted the offer of negotiation with terrorist, how we can face families of the martyrs", he added. He said that our Jawans were equipped with so unmatched bravery and valor that it was also recognized by our enemy. But the PTI activists had shown disrespect to the monuments of these Jawans who laid down their lives for the country. How we could negotiate with them.

He said that Imran Khan also hatched a conspiracy to divide Pak army during appointment of army chief but it was foiled by the maturity of army high command. God forbid, if he succeeded it was tantamount to fulfill aspiration of the enemies of Pakistan, he added.

He said that another conspiracy was also hatched which was detected in-time by our agencies. Under this conspiracy, they had planned to attack house of a known PTI worker and kill innocent people there so that they could put its blame on the government and agencies. "We immediately informed the people as it was a ripe strategy which could be exercised any time", he added.

The minister said that Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was the first defense line of Pakistan and it had played a key role in war against terrorists.

Ijaz-ul-Haq refutes rumours of PML-Z, PTI merger

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Pakistan Muslim League Zia (PML-Z) chief Ijaz-ul-Haq refuted rumours of his party merger with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

As per details, in response to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) the son of former military dictator Zia-ul-Haq and PML-Z chief Ijaz-ul-Haq said the news of the merger with PTI is fake.

He said that in a meeting with the PTI chief Imran Khan, he discussed of coalition with PTI but not a merger. The ECP sought an answer from the PML-Z) chief Ijaz-ul-Haq about his party position.

On March 19, it was reported that Pakistan Muslim League Zia (PML-Z) chief Ijaz-ul-Haq formally joined Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Sunday.

The son of former military dictator Zia-ul-Haq and PML-Z chief Ijaz-ul-Haq met Imran Khan today. After the meeting, Haq announced to formally join Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.

Earlier, PTI Chairman Imran Khan on Wednesday asserted that he was ready to constitute a committee for talks and would step back if the panel is convinced on 'two conditions'.

"I am forming a committee for dialogues. It will talk about two things — if the country can function better without me, I will leave politics. Second, how is it beneficial for the country if elections are held in October," the former premier said while addressing the party workers and supporters. It is pertinent to mention here that several PTI lawmakers and members have parted their ways with the party following the May 9 violence, wherein military installations including General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi and Corps Commander House Lahore were attacked after the arrest of party chairman Imran Khan.

BAP to not be ended on anyone's desire: Bizenjo

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudus Bizenjo on Sunday said that Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) would not be ended on anyone's desire while our party was as strong and stable as the first day in the province. Talking to media persons here, he said that all political parties and their leaderships have respect and dignity saying that the BAP party has achieved a lot of success in the objectives for which it was created.

For the development and prosperity of the province, our government took such bold historical decisions, which were unprecedented in the past, he maintained.

He said that elimination of unnecessary check posts, Gwadar's long-standing problems of electricity and water have been resolved adding that we have protected the rights of fishermen and given them labor status, contract teachers and employees of other departments made permanent. "In a peaceful atmosphere, local body elections, census, exhibition match of PSL, national games were held after 19 years due to positive measures of incumbent provincial government", he underlined.



ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters following early exit poll results for the second round of the presidential election in Istanbul.

‘Mustafa Kamal allegations is baseless against the CM Sindh’

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sharjeel Inam Memon, the Minister of Information, Transport, and Mass Transit of Sindh, stated that Mustafa Kamal has made baseless allegations against the Chief Minister of Sindh. Mustafa Kamal's party is our ally in the federal government. If he has any concerns within his own party, he should address them internally rather than resorting to unfounded accusations.

During a press conference held at the Sindh Archives Complex in Clifton, Karachi, Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted that while Mustafa Kamal's party was inactive, the Chief Minister of Sindh was actively advocating for an accurate census of the citizens residing in Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Nawab Shah, and other areas of Sindh. The records serve as evidence that the Sindh government has consistently and effectively raised its voice at every platform, emphasizing the importance of an accurate population count for the province, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, in one of his press conferences, even stated that the alliance could be reconsidered if the census results were found to be incorrect.

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that Karachi boasts some of the finest government medical facilities in Pakistan, and therefore, it is inappropriate to engage in biased discussions. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) firmly rejects the politics of prejudice, such biased remarks will not be taken seriously by the people, and it is essential to refrain from creating a negative atmosphere.

Sindh Information Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon pointed out that Imran Khan had repeatedly stated that he would never negotiate with certain individuals, it is now evident that Imran Khan is showing eagerness to engage in negotiations with these very same individuals, half of the individuals appointed by Imran Khan to the negotiation committee are currently in hiding, there have been pictures of these people involved in the May 9 sabotage.

Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Asif Ali Zardari has made it clear that before any negotiations can take place, Imran Khan should apologize for the injustices and wrongdoings committed during his tenure, Imran Khan's policies and actions have caused significant damage to the country and its people, it is noteworthy that despite this, Imran Khan is now expressing a willingness to engage in negotiations.

Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted that individuals involved in the attack on the United States Capitol Hill received prison sentences of 18 years, indicating the severity of their actions. He further emphasized that the crimes committed by Imran Khan are even more dangerous in nature. Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Imran Khan failed to condemn the acts of sabotage that occurred in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. Sharjeel Inam Memon expressed his concern that the person responsible for inciting people to carry out acts of sabotage is still at large.

Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that similar to the Al-Qadir Trust case, the

incidents of sabotage that occurred on May 9 are also clear-cut cases against the accused individuals. He mentioned that on that day, the government displayed patience and exercised restraint to prevent any loss of innocent lives. The authorities deliberately kept the police at a distance from the protesters to avoid any potential clashes.

In response to a question, Information Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon expressed that Imran Khan is receiving preferential treatment and blanket relief despite the widely witnessed events of May 9, despite this he was asked to condemn the activities of May 9. Isn't this a relief? Why so much love, so much discount is being given to Ladla.

In response to a question, Sharjeel Inam Memon said that it is being recommended to give NRO to Imran Khan through external and internal messengers. In response to a question, he stated that political parties are not supporting or accommodating individuals who have FIRs lodged against them. However, he clarified that there is no objection or opposition to those individuals who do not have any FIRs filed against them.

He compared his as Sicilian mafia and said that despite numerous instances of sabotage, it appears that those responsible cannot be apprehended or held accountable, drawing a parallel to the perceived impunity. In response to a question, he said that the food department had successfully completed 50 percent of its procurement during the previous month.

President praises scientists, political, military leadership for achievement of nuclear capability

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Sunday said that the achievement of nuclear capability was indeed a remarkable feat for which country's scientists, engineers, political and military leadership of the time deserved high commendation.

In a message on the occasion of 25th anniversary of Youm-e-Takbeer, the president felicitated the Pakistani nation.

He said on this day 25 years ago, in response to India's nuclear tests, Pakistan conducted nuclear tests that was essential for maintaining the balance of power in

the region.

"We must highly appreciate our political and military leadership that took wise decision at that time to achieve nuclear capability making defense of the country unassailable," President Secretariat Press Wing in a press release quoted the president as saying.

On this day, he said, the whole nation paid tribute to the contributions of their eminent engineers and scientists who made Pakistan a nuclear power within a short period of time.

For this, our whole

nation was indebted to all those who played their part in making Pakistan the 1st Islamic nuclear power, he added.

The president further said, "On this day, let us pledge to make Pakistan a stronger country by investing in the intellectual development of our people and strengthening our cyber-security to ensure our defense."

While praying for the country and nation, the president expressed that with their collective efforts, they would be able to make Pakistan's defence impregnable.

Internal differences spark intense fighting among TTP, affiliated terrorist groups

RAWALPINDI (NNI): In a startling turn of events, internal divisions within the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliated terrorist organisations have escalated, resulting in fierce clashes among the militants. In a report issued by the high-profile secret agencies, the ongoing infighting has claimed the lives of several terrorists who were involved in attacks on security forces, as well as suicide bombings targeting public gatherings. Notably, the internal conflict has also caused injuries to those militants whose heads were designated by the Pakistani government.

The series of clashes and casualties can be traced back to a specific timeline of events. On January 19, 2022, Mufti Barjan, a prominent figure of the

Tehreek-e-Taliban Swat faction, sustained injuries, while the group's leader, Muslim Yar, was killed.

Several months later, on May 15, 2022, a clash erupted, resulting in the deaths of five terrorists, including Osman, Bilal, Jannat Gul, and Hazratullah from Tehreek-e-Taliban Swat, with eight others sustaining injuries.

Continuing the string of internal conflicts, Gohar, the leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Bajaur, was injured on May 28, 2022, followed by Zubair alias Kala of TTP on June 25, 2022.

On August 7, 2022, Abdullah, a TTP Bajaur militant, was injured, while the group's leader, Aqabi, was killed the next day, on August 8, 2022. Another notable casualty was the

death of Anwar Khan, leader of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, on the same day.

Moving forward to September 14, 2022, a clash resulted in the deaths of six terrorists, including Badshah Khan and Roshan, both leaders within the organizations. Additionally, 12 individuals, including Zabihullah and Abdul Wahid, sustained injuries during the confrontation. In a separate incident, Balochistan leader Bismillah, alias Pahlawan, was killed. The internal strife among these terrorist groups underscores the deep-rooted divisions and power struggles that have plagued their ranks. It remains to be seen how these clashes will impact the overall dynamics of the TTP and its affiliated organizations, as well as the broader security situation in Pakistan.

PNS SHAHJAHAN participates in int'l exhibition at Malaysia

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship SHAHJAHAN visited Port Langkawi, Malaysia and participated in Langkawi International Maritime & Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) 23. The visit of PN Ship is aimed to strengthen bilateral ties and enhance interoperability between participating navies.

Upon arrival at Port Langkawi, the ship was warmly welcomed by official of Malaysia Navy and Defence attaché of Pakistan at Malaysia. During meetings with Malaysian officials, Commanding Officer of the ship conveyed well wishes from Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi for the people of Malaysia in general and Malaysian Navy in particular. Matters of mutual interest, bilateral collaboration and PN contribution towards regional peace and maritime security were discussed.

PNS SHAHJAHAN participated in International Fleet Review at Langkawi which was witnessed by



Malaysian Prime Minister. Concurrently, Ship's officers and crew participated in various conferences, Table Top Discussions and knowledge sharing sessions on Maritime Interdiction Operations. On completion of harbour activities, ship participated in LIMA Sea Exercise along with warships from Brunei, China, Indonesia, Italy, Japan,

Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, US and other navies.

Visit of PNS SHAHJAHAN to Malaysia contributed significantly towards promoting naval collaboration between various maritime nations to improve interoperability while strengthening bilateral associations and existing bonds of friendship with Malaysia.

Ukraine war: Kyiv hit by new massive Russian drone attack

KYIV (BBC): Russia unleashed waves of air strikes on Kyiv overnight in what officials said appeared to be the largest drone attack on the city since the start of the war, as the Ukrainian capital prepared to celebrate the anniversary of its founding on Sunday. Ukraine's Air Force said it downed 52 out of the 54 Russia-launched drones, calling it a record attack with the Iranian-made 'kamikaze' drones. It was not immediately clear how many of the drones were shot over Kyiv.

In what also appears to be the first deadly attack on Kyiv in May and the 14th assault this month, falling debris killed a 41-year-old man, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

The pre-dawn attacks came on the last Sunday of May when the capital celebrates Kyiv Day, the anniversary of its official founding 1,541 years ago. The day is typically marked by street fairs, live concerts and special museum exhibitions — plans for which have been made this year too,

but on a smaller scale.

"The history of Ukraine is a long-standing irritant for the insecure Russians," Andriy Yermak, the head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office, said on his Telegram channel.

Air Force said on Telegram that Russia had targeted military and critical infrastructure facilities in the central regions of Ukraine, and the Kyiv region in particular.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the information.

With a Ukrainian counteroffensive looming 15 months into the war, Moscow has intensified air strikes after a lull of nearly two months, targeting chiefly military sites and supplies. Waves of attacks now come several times a week.

The Sunday attacks came after Kyiv said that combat clashes eased around the besieged city of Bakhmut in southeastern Ukraine, the site of the war's longest battle.

Serhiy Popko, the head of Kyiv's military administration, said the

attack was carried out in several waves, and air alerts lasted more than five hours.

"Today, the enemy decided to 'congratulate' the people of Kyiv on Kyiv Day with the help of their deadly UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles)," Popko said on the Telegram messaging channel.

Several districts of Kyiv, by far the largest Ukrainian city with a population of around three million, suffered in the overnight attacks, officials said, including the historical Pecherskyi neighbourhood. Reuters witnesses said that during the air raid alerts that started soon after midnight, many people stood on their balconies, some screaming offensives directed at Russia's President Vladimir Putin and "Glory to air defence" slogans.

In the leafy Holosiivskiy district in the southwestern part of Kyiv, falling debris set a three-storey warehouse on fire, destroying about 1,000 square metres of building structures, Mayor Klitschko said.