

X services restored
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After an outage of 39 hours, the services of the popular micro-blogging website X, formerly known as Twitter, have been successfully restored in Pakistan. The outage, which started at 9 p.m. on Saturday, impacted users who reported difficulties accessing tweets and new posts. Attempts to load the site resulted in a 'this site can't be reached' notification.

Public hanging of rape convicts

Upper House

throws out bill

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Senate rejected a bill seeking to publicly execute those convicted of rape with a majority vote on Monday, with parliamentarians strongly opposing the idea as a "counter-effective measure in deterring sexual crimes". The upper house of parliament rejected the move to amend the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, and Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2023 with a 24:14 vote. The bill presented by Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) Senator Mushtaq Ahmed was supported by Senators Mehr Taj Roghani, Kamran Murtaza, Maulana Faiz Muhammad, Hafiz Abdul Kareem, Kamal Ali Agha, Abdul Qadir, and others. The senators who had voted against the bill called for improved prosecutions, investigations for combating sexual crimes, and a better jail environment to ensure that such heinous crimes are averted in the future. Defending his proposal after it had been defeated, JI's Mushtaq said the senators did not talk about the "basic issue" and noted that the lawmakers spoke about "brutality" becoming rife due to public executions, but it's already rife. "I want to halt brutality through public executions. Did the motorway rape case woman and Zainab have no respect? [How] does a rapist have respect?" he wondered, claiming that publicly hanging such criminals would act as a "deterrence". Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl's (JUI-F) Faiz Muhammad, backing Mushtaq, said that culprits who commit such heinous crimes should be hanged publicly. Voicing concerns, Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Senator Sherry Rehman strongly opposed the proposal, calling it a counter-effective measure in deterring sexual crimes, and urged improved prosecutions and investigations to address the matter. Speaking during the session of the Senate, she said: "The Peoples Party has always had a principled stance against the death penalty, whether public or private." "While the PPP staunchly condemns rape as a heinous and grave crime, calling for the death penalty or public executions, as seen in various countries, have not proven to be effective in deterring sexual crimes. We must prioritise enhancing prosecutions and investigations rather than resorting to barbarism and violence within society." She added that there have been historical attempts at public executions during Ziaul Haq's era which failed to reduce crime. "If public hanging is advocated for one crime, it will be demanded for other offences as well. The PPP focuses on the importance of addressing the prevailing anger towards violence and sexual crimes through comprehensive measures, including improved funding for the police, enhanced criminal investigations, and better training for officers handling rape cases." Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) Senator Sadia Abbasi said she opposes the bill as it would make the society more violent. "People were publicly flogged in this country [...] we saw the reaction that took place within the nation and abroad." PML-N's Senator Ishaq Dar also backed the voices against the bill, noting that the death penalty exists in the law. He also deemed the bill "inappropriate" and said that criminals should not be publicly executed.

State to defend civil servants, act against 'violent trolls': PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Monday vowed that the State of Pakistan would defend the civil servants in discharging their constitutional duties and act against those "violent trolls" involved in blackmailing and pressurising them. The prime minister, in a statement, said that the people of Pakistan had spoken with a clear voice on February 8 and had given a split mandate. "Some elements with a proven track record of violent behaviour and vigilantism (however) are now using different tricks, including weaponisation of social media in blackmailing, vigilantism and pressurising civil servants to switch their loyalties from the State of Pakistan to the violent gang," he added. Such action, he said, was a clear violation of the Article 5 and other articles of the Constitution and the laws of the land. "The State of Pakistan shall defend the civil servants in discharging their constitutional duties, act against these violent trolls and ensure exemplary punishment to them." Prime Minister Kakar said that there should be no doubt about the government's commitment to the noble civil servants serving the State and the people of Pakistan.

Four fall prey to KP rain-related incidents

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Four people lost their lives while nine others were injured in rain-related incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), according to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) report on Monday. According to DG PDMA Muhammad Qaiser Khan, recent rains and land sliding claimed the lives of four people and injured nine people. Two houses were completely damaged while four suffered partial damage. Khan further said efforts are in place to open blocked roads due to landslides in the province. We are in close touch with the administration of the affected provinces, he added. The statement further said letters were penned to the district administrations on February 15 and 17 to ensure precautionary measures. Meanwhile, the reports said power supply in the different areas of PESCO region was affected following rains and snowfall. According to a PESCO spokesman, the rains continued in Mardan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Swat and Swabi and due to rain, some feeders of PESCO were tripped. On the instructions of PE-SCO Chief Executive Officer Akhtar Hameed Khan, the field staff was put on high alert. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Meteorological Department on Monday predicted more rain-wind thunderstorm, snowfall over the hills with isolated heavy rain hailstorm in most parts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Meanwhile, at least 148 travelers were rescued in the wake of intense snowfall in Upper Dir and Swat Valley, said security officials on Monday. Key roads and the Lowari Tunnel have been closed due to heavy snow accumulation. Local authorities and the Pakistani Army have swiftly initiated emergency measures to clear critical roadways and the Lowari Tunnel. In a rapid response, district administration and the military safely transported 148 stranded travelers to designated secure locations. Heavy machinery is being deployed to clear snow from all roads, ensuring accessibility across the affected areas. The Pakistani Army is actively engaged in rescuing a large number of travelers trapped in the Lowari Tunnel, ensuring their safe evacuation.

Caretaker PM again skips court hearing

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday ruled that the caretaker prime minister should be removed from his office as he failed to answer in the missing Baloch students' case. The Caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar didn't appear before the court in person for second time in the case pertaining to the non-recovery of Baloch students. "The Prime Minister didn't appear in the court for second time. He was summoned because he was answerable for all this," Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani remarked. Earlier, Justice Kayani had remarked that death sentence should be handed down to those behind forced disappearances. The people involved in such disappearances should be awarded death sentence twice, he said during the last hearing. Justice Kayani said that defence secretary, interior secretary, DG ISI and DG MI are government officials and therefore PM was summoned because he was answerable for it. All these officers are also responsible for this and no one is beyond the law, court ruled. "Where are caretaker ministers, interior secretary and defence secretary," Justice Kayani questioned. The court remarked that 12 missing students have not been recovered yet. Attorney General Mansoor Usman said that there were eight missing students yet. "Three consecutive governments couldn't do anything for missing persons," the court ruled and added that it is utter failure of state institutions. Attorney General requested the court to grant some time to prepare the policy until the next government takes charge. Justice Kayani said that the DC Islamabad is misusing the MPO order. A raid was conducted at the residence of PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat late night despite the fact that he is MNA and a lawyer, the court said. The IHC once again summoned the prime minister on Feb 28 before adjourning the case.

Protest continue in Balochistan

F.P. Report

QUETTA: A protest sit-in of four parties alliance continued on Monday outside the office of Deputy Commissioner Quetta/District Returning Officer, Quetta, pressing the authorities to issue election-2024's results of different constituencies of the province in accordance with Form-45. According to detail, four parties alliance, including Pushtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Balochistan National Party (Mengal), National Party and Hazara Democratic Party, have been observing the protest sit-in at Anscomb Road area of Quetta outside the office of Deputy Commissioner Quetta/District Returning Officer, Quetta for the last eleven days.



GAZA: Workers unload bags of humanitarian aid that entered Gaza by truck through the Karem Abu Salem border crossing in southern part of Palestinian territory.

President calls for respecting people's mandate

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has said that political inclusion is imperative for financial inclusion to put the country on the path of progress and prosperity. He hailed millions of young voters who had expressed their confidence in the democratic system. He said if their confidence in the system was shaken, it would not be in the country's interest, and called for respecting the mandate of the people. The President maintained that the blockage of social media websites in Pakistan was due to the lack of intellectual capacity to handle criticism. He also lamented that capable people were being kicked out of politics. The President gave these remarks while addressing the third edition of Hosting Business Net 2024, a platform to promote financial inclusion and digital transformation and recognize the contributions of companies working in this sector, according to a statement issued here on Monday. The ceremony was attended by members of the business and diplomatic community. Speaking on the occasion, the President called for enhancing the inclusion of deprived sections of society, especially women and persons with disabilities, in the mainstream of the economy through the digital transformation of the financial sector for socio-economic development. He said financial inclusion was not possible without political inclusion of the people as excluding them from the development process could have repercussions for the country. Expressing concern over the slow decision-making and lack of leadership in the country, the President said that Pakistan needed good leadership and timely decision-making to put it on the path of progress and prosperity. He remarked that Pakistani people were a vibrant nation that had been blessed with abundant natural resources, adding that Pakistan needed to invest in their intellectual development and capacity building. The President highlighted that Pakistan could not progress without the inclusion of 26.2 million out-of-school children in the education system. He said educating such a large portion of our population would require thousands of new schools and additional resources. "If left unaddressed, Pakistan would export raw labour without any value-addition", he added. He cited the example of China which had lifted millions of its people out of poverty by investing in their education and health. The President said that technology could have been utilized to grant the right to vote to overseas Pakistanis through internet voting (i-voting) as well as bring improvements in the electoral process through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). He regretted that i-voting and EVMs could not be introduced due to vested interests. The President highlighted the need for setting priorities for the country, making good decisions and efficiently utilizing its human resources for progress of the country. He said the low tax-to-GDP ratio was a perennial problem in Pakistan, adding that overcoming this issue would help reduce Pakistan's reliance on foreign loans. The President said that banks were offering business loans for women on easy terms and conditions, however, there was a lack of awareness about micro-credit facilities for women. He urged the banks to enhance their outreach by introducing cashless banking in far-flung areas through customized products and services. CEO of Transforming Hub, Iftikhar Hussain, highlighted that BizNet was an ecosystem that had brought together the best minds by promoting increased collaboration, commitment and innovation. He underlined the pivotal role played by the banking sector in adopting the latest financial solutions paving the way for user-friendly banking transactions. Speaking on the occasion, CEO of Airlinks Communication, Muzaffar Piracha, apprised the audience that digitization of the economy was the first step towards financial inclusion which was not possible without advancements in the mobile industry. Chief Digital Officer of Jazz, Aamir Aijaz, said that Pakistan had a large undocumented economy that was undermining the whole financial system as businesses/transactions were not registered. Financial inclusion through formal banking channels and proper payment mechanisms (gateways) could effectively address such issues and empower people particularly women at the grassroots level, he added. Earlier, the President also gave away shields to the companies in recognition of their services for enhancing financial inclusion through technological and digital transformation.

PTI enters in alliance with SIC & MWM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced to enter in alliance with the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) and Majlis-e-Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM) here on Monday. Chairman PTI Barrister Gohar made the announcement flanked by MWM Chief Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, SIC's head Sahibzada Hamid Raza and Omar Ayub Khan. Speaking on the occasion, Barrister Gohar was of the view that PTI-backed independent candidates, who are in centre, Punjab and KP will join the Sunni Ittehad Council. The decision was taken after prolonged consultation between PTI, SIC and MWM, he added. Barrister Gohar said the PTI candidates will present documents of joining the Sunni Ittehad Council with the ECP. The PTI chairman reiterated his party's stance of alleged rigging in the general elections and claimed that his party won 170 to 180 seats in the NA, but the results were 'rigged'. Speaking on the occasion, Omar Ayub Khan said the decision to join the Sunni Ittehad Council was made to get reserved seats as they are only allotted to political parties. Commenting on the revelations of the ex-Rawalpindi commissioner Liaquat Chatha, Ayub alleged rigging was done to deprive the PTI of winning the elections. He also accused MQM-Pakistan of 'stealing' PTI seats in Karachi and Hyderabad during the elections 2024. MWM chief Allama Nasir Abbas and Sunni Ittehad Council head Hamid Raza commended PTI for contesting and winning the elections without the "bat" symbol. Both the leaders said their alliance with the PTI is 'unconditional'.



Israel to restrict access to Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramazan

GAZA: Israel will impose some restrictions on access to Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of occupied East Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramazan according to "security needs", Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office says. The Al-Aqsa compound, the third holiest site in the world for Muslims, sits atop a hill in the Old City. The site is also revered by Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount. Restrictions on access to the site have long caused friction, particularly around religious holidays such as Ramazan, which will begin about March 10 this year. Asked about the possibility of blocking access for some worshippers during the holy month, Netanyahu's office said on Monday: "The prime minister made a balanced decision within the security needs determined by professionals." His office gave no further details. Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza Strip, denounced the planned restrictions and urged Palestinians to mobilise against them. It described the restrictions as "a continuation of Zionist criminality and religious warfare led by the extremist settlers group in the terrorist occupation government against our Palestinian people". The group called on Palestinians in Israel, Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank to "reject this criminal decision, resist the occupation's arrogance and insolence, and mobilise to stand firm and steadfast in Al-Aqsa Mosque". Israel often sets rules to limit the number of worshippers at the site, citing security reasons. Israeli forces have previously undertaken violent raids at the site during Ramazan. The announcement comes as Israel warns that it will continue its assault on Gaza during Ramazan, including in the densely populated Rafah area in the south. "The world must know and Hamas leaders must know: If by Ramazan the hostages are not home, the fighting will continue everywhere to include the Rafah area," war cabinet member Benny Gantz said on Sunday. "We will do so in a coordinated manner, facilitating the evacuation of civilians in dialogue with American and Egyptian partners and to minimise the civilian casualties as much as possible." "Hamas has a choice. They can surrender, release the hostages and the civilians of Gaza can celebrate the feast of Ramazan," he said. Israel launched its assault on Gaza on October 7 after Hamas led attacks on Israel, killing at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera count based on official figures. It also took about 250 other people captive. Israel's bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza has killed more than 29,000 people, according to Palestinian authorities. It has also reduced much of Gaza to rubble and displaced more than 80 percent of its population, according to aid groups. Negotiations over a potential truce and hostage-for-prisoner exchange have appeared to stall in recent weeks with Netanyahu publicly describing demands by Hamas as "delusional". The United States, Israel's top ally, has said it still hopes to broker a pause in hostilities but signalled it would veto a draft United Nations resolution calling for a ceasefire and argued against measures that could jeopardise "the opportunity for an enduring resolution of hostilities". There is growing international pressure on Israel to halt the war in the enclave, especially as UN agencies warn of catastrophic damage and casualties if Israeli forces press on towards Rafah. Still, Netanyahu has insisted on his war goals of "destroying" Hamas. On Sunday, the Israeli leader promised "total victory" over Hamas despite rising anger from desperate relatives of the remaining captives and growing antigovernment protests. Israel says it believes about 130 captives remain in Gaza, including 30 presumed dead. Meanwhile, the UN experts on Monday expressed alarm over "credible allegations of egregious human rights violations" against Palestinian women and girls in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. They are being arbitrarily executed, arbitrarily detained, raped or threatened with sexual violence, the experts said, adding that these alleged acts may constitute "grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and amount to serious crimes under international criminal law that could be prosecuted under the Rome Statute." They called for the perpetrators to be held accountable, and for victims' families to receive "full redress and justice." The experts cited instances of Palestinian women and girls being reportedly arbitrarily executed in Gaza, often together with family members, including their children. "We are shocked by reports of the deliberate targeting and extrajudicial killing of Palestinian women and children in places where they sought refuge, or while fleeing," they said. "Some of them were reportedly holding white pieces of cloth when they were killed by the Israeli army or affiliated forces." The independent experts include the working group on discrimination against women and girls, the special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem, and Francesca Albanese, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories. They expressed concern about the arbitrary detention of "hundreds of Palestinian women and girls, including human rights defenders, journalists and humanitarian workers, in Gaza and the West Bank since 7 October." They have reportedly been subjected to "inhuman and degrading treatment, denied menstruation pads, food and medicine, and severely beaten," the experts said, adding that on at least one occasion, female detainees were put in a cage and left without food in the rain and cold. The UN experts also expressed distress at reports of multiple forms of sexual assault against Palestinian female detainees, including being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli officers. "At least two female Palestinian detainees were reportedly raped while others were reportedly threatened with rape and sexual violence," the experts said, adding that that photos of female detainees in "degrading circumstances" were also reportedly taken by Israeli soldiers and uploaded online. — Al Jazeera & Arab News

City receives drizzle

LAHORE (APP): The provincial capital on Monday received a drizzle which turned the weather pleasant bringing some cold conditions, besides clearing the atmosphere of thick and hazardous smog.

Minimum temperature was recorded 12 degree Celsius while maximum could not cross 21 after the shower. According to a spokesman for the Pakistan Meteorological Department, moderate to heavy rain-wind/thunderstorm (snowfall over the hills) is expected in Murree, Galliyat, Pothohar Region, Attock, Chakwal, Jhelum, Mandi Bahauddin, Mianwali, Khushab, Sargodha, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Faisalabad, Jhang, Sialkot, Narowal, Lahore, Kasur till Wednesday, while light to moderate rain-wind/thunderstorm in Multan, Bhakkar, Kot Addu, Layyah, Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan during the period.

CCPO orders action against online betting

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana has directed to expedite action against online gambling on cricket matches and to tighten the noose around those indulging in online betting.

In a statement issued on Monday, the CCPO emphasized that raids should be conducted daily to curb online betting. Utilizing modern technology to combat the curse of betting and keeping a close eye on social media accounts that promote online gambling, in collaboration with line departments is essential to tackle the involvement of anti-social elements in online betting, he concluded.

PU Library Club arranges introductory talk

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab University (PU) Library Club organized introductory talks on books titled: 'Urdu Ki Samaji Lughat' by Dr Tariq Hashmi and "The Parliament of Pakistan" by Mahboob Hussain.

On this occasion, Department of Gender Studies' Assistant Professor Dr Qaiser Khalid Mehmood, Centre for South Asian Studies' Assistant Professor Dr Mariyam Kamal, faculty members and students were present, said PU's spokesperson on Monday.

Dr Qaiser Khalid Mehmood shed light on 'Urdu Ki Samaji Lughat'. He highlighted the socio-cultural insights presented in the book. He underscored the influence of historical forces such as monarchy and colonial rule on language evolution. He emphasized the importance of fostering an egalitarian language free from gender biases and discriminatory connotations. Dr Mariyam Kamal presented an analysis of 'The Parliament of Pakistan'. Dr Kamal's insights delved into the intricate relationship between Prime Minister Bhutto and Parliament during the 1970s, shedding light on the parliament's role as a platform for opposition voices and its evolution over time.

CM inaugurates upgraded blocks of Services Hospital

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi's unwavering commitment to serving humanity has transformed Services Hospital into a state-of-the-art facility within a remarkable span of just 4 and a half months.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Monday inaugurated the upgraded surgical, medical, and administrative blocks of Services Hospital, where he inspected the modernized wards and expressed satisfaction over the provision of contemporary medical equipment and beds. He also visited nursing counters and doctors' rooms, directing the swift operationalization of all operation theaters and emphasizing the importance of regular cleanliness management in the upgraded blocks.

The CM also inaugurated a digital data storage system for patient records, a significant step towards modernizing healthcare services. He commended the high quality of the hospital's upgradation. Secretary Communication and Works provided a detailed overview of the upgradation work, while Secretary Health highlighted the enhanced treatment facilities in the upgraded blocks.

Mohsin Naqvi urged the completion of the new lab and diagnostic center at Services Hospital, giving specific instructions to the Principal of SIMS (Services Institute of Medical Sciences) in this regard. Talking to the media after the inauguration, Mohsin Naqvi recalled his visit to Services Hospital six months ago, stating his shock at the dire state of the facility at that time, remarking that he wouldn't even send an enemy there for treatment. He praised the rapid transformation of Services Hospital into a state-of-the-art facility within 4 and a half months. The ongoing upgradation covers an area of 3 lakh 11 thousand square feet, including the addition of 24 new, state-of-the-art operation theaters, in the 1600-bed hospital.

Mohsin Naqvi applauded the hard work of Provincial Minister Mansoor Qadir, Secretary Communication and Works, and the Health Department. He specifically mentioned Mansoor Qadir's dedication,

visiting Services Hospital twice daily. Mohsin Naqvi also acknowledged the significant work being done by the Communication and Works Department on numerous projects, highlighting the exemplary role of the Secretary Communication and Works.

Responding to a question regarding recent allegations of Commissioner Rawalpindi, Mohsin Naqvi refrained from commenting until the completion of the report. He noted the increased cost of medicines in hospitals but emphasized that the budget remains unchanged, adding that the incoming government could revise the budget if necessary. The Punjab government currently spends 50 billion rupees on medicines. Mohsin Naqvi also mentioned the upcoming completion of Lahore Zoo on February 22.

Expressing confidence in the future development of the province and country, Mohsin Naqvi emphasized his commitment to defending his officers during his tenure as Chief Minister. He highlighted efforts to increase the number of nurses and paramedic staff, including language training for nurses. He concluded with optimism, envisioning a future of exponential development for his province and country. The event was attended by Provincial Ministers Amir Mir, Mansoor Qadir, Secretaries Health, Information, CCPO, Deputy Commissioner, DG PHA, Principal SIMS, MS Services Hospital, Special Secretary Health Department, and other relevant officials.

CM seeks report about rape-cum murder of child: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has sought a report from Regional Police Officer (RPO) Sahiwal about rape-cum-murder of an innocent child in Okara.

The CM directed that strict action be taken against the arrested culprit. "The perpetrator of this heinous crime deserves no leniency," he declared emphatically. The CM also extended sympathies to the grieving heirs and assured them of the provision of justice.

686,711 students access PITB's Higher Education Portal

LAHORE (APP): The Higher Education Portal (HEP), developed by PITB for the Higher Education Department, is a centralized platform enabling public colleges in Punjab to have daily reporting of essential data.

This centralized platform serves as a pivotal tool, empowering public colleges across Punjab to streamline their administrative processes through daily reporting of essential data. Currently, 825 public colleges across Punjab having 686,711 students are using HEP. The Higher Education Portal encompasses com-

prehensive features, including the collation of basic student profiles, detailed program information, and in-depth college profiles and facilities. This unified and centralized system facilitates seamless data reporting, fostering enhanced efficiency and transparency in higher education administration throughout the province.

In this regard, PITB Chairman Faisal Yousuf stated, "HEP signifies a significant stride towards modernizing and digitizing the higher education landscape, enabling stakeholders to make informed deci-

sions based on real-time and accurate data."

"The Higher Education Portal aligns with the broader vision of the Punjab government to uplift the standards of education, making it more accessible, transparent, and technologically advanced," he maintained. PITB's Higher Education Portal has emerged as a transformative tool, reinforcing the commitment to leveraging technology for the betterment of education administration. The success of this initiative reflects the dedication to creating a robust and efficient educational ecosystem in Punjab.

Verification of KMC employees' data started

KARACHI (APP): The process of verifying the data of KMC employees for transfer to PIU Click Sindh Local Government department under the SAP application system has started, on the direction of Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab.

In this regard, the pay sheet clerks of all departments have been summoned on February 20 at the KMC Head Office with the paid bills of their departments for January 2024 so that those department data of active employees can be updated and verified, said a statement on Monday.

All drawing and disbursing officers and heads of departments of KMC have been directed to maintain full coordination with the KMC Payroll Section, Information Technology department and complete the data verification process of the employees of the concerned department within three

days. Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab had shifted the disbursement of salary and pension of KMC employees to SAP application in August 2023.

KMC is the first local body in Pakistan where employees salary and pension has been shifted to SAP application to ensure transparency in employees data, which would not only improve the salary and pension data but also due to the implementation of this method, the payment of double salary will also be resolved. Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that by transferring all the data related to salaries of employees working in various departments of KMC and pension of retired employees to SAP, this record has been improved and secured and if required, any information regarding officers or other employees will be readily available.



KARACHI: First Lady Begum Samina Arif Alvi distributing awards and certificates of appreciation among the members of Floral Art Society of Pakistan who won the Bloom Oman competition.

Power supply suspension schedule for week

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has issued power supply suspension schedule for a week i.e. February 20 to 26, 2024 as the company has to embark upon necessary maintenance and repair work on transmission lines. According to the company's spokesman here Monday, the electricity supply would remain suspended intermittently from 8 am to 6 pm on the feeders of New Shalimar Grid, Shalimar Grid I & II.

On February 21, the power supply would be suspended from 9 am to 01pm on feeders of Shamke Grid including Ali Park, New Muslim International, University of Health Sciences, SF-8, Super Eagle Rerolling, Ali State Steel, Sharif Oxygen, Sher Bengal, PTV, Qila Cleer, Liaquat Steel, Kamalia Steel, Karim Steel, Basheer Steel, SPARCO, Noorani Steel, Afaq Daniyal Steel, PCO, Pakhiyala, UIN Pit, Islam Steel, Amaz Steel, Industrial (P), Diamond Poly, Punjab Judicial Academy, SA Garden I & II, Shan Steel, Anmol Steel, Sadiq Paper, Rachna Town, UET (University of Engineering) KSK, Osman Steel, Ibrahim rerolling and Azmat Park.

He added that power supply would also remain suspended from 9am to 2pm on feeders Farooqabad Grid including Banduki Up, Ghang, Jhamke and Kot Radha; Kishan Grid's feeders on Kasur Road, Allama Iqbal Town Grid's feeders of Neelum and Sutlaj Blocks; Punjab University Grid's feeder of Sher Shah-II; WAPDA Town Grid's feeders of COMSATS and Green Acre; Johar Town Grid's feeder of PCSIR; Wan Radha Ram Grid's feeders of Alkaram, Reshma Textile, Choochak, E-Plot, Farooqabad, Shakar Mandi, Wan, Hussain Khanwala, Manzoor Textiles, Sehjuwal and Shadab Textiles; Defense Phase 5 Grid's areas of Guhawa, Hayr and

Motasingh; Ghazi Grid's feeder of Altaf Colony; Old Kot Lakhpat Grid's feeders of Amar Sidhu, Mast Iqbal, RA Bazaar and S. Block DHA; New Kot Lakhpat Grid's feeder of Shaikat Town; Ravi Grid's feeders of Chirag Park and LDA; Fatehgarh Grid's area of Eidgah; McLeod Road Grid's feeder of Lady Aitchison; ICI Public Grid's feeders of CKM-1, First Treat and Qadriya Board; Syedpur Grid's feeder of Jeevan Hana; Band Road Grid's feeder of Hyder Colony; Shalimar II Grid's area of Alia Town; Old Kasur Grid's feeders of Kot Ghulam Muhammad, Fatehpur and Noorpur; Bachiki Grid's areas of F3 Bada Ghar, F4 Kot Tahir, Bashir Cotton (5), F1 Kot Namdar, F9 Zafarwal, Garnada and Textile; Mominpura Grid's area of Gulbehara Town; Sigian Grid's feeder of Industrial-I; Ghazi Grid's feeder of Gwalmandi; Bund Road Grid's feeder of Fazal Colony; Green View Grid's feeders of Al-Jalil Garden, Kashmir Fazal Hospital, and Wahgray; Syedpur Grid's feeder Sikander; Lahore Cantt Grid's feeder Zaman Colony; Chah Meeran Grid's feeder Chah Meeran; Chuhan Grid's feeder Green Fort-II, Chunian Grid's feeder of Chunian and Bhagao Ki; Allahabad Grid's feeder Mastowal, Deo Khara, Gilan Heather; Kasur New Grid's feeder Sheikh Bhagoo; Feeder from Kasur Old Grid to Charagh Shah, Feeder from Kasur Old Grid to Shahari Road, Nanka Nah Grid to Feeder: Darbar Shah Salim, CKP Grid to Feeder: Stadium, Township Grid to Feeder: Madina Road, Ravi Grid to Feeder from Hanif Park, Sunnyview Grid to Davis Road, Mochi Gate Grid to Akbari Gate, Bunga Hayat Grid to Feeder to ARMY Divalpur, Vandala Jagir, Divalpur Grid to Kowsar Mills, Wellington Mall Grid to Feeder to

Walton Road, Sabzazar Grid Feeder: Kot Mohammadi, Wapda Town Grid Feeder: PGH Society 2, Model Town Grid Feeder: Punjab University, Malikpur Grid Feeder: A1 (Chachiki Gul), Mominpura Grid Feeder: Salamatpura, Warburton Grid's feeder of A103; Model Town Grid; Mochi Gate Grid's feeder Gawalmandi; Sadar Gugera Grid's feeder Bahadur Nagar, Yongpur, Shadman Grid's feeder of Race Course; Township Grid's feeder of Umar Chowk, Rehman Park Feeder from Grid: Rabi Park, Feeder from Ghazi Grid: Jalupark, Feeder from Paragon Grid: Phalrawan, Feeder from Shahkot Grid: Farooq Nagar, S4, Feeder from Fatehgarh Grid: Ram Feeder from Garh, Haveli Grid: Malik Plant, Peer Islam, Bonga Feeder from Hayat Grid: Sharafpura, Feeder from Hija Grid: Zahidpura, Kharal Kalan, Peer Hayat, Qadirabad, Shah Moqim, Feeder from Garden Grid: Achrah Mor, Cordoba Grid to Feeder: Fateh Sher Road, Old Kot Lakhpat Grid to Feeder: Old Ferozepur Road, Rasool Park, Syedpur Grid to Feeder: Bustami Road G Ravi, Studio, AWT to Baduki, Canal Road, Jubilee Town, MSTH, Bhubhtian Chowk, DHA Feeder from Rehbar Grid: Ali Hussain Shah, Feeder from Valensha Grid: Amirpura, Feeder from AWT Grid: AWT1, AWT2, AW Feeder from T3, AWT4, Beacon House, BNU, Sharif Medical College, Al Kabir Town, Arayan, Air Force, ICON, Chinar Bagh Grid: Pajian, JW Photon, Zahoori, Raiwind Old Grid Feeder: Bhatti Cotton, Haier, Kot Jamalpura, SKP Feeder from Grid: Khalid Road, Model Town Feeder from Grid: International School, Samanburgh, Phulnagar Feeder from Grid: Asia Feeds, Bhagyana Kalan, Big Bird, Gulshan Gulistan, Jambhar Data , Kot Majhi, Shabbir.

Orientation session on BS Program in Sindh's held

KARACHI (APP): An enlightening orientation session on the Bachelor of Studies/Bachelor of Science (BS) Program in Government Colleges of Sindh was convened here at Government Commerce and Economics College Karachi on Monday. The session aimed to delve into the intricacies of the program and foster dialogue among stakeholders to enhance the educational landscape in the region.

The event, hosted by the Directorate General Colleges, witnessed the esteemed presence of Caretaker Minister of College Education Sindh Rana Hussain, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

She delivered an insightful presentation, highlighting the significance of the BS Program and engaging in meaningful discussions with participants. Emphasizing the recent concerning results of XI from the Karachi Board and urged college educators to reflect on the current scenario and provide comprehensive guidance to students. Distinguished figures including Sadaf Annes Sheikh, Secretary College Education, Dr. Sheikh Muhammad Zeeshan, Assistant Professor of University of Karachi, Dr. Juneed Karim Khan, Assistant Professor of NED University Karachi and Prof. Saleh Abbas Rizvi, Director General Colleges Sindh, were among the notable attendees. Their collective expertise and diverse perspectives enriched the discourse, contributing to a holistic understanding of the program's opportunities and challenges.

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

NATIONAL DATABASE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

(Regional Head Office Peshawar - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)

RENTAL OFFICE SPACE REQUIRED

FOR NADRA Offices, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(Re-Tender Notice No. 2023-24/Estate/2 x NRCs)

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION WILL HAVE FOLLOWING FEATURES:

- Office Accommodation should be in the below mentioned locations: -

S#	NADRA Registration Center	Required Covered Area
1.	Utman Khel (Tehsil Dargai, District Malakand)	2000-3500 sq ft
2.	Chota Lahor (Tehsil Chota Lahor, District Swabi)	2500-4000 sq ft

- Space measuring of total covered area mentioned against each with public and staff washrooms.
- Prominent, having independent entrance and proposed building should not be in residential area.
- Security wise viable location and easily accessible by public transport.
- Dedicated 3 Phase Electrical Meter / Connection
- Preference will be given to the building in which dedicated transformer is installed.
- Tap Water facility along with overhead tank.
- Ramp for wheel chair for disable citizens.
- Space, NOC for installation of direction board, sign board and heavy generator.
- Roof top for satellite dish antenna installation.
- Sufficient space for maintaining the public queue & parking area.
- Tenancy for a longer period (Preferably 10 years).

Note:- Interested parties / owners can purchase the bidding documents on submission of a written application at a cost of **Rs. 100/-** from below mentioned address or from concerned offices between **09:00 am – 03:00 pm hours** (except gazette holidays). The bids / proposal should be submitted duly completed in all respects by **12th Mar, 2024 at 11:00 am hours** (under **Single Stage–Two Envelope** bidding procedure). The envelopes shall be clearly marked as Technical and Financial proposals. Technical bids / proposals will be Opened on **12th Mar, 2024 at 11:30 am hours** at NADRA Regional Head Office, EOI Building, Plot No. 31 Sector B-1, Phase-V Hayatabad Peshawar in presence of bidders/their nominated representatives. Bid / proposals must include the following documents in addition to any other information that the bidder may find necessary: -

Technical Bid (Separate Envelope):

- Photocopy of property ownership documents [Fard-e-Jaidad/Allotment letter/Relevant Certificate by concerned authority (where settled revenue record is not available)].
- Photocopy of valid CNIC.
- Fitness Certificate of the building
- Undertaking on Non-judicial stamp paper of Rs. 100/- certifying that owner / building is not temporary /permanently debarred from any Government agency / authority / department (without bearing any responsibility on NADRA whatsoever in this regard).
- Pictures of the building offered for lease.
- Valid Site Plan / Map of the building duly approved from concerned authority.
- In case of absence of owner, authority letter for representative duly signed by property owner, permitting him to attend tender process.

Financial Bid (Separate Envelope):

- Owner's consent showing monthly rent & offered area of the building.
- Quoted price shall be inclusive of all taxes.
- No brokerage / service charges will be paid in case of real estate agent.
- Opening date / time of Financial Proposal will be informed to all successful bidders of General Proposal Evaluation.
- Bidding documents received after submission of due date / time mentioned above, will not be entertained.
- NADRA reserves the right to reject all bids / proposals under PPRA Rule 33 and can cancel the bidding process before acceptance of bid or proposal.
- Bid can also be rejected if owner of selected building fail to produce acceptable required / property documents.
- This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.org.pk

For any query contact on following address:

PID/04944/23

Director (Admin)

NADRA Regional Head Office, Peshawar - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

EOI Building, Plot No. 31 Sector B-1, Phase-V Hayatabad Peshawar | Telephone: 091-9217840



LAHORE: Women viewing artwork during Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition in collaboration with The Formanite School System and Walled City of Lahore Authority.

Governor lauds lawyers’ role in development

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ghulam Ali on Monday said that lawyers have an important role in maintaining the rule of law and establishing a justice-based system in society.

“Lawyers have always played a positive role in the country’s stability, development, prosperity and democracy. They are the most important part of the judiciary and the delivery of justice,” he said during a meeting with a delegation of Charsadda District Bar Association here at Governor House.

The governor said that the role of a lawyer in any society is very important especially in the provision of justice, adding that the lawyers’ community has a great responsibility to uphold the supremacy of law and ensure justice for the poor and middle-class of the society.

He urged lawyers to play an important role in the speedy disposal of cases and the provision of justice to the victims.

Earlier, the delegation led by the President of the Bar Association Mujibur Rahman Advocate informed the Governor about the problems and difficulties faced by the District Bar Association and requested for his cooperation to solve them.

He especially mentioned that the revenue cases of Charsadda were referred to Peshawar and caused inconvenience for both lawyers and the masses. The Governor issued necessary instructions to the relevant authorities to solve the issue.

The delegation members included Vice President Ahmedzeb Advocate, General Secretary Saifullah Khan Advocate, Joint Secretary Adil Zahir Advocate, Mohammad Fawad Khan Advocate and Ali Khan Advocate.



PESHAWAR: Delegation of Charsadda District Bar Association meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali at Governor’s House.

Anti-polio drive to be started

PESHAWAR (INP): Seven-day anti polio vaccination drive would start from March 02 in the provincial capital to vaccinate 901,986 children under the age of five against the crippling disease.

The campaign would continue till March 08 under the supervision of district administration. 2506 health teams with adequate security would administer the polio drops, said the office of the deputy Commissioner. Deputy Commissioner Afaz Wazir has appealed to the parents to get their children vaccinated for eradication of the disease.



PESHAWAR: A view of vehicles’ passing through accumulated rain water.

Rs35.6b program being launched to eradicate fatal diseases: Minister

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Health, Dr Nadeem Jan on Monday said that a mega project worth Rs35.6 billion was being launched to eradicate fatal diseases including sugar, HIV AIDs and hepatitis in the country.

The Minister said that a Rs six billion program has been prepared for control of sugar disease besides projects were being launched for eradication of AIDs HIVs.

He was addressing a function after inaugurating a modern labour room at Basic Health Unit (BHU) Kotkay in Charsadda district.

The Minister said that providing best healthcare facilities to patients at their doorsteps was the top priority of the government.

He said that basic health units are being strengthened in terms of medical staff, equipment and medicines.

The Minister said the promise of rehabilitation of the flood affected BHU has been fulfilled and termed the cooperation of world health organization for rehabilitation of the BHU was highly praised worthy.

Nadeem Jan said that people of the area would now get quality treatment and medicines facilities at their doorsteps.

The Minister said responsibilities rest on the shoulders of officials of health department to ensure best use of the BHU for betterment of the people.

The Minister said that timely availability of the staff and provision of better healthcare facilities was the prime responsibility of the health department.

“If the performance of BHUs are good then there will be minimum load on big hospitals and precious lives would be saved” he said.

He said that a mega project worth Rs35.6 billion was being launched in Pakistan to eradicate fatal diseases including sugar, HIV AIDs and hepatitis besides help its patients.

Nadeem Jan said that a Rs six billion program has been prepared for control of sugar disease besides projects were being launched for eradication of AIDs HIVs and the patients of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would also be benefited.

Later, the Minister visited basic health unit Akhun Dheri Charsadda and TB Hospital Baghdada in Mardan where he also inaugurated a training centre. The Minister was briefed about these projects.

Cyber threats increased by 17% in 2023: research reveals

PESHAWAR (APP): Experts of the global cybersecurity and digital privacy company Kaspersky have revealed that the number of overall cyber threats in Pakistan has increased by 17% in 2023 as compared to 2022.

The facts surfaced in a recent discussion on the evolution of the cyber threat landscape in the region during its 9th annual Cyber Security Weekned-META 2024 on Monday, said a press release.

Kaspersky blocked 16 million cyberattacks in in 2023 whereas 24.4% of users in Pakistan are affected by online threats.

The focal point of the discussions was the security of emerging technology trends such as AI that are influencing the scale of modern threats.

In parallel, threats targeting industrial control systems within critical infrastructure, in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia were also discussed.

Dissecting the threat landscape further, Kaspersky experts saw attacks using banking malware rose by 59%, such attacks designed to collect online banking credentials and other sensitive information from infected machines.

Researchers also reported an increase of 35% in trojan attacks that disguise themselves as legitimate computer programs but are used to run malicious code by cyber criminals.

In addition, ransomware attacks designed to encrypt a victim’s data, files, or system, making them accessible in exchange for a payment, increased by 24%.

Also, the researchers reported attacks using spyware rose by 36%, such attacks are malicious software that enters a user’s computer, gathers data from the device and user, and sends it to third parties without their consent.

“Being an emerging country and accepting digital transformation at a good pace, Pakistan has a very important role to play in Asia”, said the release.

As the cybersecurity landscape evolves, cyber threats continue to become diverse and sophisticated. This trend is particularly evident due to the emergence of advanced technologies like AI and the escalating geopolitical and economic turbulence within the META region.

Director of META Research Center Global Research and Analysis Team (GReAT) Amin Hasbini stated that these factors collectively contribute to the surge in cybercrime and the heightened complexity of cyberattacks.

According to Kaspersky’s analysis of the cybersecurity threat landscape in the META region has fluctuated significantly.

In the region, Turkey saw the highest number of users affected by online threats 41.8%, followed by Kenya 39.2%, Qatar 38.8% and South Africa 35%. Fewer users were affected in Oman 23.4% and Egypt 27.4% followed by Saudi Arabia 29.9% and Kuwait 30.8%.

Heavy downpour disrupts power supply

PESHAWAR (APP): Heavy downpour across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had resulted in tripping of various grid stations in different regions of Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) and suspension of power supply from as many as 306 feeders in Peshawar, Mardan, Manshehra, Abbottabad, Swat, Swabi and other districts.

PESCO spokesperson said that a crises management cell had been set up at PESCO Hqr to resolve the issue of power suspension while the field staff had been deployed for necessary maintenance work.

He said that due to weather conditions the field staff was facing difficulties, adding that as soon as the intensity of rain decreased, the process of power restoration process would be started. The company appealed to the consumers to extend cooperation and stay away from electrical installations during rain to avoid any incident.

The spokesman urged people to dial PESCO’s toll free Helpline 118 in case of any emergency.

Rain-wind thunderstorm, predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Meteorological Department on Monday predicted more rain-wind thunderstorm, snowfall over the hills with isolated heavy rain hailstorm in most parts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Rains is predicted in Chitral, Lower and Upper Dir, Malakand, Buner, Swat, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torghar, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Hangu, Kohat, Karak, Bannu, Lakk, North and South Waziristan, Tank and DIKhan.

Heavy rain snowfall may disrupt and cause closure of roads, and may cause landslides in Chitral, Swat, Dir, Shangla, Kohistan, Battagram, Torghar, Mansehra and Abbottabad. Tourists are advised to be cautious.

Rain Recorded in (mm): Pashat-Bajaur 57, Saidu Sharif and Pattan 55 (each), Kalam 52, Dir 49, Peshawar (Airport 46, City 43), Balakot and Malamjaba 44 (each), Takht Bai and Ghallani 41 (each), Mirkhani 40, Cherat 32, Drosh 30, Landikotal 29, Risalpur and Parachinar 25 (each), Chitral 21, Kakul 17, Kohat 15, Bannu 14, Timergara 08 and DI Khan Trace.

Gandapur promises economic revival

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Amin Gandapur has said that the party will work to resolve economic crisis of the country.

Gandapur, who is the PTI-nominated candidate for the office of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister, was talking to media outside Peshawar High Court (PHC) where he had gone to seek bail in a criminal case on Monday.

He promised that the PTI government in the province would give employment to the youth and take steps to create business-friendly environment in the country.

He said his provincial government would seek its share in divisive pool from the centre as its right.

Regarding the PTI affairs, he said the party has moved the PHC for retaining its status as an independent party as the ECP only deprived it of its election symbol.

The party would hold intra-party election soon and want its candidates to join the PTI instead of any other political party, he added.

However, a final decision in this regard would be taken by the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, he continued.

Earlier, Gandapur appeared before the PHC for protective bail.

His counsel submitted that Gandapur has to appear before an Islamabad court for which he needed protective bail.

His lawyer requested the court to fix the bail application for hearing today.

Budget assessment of KP universities: HEC appreciated efforts of Medical University

PESHAWAR: The joint committee of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), composed of senior representatives from HEC, the Ministry of Finance Government of Pakistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government HE entities, concluded its meeting sessions on February 17-18, 2024, at the HEC regional center in Peshawar. The purpose of the meeting was to review and rationalize the budgetary demands of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities while assessing their efforts in implementing HEC’s financial reform guidelines.

During the assessment of Khyber Medical University (KMU) Peshawar’s budgetary requirements, Ms. Samina Durrani, Director Finance HEC, commended the efforts of the KMU team under the leadership of its Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq. She informed the committee members that KMU has exhibited remarkable growth in academic, research, and financial matters, not only within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also nationally and internationally. KMU has distinguished itself by attracting foreign reserves through its successful research projects, positioning itself as a leading medical university both nationally and internationally.

Ms. Durrani extended an invitation to the Vice Chancellor of KMU for an upcoming workshop at HEC Islamabad. The workshop aims to showcase KMU’s successful journey under Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq’s visionary leadership, which has propelled KMU to the top rankings of universities through strategic planning in a remarkably short time.

The successful assessment and recognition of KMU’s achievements underscore its commitment to excellence in academia, research, and financial management.

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PHC extends protective bails of Atif, Shahram

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar High Court on Monday extended the protective bails of Atif Khan and Shahram Tarkai till February 26 and ordered them to appear before the relevant courts. Justice S M Atiq Shah and Justice Waqar Ahmed conducted the hearing on the bail applications of former provincial ministers Atif Khan and Shahram Turkai.



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali listening people’s problems.

Grilled fish, Chappli Kabab attract foodies as rains continue lashing

PESHAWAR (APP): The grilled fish and chappli kabab outlets have started attracting foodies in a bid to keep themselves warm after torrential rains continued lashing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since last night turning the weather extremely cold and chilly.

In the wake of increased chill and rainy weather conditions since last night in Peshawar being known as city of hospitality, the people thronged to the outlets of mouth watering Chappli Kabab and grilled fried fish at historic Qissa Khwani and Namak Mandi where the delectable varieties are being served with traditional qehwa (green tea) and spicy sauces besides taking percls for their loved ones at home to beat the cold rainy weather.

Peshawar is a unique ancient city for being frequently visited by the tourists and food lovers to relish its delectable traditional food varieties including the mouth-watering chapli kabab, Peshawari rice-pulao and fish varieties mostly brought from Malakand, Hazara divisions, Punjab and Karachi as special winter offer.

The visitors, while travelling on historic Qissa Khawani and Namak Mandi bazaars in the bustling city of Peshawar, can’t resist the aroma of grilled fish and chapli kabab being served with traditional qehwa [green tea] and spicy sauces till late night.

“The tantalising aroma of trout and carp fish, chapli kabab and chicken corn soup with traditional Gajar halwa and Chicken Yakhni always attracted me to enjoy in winter at Qissa Khawani bazaar having work of 3,000 years old history, said Ms Sundas Amin, a lecturer of Statistics and resident of Bannu district while talking to APP on Monday.

It is my fifth visit to Qisa Khawani during the ongoing winter season with my family. My visit to Peshawar remained incomplete without enjoying the mouth watering chapli kabab and grilled fish with green qehwa at Qissa Khwani which was internationally known for storytellers. The tourists while travelling to subcontinent or Central Asia for trade had often stayed here at night and swapped tales of each other’s culture, civilizations and traditions besides day to day happening while enjoying Chapli Kabab with traditional qehwa.

The visitors also went around to the historic Balahisar fort, Ghanta Ghar, Mohalla Sethian with rare architecture and wood work of its buildings in a day long trip and returned to Qissa Khwani for a night stay before starting their journey to their destination for trade.

Ghanta Ghar, a famous fish trade hub in Peshawar also drew a substantial number of seafood lovers on Monday where the trade of fish including mushka, rahu, simon, pomfret, mahsher, and lobsters have significantly increased after the cold wave caused by heavy torrential rain has gripped Peshawar valley since last night.

A fish outlet owner at Ghanta Ghar, Barkat Ullah said trout stock has been brought from Swat and Mansehra districts as a special winter offer to fulfil Peshawarties’ pressing demands for marriages and other parties.

“The recipe for trout fish is very simple and time-efficient. We prepare trout in oil after its proper water wash and cutting. Later, varieties of spicy sauces, pomegranate seed powder, salt and other spicy ingredients are properly mixed.”

Before making it on medium flame, he said the fish is properly marinated for about two hours to ensure that all sauces are intact and the colour is unchanged and later served to customers with chips, sauces (Chatnis), salad and naans.

While eating fish at Ring Road Peshawar along with friends, Zeeshan Qaiser a resident of Wapda Town Peshawar said trout was his favourite seafood as its meat was full of proteins and vitamins besides easily digestible. “When I was young, I visited Swat with my father during winter to enjoy the freshwater brown trout due to its aromatic taste and spiciness amid snowfall. This winter, I did not go to Swat due to the availability of the grilled and baked trout fish at Peshawar.”

Dr Ziaullah Chamkani, senior medical specialist at Government Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar said there was an additional burden on the heart, brains, joints and lungs of weak people and children due to persistent cough, nausea and frosts in winter, adding consumption of fish was the best available choice to help reduce risks of these diseases.

Besides the best source of proteins, vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids, phosphorus, iron and iodine, he said that consumption of seafood helps improve digestion, protects skin from dryness and relieves joints’ pains.

Usman Ali, General Secretary of Swat Trout Fish Farming Association said that business of trout farmers have shined in winter following increase in demands of consumers and hotel industry from across the country. He said about 150 trout farms existed in Swat that engaged extra laborers to meet the placed orders.

He said about 2,500 people were directly associated with trout farming in Swat where one kilogram trout was being sold at Rs 2000 to Rs 2500 per kilogram in the open market. “Trout farming is a highly profitable business and any farmer having 35 marla land minimum and proper water inflow and outflow system can produce 2,250 kg trout by earning about two million rupees profit after 15 months raring”.

Officials in the Fisheries Department told APP that under the Trout Village Project (TVP), around 93 small and large trout fish farms were established in Malakand and Hazara divisions under a 50:50% cost sharing formula basis.

A model trout hatchery under KP government was set up at Salathanan valley in Upper Swat on 15 kanal with capacity to produce six million fish seeds per year. ‘Development of cold water fisheries resources’, a joint venture of Federal and Provincial Governments having 40:60pc cost sharing basis, is in progress in

Malakand and Hazara divisions under which 297 trout lakes were being established to bolster fish production.

The KP government has approved ‘development of reservoirs for uplift of fisheries resources’ project under which 67 carp fish farms and model hatchery on 179 kanal at Swabi were being established from where fish seedlings to be provided to private hatcheries and Turbella dam.

Following completion of these projects, he said KP’s fish production would likely increase to 740 metric tons from the existing 400 metric tons by 2025. A model coldwater research centre is being established at Madyn Swat with a facility of a fish hatchery where academia and young researchers would be facilitated to conduct researches on different issues of aquatic resources in the province.

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In brief

ECP
summons RO
F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) summoned Returning Officer (RO) NA11 for 26th February on runup candidate plea against alleged rigging in the constituency, on Monday. The runup candidate named Syed Fareen Shah appeared before ECP along with his lawyer and argued that the victorious candidate had obtained 600 votes on women polling at Maroofkhel despite no female voter come to the premises to cost her vote. The runup candidate blamed that organized rigging happened in NA11 with help of government machinery and claimed that he will every door to protect public including ECP and high judiciary. He claimed that PTI backed independent candidate had won public mandate with ballot paper but it was manipulated.

Rickshaw driver
shot dead

KASUR (INP): Unidentified armed men gunned down a rickshaw driver here on Monday and fled the scene, police said. The incident took place in Jamalpura area of Kasur where unknown gunmen sprayed bullets at a rickshaw driver. As a result of firing, Amjad Ali hailing from Dhang Shah was killed on the spot and attackers escaped the scene. The body was shifted to hospital for postmortem and police after registering a case unidentified murderers started investigations.

Adulterated
oil wasted

MULTAN (INP): About 500 liter of edible oil prepared from poultry was seized and wasted at Multan Road, according to a statement issued by the Punjab Food Authority here on Monday. There was no sealing and labeling on the drums as it was being carried out openly, the statement said. The action was taken on tip-off of the vigilance team. DG Food Authority, Asim Javed said that the case was registered against the accused person. He said that the substandard oil was to be supplied to various food production units, hotels, and snack factories. He said that the health of the masses is not uncompromisable and no concession would be granted to the accused people in this regard.

Man killed,
two injured

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): A man was killed and two people critically injured in collision between an over speeding truck and a trailer here, rescue sources said on Monday. According to details, the accident took place on Lahore Road near Housing Colony in Sheikhupura where a reckless driven truck and a trailer collided with each other. As a result of accident, 33-year-old Shah was killed on the spot while Abdul Wajad Muhammad Shan were critically injured. The body and injured were shifted to hospital and police after registering a case into the incident started investigations.

Seminary teacher
kidnapped

MATIARI (INP): A seminary teacher was reported kidnapped from the suburbs of Matiari district in interior Sindh when he was coming back to home after attending a marriage ceremony, reported on Monday. Family members and residents of the area have expressed concerns about the abduction of a poor madrasa teacher. The incident created panic in the area as locals were already worried about the rising incidents of robberies.

Residents of
Mardan facing
multiple problems

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The second largest city of the province Mardan has become a heap of problems for the people. The supply of electricity and gas, the basic needs of human life, was not only rare before, but now the meter readers coming for monthly electricity readings have added to the problems of the people.

Unannounced load shedding of 16 to 18 hours during 24 hours in urban areas has made the life of the people miserable. In this situation, when the meter reader comes to take monthly readings, they automatically load the closed meters due to the power cut by WAPDA, then when the consumers receive the electricity bills, the citizens are forced to go round the WAPDA offices.

Earlier in the day time in urban areas there was electricity load shedding every one hour but now unannounced power cut off from 11 pm to 11 am has become normal routine. The group of politicians claiming public issues was busy preparing for the elections and now the situation is that the winners of the elections are still busy in the happiness of congratulations, on the other hand those who lose the election have completely disappeared from the scene suffering from grief.

The third class is the people who have no choice but to stumble from door to door what is the function of the officer-shahi class in this poor city like Pakistan, to solve the problems of the people by taking care of a little injury is a far-fetched thing, not even asking about these problems. People are badly trapped in the circle of these two departments.

Youth killed: A 28-year-old youth was slaughtered with a sharp blade in the limits of Police station Saro Shah and the body was thrown in the desert. Saro Shah Police registered a case on the report of the deceased's brother and arrested the named accused.

According to reports, Tariq son of Sherzada, a resident of Kamran Kaly in the urban area of Takhtbhai was slaughtered with a sharp blade and the body was thrown in the desert at the place of Jehazono Dagga.

According to Usman the brother of deceased young man Tariq resident of Kamran Kaly he used to deal in junk etc. in Meena Bazar Pat Baba and his partner Aman resident of Abdul Rahman Kaly had a debt of Rs. 550,000/-.

Last night, he had gone out for some work on his Honda motorcycle 125 but did not return and later his

butchered body was found. On the report of the deceased Tariq's brother Usman the Saro Shah police registered a case under 302 and arrested the named accused Aman.

Meanwhile, today marks a significant milestone in our journey towards a polio-free future! We are thrilled to announce the inauguration of the Divisional EPI Training Hall at TB Center Mardan. This was said by DHO Dr. Javed Iqbal, along with Dr. Ikram and Dr. Imtiaz and warmly welcomed the esteemed presence of Federal Health Minister, Dr. Nadeem Jan, and foreign dignitaries from our donor partners.

During the ceremony, Dr. Javed Iqbal emphasized the critical importance of this training facility in our ongoing efforts to combat polio in Mardan. With comprehensive polio campaigns facing challenges like refusals, having a dedicated space for routine EPI trainings is crucial. He expressed heartfelt gratitude to Federal Health Minister Dr. Nadeem Jan for gracing us with his presence and extended appreciation to our donor partners for their unwavering commitment to polio eradication in our region. Let's continue working together towards a healthier, polio-free world.

Woman killed in Dir
rain related incidentn

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A woman identified as wife of Zarif Khan was killed when roof of the room she was sleeping in collapsed due to torrential rains at Ghanam Shah area in the jurisdiction of Munda police station here on Monday, residents and police said. They said the woman was injured under the debris due to the roof collapse. As soon as the information was received, the Rescue 1122 medical and disaster teams reached the spot and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital wherein she succumbed to injuries. Later the victim was laid to rest at her ancestral graveyard.

The torrential rains continued in all parts of Lower and Upper Dir for the second consecutive day. The hill tops in both the districts also received a heavy snowfall. According to local administration the Lowari top received over two feet of snow due to which vehicular traffic to and from Chitral remained suspended. The administration meanwhile directed the drivers to avoid unnecessary travel to and from upper parts of Dir and Chitral. The motorists were also directed to use snowchains in case of emergency.

The Shahi top in Lower Dir also received about two feet snowfall disconnection traffic to upper parts of

Jandol. The district administration sent machinery for clearing the Shahi road for traffic. According to local some parts have been cleared but traffic to Shahi and Binshahi was still suspended. The hilltops in Laram Dara, Talash, Maidan and Lugman Banda in Lower Dir and Doog Dara, Kumrat, Kohistan, Barawal and Usheraai Dara in Upper Dir also received snowfall up to one foot.

Meanwhile two persons were injured when two cars collided at Kotkay area in the jurisdiction of Munda police station here on Monday. The Rescue 1122 medical team reached the spot and shifted the injured to the hospital.



GILGIT: President PPP Gilgit-Baltistan, Amjad Hussain Advocate addressing press conference during his visit to Union office.

Galiyat, Thandiyani and
Ayubia receive snowfall

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Galiyat, Thandiyani, Ayubia and other surrounding hilly areas of Abbottabad received heaviest snowfall of the current winter season resulted below freezing temperature in Abbottabad district. All the link roads in Galiyats are closed due to heavy snowfall while Abbottabad to Muree road is completely closed for all sort of traffic from Bara Gali/Kala Bagh as at least more than one feet snow is reported on the main road while on the upper hills of Mira Jani, Mosa Da Musalla, it is recorded two to three feet and it was expected more snow fall as predicted by the weather department.

Snow fall current spell which was started one day

earlier on Sunday and with frequent intervals till Monday evening it was falling says spokesman of the GDA Ahsan Hameed who is also incharge of tourism section of Galiyat Development Authority.

Galiyat Development Authority has chalked out comprehensive plan for the removal of the snow from main road and entire 56 K.M area has been divided in four zones and machinery is placed on four points which is being operated on two way basis from both sides however due to snow fall, snow removal operation is suspended and it was told that as soon as snow fall is stopped, removal of snow will be started by using heavy machinery and blowers and salt will also be showed on the roads.

Director General GDA

Shah Rukah Ali is looking after the snow removing operation and had cancelled the leaves of field staff of GDA while entire machinery is in working condition. GDA special teams are in close contact with local hotels and guest houses and had arranged special tractors to rescue stranded tourists vehicles if any and had asked tourists to get the clearance from the GDA special counters and information centers. All other link roads Nathiagali-Bakot Road, Nathiagali-Ayubia Road, Koza Gali-Ayubia Road, Sawar Gali-Lora Road, Changla Gali-Ziarat Masoom road are completely closed and it was told by one insider that this year C & W department has not yet release tenders for the snow removing from link roads.



SHANGLA: People busy to pullout a vehicle after heavy snowfall in the area. — F.P. photo

Mentally
disable youth
sexually
assaulted

F.P. Report

THATTA: A mentally challenged teenager has been subjected to sexual assault near Haji Marahi Village of Taluka Gorhabari of district Thatta. Initial medical report of the victim identified as Mustafa Marahi aging around 14 years, issued on Monday confirmed sexual and physical assault.

The local villagers found the victim lying in a banana field near the village in an unconscious state and shifted him to Rural Health Center Var. Dr. Sajid Sheikh Medico legal officer, who received the victim said that he had examined the victim upon which he found that the victim was mentally unstable and his mental condition had further aggravated in the wake of the trauma that befell over him.

The relatives of the victim complained regarding the indifferent attitude of the police saying that the local SHO had refused to lodge the first information report of the incident despite sufficient clues.

Child falls
to death in
water tank

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: A three-year-old child was killed after falling into a water tank in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber district on Monday.

Police said the incident occurred in Bakarabad area of Jamrud where a three-year-old child, named Hayan, son of Amir fell in a water tank during play. The area people retrieved the child from the water tank and shifted him to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Jamrud. Doctors at the hospital did their best to save the child however, the child breathed his last at the hospital bed.

Man killed
as as groups
trade fire

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): A man was killed when two groups traded fire after verbal clash in Soda Basti of Bahawalnagar, police said on Monday.

According to details, members of two group exchanged hot words and the verbal clash turned violent. An exchange of fire took place in which 45-year-old Atta Muhammad was killed. The body was shifted to hospital for post-mortem and police after registering a case against armed men of both groups started raids for their arrest.

Girl killed
after rape

OKARA (INP): A wicked person raped, killed a minor girl and dumped her body in agriculture fields. Local people held the accused. Body of another missing elder person was found.

According to details, an accused identified as Nabi Baksh raped a four-year-old girl, killed her and threw her body in agricultural fields. The local people held the accused and handed her over to police.

Hoti thanks people
for voting ANP

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Former Central Senior Vice President of Awami National Party (ANP) and former Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Ameer Haider Khan Hoti said that the day-to-day interference of the establishment in the country's politics is becoming a big threat to the country and democracy.

All national institutions should never exceed the powers prescribed by the constitution. In the context of domestic and international conditions, conducting free and transparent elections is an important need for Pakistan. Otherwise, political division will become more intense and bitterness and economic instability will increase.

Instead of political stability, the election has made

the protest of successful and failed candidates a matter of the moment. He was addressing the district council meeting of Awami National Party district Mardan at Hoti House. Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar, Awami National Party Mardan district President Imran Mandori, General secretary Haroon Khan and others also spoke.

On this occasion, a large number of unsuccessful provincial assembly candidates from ANP district Mardan, party central and provincial and district councilors, along with lawyers, teachers, businessmen, doctors, were present. On resigning from his party post, Ameer Haider Khan Hoti said that ANP is a movement.

This drama election results cannot stop our way,

Leader of Democracy Khan Abdul Wali Khan resigned from the party post after losing the elections. Similarly, apart from Central President Asfandiyar Wali Khan, Begum Naseem Wali Khan resigned from the party posts after losing the election.

He thanked the people of Mardan district for voting in large numbers. An example of the soil of Mardan is our mother. And no one can be angry with his mother. He said that compared to government formation in the center and other provinces, the beginning and end of government formation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will be on war. Most of the casualties will be the unfortunate people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa instead of anyone else. There will also be an increase in terrorism.

Hamza Baba, a bacon of
inspiration for new generation

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Speakers at a ceremony said that three decades back, Hamza Baba had passed away but still he remained a source of inspiration for generations of Pashto poets and writers. The daylong event was organized in Jirga Hall, Landi Kotal; district Khyber, under the auspices of Khyber Pakhto Adabi Jirga, to mark the 30th death anniversary of famous Pashto poet fondly known as Baba-e-Ghazal and attended by large number of the poet lovers.

The literary activity was headed by Prof Dr Yar Muhammad Maghmoom while Prof Dr Qasim Mehmood was the chief guest on the occasion. The gathering consisted of Seminar and Mushaira.

In the first session Prof Dr Yar Muhammad Maghmoom, Prof Dr Salman Taseer, Prof Dr Mohib Wazir, Dr Sarfraz shed light on various aspects of Hamza Khan Shinwari and said he was the Rehman Baba and Khushal Baba caliber poet in twenty century.

Dr Tawab Masroor, head of Khyber Pakhto Adabi Jirga presented a number of resolutions pertaining setting up seminar hall, posting of librarian, preservation of the poet personnel use commodities etc. in Hamza Baba complex.

Poetry reciting (mushaira) session poets including Prof Dr Qasim Mehmood, Feroz Khan

Sadiq, Kohat Khan Zakir, Fazle Maula Torakai, Murad Ali Murad, Nazir Muhammad, Ithebar Khan Ithbar, Almas Khan and others from different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Afghanistan was also held and the participants' poets amused the audience by reading their poems.

The participants admired and acknowledged great services of Hamza Baba, rendered for the uplift of Pashto language and paid rich tribute to him through their prose. Pashto verses and ghazal recited on the occasion. Hamza Baba who is remembered as a pioneer of Pashto modern ghazal passed away on 18th February, 1994.

First snowfall after prolonged
drought winter in Buner

F.P. Report

BUNER: Heavy rains in the district for the last two days and snow is also falling in the mountain ranges of Elum Ghar Dwa Sari and tourist spots of Kalil Kandoor Pir Baba Shahida Sir Chagharzi and Mahabannr Amazi due to which the weather has become cool and pleasant throughout the district.

And the wheat crop and gardens have benefited and the trees and plants are turning green and the whole

environment is clean and clear and the whole area looks like it has been washed. And there is a rush at the samosa fish biryani Kabab and tea shops.

However, the attendance in hospitals, offices, courts, markets and schools has decreased. The people worried about the lack of gas and electricity in the district have filled small LPG cylinders and kept their homes warm and turned to burnt fire wood for cooking and warming as well.

Due to increase in the

consumption of LPG and firewood, their prices have seen a sharp rise. People are worried about the increase in food items and other daily use items and demanded of the government to announce relief package. The public were of the view when the elections are done, please bring positive changes at all levels to improve the condition of the people and have mercy on them so that they can easily eat two times meals a day at their homes with their families and sleep soundly.

Equipping students with IT, AI dire
need of hour: Governor Punjab

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Governor Punjab, Muhammad Baligh Ur Rehman has said that equipping students with Information Technology (IT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) was the dire need of the hour. While addressing convocation of a private institute here on Monday, he said that in the modern era, acquiring knowledge of modern sciences and arts holds key importance for progress and success.

Baligh Ur Rehman further stated that hard work

and consistency play a crucial role in the journey of progress. Instead of reacting to false and misleading information on social media, ensure a research-based approach, he advised the students and added that reacting against corruption should be based on real data and facts from international organizations.

The Governor Punjab noted that destruction and violent protests were extremely detrimental to the country. He said that determining those who merely talk against corruption and those who

take practical actions was imperative. Baligh Ur Rehman said that success in education was possible through collaboration with the private sector. Honesty and high moral values were the keys to success in practical life, he maintained.

The event was attended by Vice Chancellors (VCs) of public and private universities besides parents and graduating students were in attendance. Earlier, the Governor Punjab distributed medals and degrees among the students.



Navalny's widow Yulia to meet EU foreign ministers

MOSCOW: Yulia Navalnaya, the widow of the late Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny, will meet European foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday, the European Union's foreign policy chief said. The 47-year-old Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent domestic foe, died in a Russian jail after spending more than three years behind bars, prompting outrage and condemnation from Western leaders and his supporters.

"On Monday, I will welcome Yulia Navalnaya at the EU Foreign Affairs Council," Josep Borrell said on X. "EU Ministers will send a strong message of support to freedom fighters in Russia" and "honour" Navalny's memory, he said. Navalnaya shared a post on Instagram that showed a picture of the two together, their heads touching as they watched a performance. "I love you," she wrote in the post two days after her husband's death. It brought a personal note to the loss she expressed more formally on a public stage just hours after Navalny's passing was announced by the Russian prison service. Navalny, 47, fell unconscious and died after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" penal colony in the Arctic, where he was serving a three-decade sentence, the prison service said. There are still few details on why he died. Navalnaya appeared before an audience of leaders, diplomats and other officials at the Munich Security Conference, saying she had

weighed coming out on stage or immediately leaving to be with the couple's two children, Daria and Zakhar, deciding her husband would want her to speak. If the news of his death was true, Navalnaya, 47, said, "I want Putin, his entire entourage, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family, to my husband". Navalny's sudden death was a crushing blow to many Russians, who had pinned their hopes for the future on Putin's fiercest foe. Navalny remained vocal in his unrelenting criticism of the Kremlin even after surviving a nerve agent poisoning and receiving multiple prison terms. His death came a month before a presidential election in Russia that is widely expected to give Putin another six years in power. Hundreds of people in dozens of Russian cities streamed to ad-hoc memorials and monuments to victims of political repressions with flowers and candles to pay tribute to the politician.

In more than a dozen cities, police detained 366 people, according to the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests and provides legal aid. More than 200 arrests were made in St Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city, the group said. Among those detained there was Grigory Mikhnov-Voitenko, a priest of the Apostolic Orthodox Church - a religious group independent of the Russian

Orthodox Church - who announced plans on social media to hold a memorial service for Navalny and was arrested outside his home. He was charged with organising a rally and placed in a holding cell in a police precinct, but was later hospitalised with a stroke, OVD-Info reported. Courts in St Petersburg have ordered 42 of those detained to serve from one to six days in jail, while nine others were fined, court officials said. In Moscow, at least six people were ordered to serve 15 days in jail, according to OVD-Info. Questions about the cause of death have lingered, and it remains unclear when the authorities may release Navalny's body. More than 12,000 people have submitted requests to the Russian government asking for the politician's remains to be handed over to his relatives, OVD-Info said. Navalny's team said that the politician was "murdered" and accused the authorities of deliberately stalling the release of the body, with Navalny's mother and lawyers getting contradicting information from various institutions where they went in their quest to retrieve the body. Russian authorities viewed Navalny and his supporters as extremists with links to the CIA intelligence agency in the United States, which they say is seeking to destabilise Russia. Navalny always dismissed accusations that he was a CIA asset. — Aljazeera

Russia will not intimidate me, Estonia's Kallas says

MUNICH (Reuters): Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas dismissed a warrant issued by Russia for her arrest, saying it was just an attempt to intimidate her amid speculation she could get a top European Union post. Once ruled by Moscow but now a member of both the European Union and NATO, Estonia has been a supporter of Kyiv and Kallas has been one of Moscow's most vocal critics since the Russian invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago.

Russian police placed her and several other Baltic politicians on a wanted list on Feb. 13 for destroying Soviet-era monuments. "It is meant to intimidate and make me refrain from the decisions that I would otherwise make," Kallas told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. "But it's Russia's playbook. It's nothing surprising and we are not afraid." The Baltic politicians risk being arrested only if they cross the Russian border, otherwise declaring them wanted has no real consequences. Kallas's high profile in pushing the EU to do more to support Ukraine has led to speculation in Brussels that she could take on a senior role after the next EU parliamentary elections in June, possibly as foreign policy chief. She said that speculation was also contributing to Russia's aggression towards her. "It's hard to be popular," she said ironically. "The Russians have also seen that, and that's why they issued the arrest warrant to really emphasise the biggest argument against me, that I am a provocation to Russia. When asked whether she was interested in any future European role she said: "We are not there yet. I'm the prime minister of Estonia." Estonia last year initiated talks to boost European munitions' supplies to Ukraine that led to the 27 EU members agreeing to send Kyiv 1 million rounds of artillery ammunition by March this year. The bloc is expected to only meet half the target.

"What it revealed was that we don't have enough, we don't produce enough, and we are not fast enough," she said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged allies at the global security conference to plug a shortage of weapons that is giving Russian forces the upper hand on the battlefield. Czech President Petr Pavel said his country had identified hundreds of thousands of rounds that could be sourced from outside the bloc quickly, but needed funding to do it. It is unclear how much support there would be among other EU members for such a move, which could be complicated by export licences and a reluctance among some to buy outside Europe. "It is definitely a viable option. We all have to realise that we have to do everything to stop the aggressor there," Kallas said. "What we learned from 1930s is that the price will be higher for everybody with every hesitation, with every delay."

Kallas also floated the idea of special EU bonds to help fund higher defence spending, a proposal that would need to convince those traditionally sceptical of EU joint borrowing such as Germany, the Netherlands and Nordic nations.

If the London court rejects Assange's plea for a full appeal, he could be extradited to the US once British officials approve his removal. His legal team plans to appeal an adverse ruling to the European Court of Human Rights, but they fear he could possibly be transferred before the court in Strasbourg, France, could halt his removal. If he prevails at next week's hearing, it would set the stage for an appeal process that is likely to further drag out the case. "This procedure has been marked by prolonged and creeping time frames," WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson said.

receive a prison term of up to 175 years, though American authorities have said any sentence is likely to be much lower. Assange and his supporters argue he acted as a journalist to expose US military wrongdoing and is protected under press freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Among the files published by WikiLeaks was video of a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by American forces in Baghdad that killed 11 people, including two Reuters journalists. "Julian has been indicted for receiving, possessing and communicating information to the public of evidence of war crimes committed by the US government," Stella Assange said. "Reporting a crime is never a crime." US lawyers say Assange is guilty of trying to hack the Pentagon computer and that WikiLeaks' publications created a "grave and imminent risk" to US intelligence sources in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the US criminal case against Assange was only unsealed in 2019, his freedom has been restricted for more than a dozen years.

Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012 and was granted political asylum after courts in England ruled he should be extradited to Sweden as part of a rape investigation in the Scandinavian country. He was arrested by British police after Ecuador's government withdrew his asy-

lum status in 2019 and then jailed for skipping bail when he first took shelter inside the embassy. Although Sweden dropped its sex crimes investigation, Assange has remained in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison while the extradition battle with the US continues. A judge in London initially blocked Assange's transfer to the US on the grounds he was likely to kill himself if held in harsh American prison conditions. But subsequent courts cleared the way for the move after US authorities provided assurances he wouldn't experience the severe treatment that his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk. Stella Assange and her husband's supporters have criticized those assurances as being meaningless because they are conditional.

economic ones, as lucrative investment deals can be negotiated. But some have pointed out that late Tanzanian President John Magufuli never travelled outside Africa in his six years in office. "Personal glorification" Kenyan foreign policy analyst Prof Macharia Munene acknowledges that some trips are necessary but says others are undoubtedly "wasteful".

"You have presidents who love to be in the air... Some of these trips are personal glorifications, not so much for the country," he told the BBC. Mr Ruto and Mr Tinubu and their spokespeople defend their trips as being vital to help address the very problems they are accused of ignoring. In the eight months since his inauguration, Mr Tinubu has made 14 trips - an average of just under two a month - but this is dwarfed by Mr Ruto, who has made about 50 journeys abroad since he became president in 2022 - averaging more than three a month. In comparison, Mr Ruto's predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, averaged just over one foreign trip a month in his decade in charge, similar to the record of Nigeria's previous president,

Muhammadu Buhari. Other world leaders have also notched up the air miles, but Mr Ruto and Mr Tinubu face continued questions over whether every trip is necessary. The Nigerian and Kenyan leaders were both in Europe at the end of last month - Mr Ruto in Italy attending the Italy-Africa summit while Mr Tinubu was continuing his unexplained "private visit" to France, the third time he has been in the country since last May. Since then, Mr Ruto has been on other trips. In June 2023, just three weeks after assuming office, Mr Tinubu travelled to Paris for a two-day climate summit. He had already been there months earlier "to rest" and plan the transition shortly after being elected president.

From Paris he went on to the UK for private talks with his predecessor, who had also travelled to "rest" after the elections. A week later, Mr Tinubu went to Guinea-Bissau for a meeting of West African bloc Ecowas, followed by a trip to Nairobi. In August he visited Benin, and in September India, the United Arab Emirates and the US for the UN General Assembly before returning to

Senegal election: Opposition supporters march calling for swift vote

DAKAR (AFP): Thousands of demonstrators have gathered in Senegal's capital, Dakar, demanding swift presidential elections. It comes after the country's top court blocked President Macky Sall's attempt to postpone the election, originally scheduled for this month.

Mr Sall's last minute decree, backed by parliament, had triggered a political crisis in Senegal, once regarded as a bastion of democracy in West Africa. Opposition supporters held signs demanding a "Free Senegal". It is the first rally allowed by authorities since Mr Sall's announcement two weeks ago. "Today's watchword is mobilisation," said presidential candidate Malick Gakou on the march.

He told the AFP news agency there was "no room for error any longer" and elections must be organised in March in order for the handover of power between President Sall and his successor on 2 April - when the president's second term in office is set to expire. Protesters in Dakar wore T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Protect our election" - named after the collective organisation of religious and civil groups opposed to Mr Sall's controversial decree. On 3 February, Mr Sall announced he was pushing back the election date - originally scheduled for 25 February - because of concerns over the eligibility of opposition candidates. His proposal was supported by 105 out of the 165 MPs after a fiery debate which saw police remove some opposition MPs from the chamber. A six-month



postponement was originally proposed, but a last-minute amendment extended it to 10 months, meaning a new election date of 15 December. That was until the Constitutional Council stepped in, annulling Mr Sall's decree and voiding the contentious parliamentary bill. A new date for the elections has not yet been given, but in its ruling the Constitutional Council said the president could not stay in power beyond the end of his term on 2 April.

The West African body, Ecowas, France and the European Union all urged Mr Sall to comply with the decision. Mr Sall has promised to consult and come up with a revised election date. But the disputes which led to the postponement in the first place remain unresolved, including allegations of corruption in the Constitutional Council and objections

from opposition figures who had been excluded from the candidate list. Holding the election using the disputed candidate list could spark renewed unrest and violence by those barred from standing. Most candidates have not been campaigning since Mr Sall's 3 February decree.

Widespread protests gripped the country in recent days, with many ending in violence and a large number of arrests. Three people have been killed in the demonstrations. However, tensions have eased since the court intervened and the authorities approved march. There was a strong, visible security force presence, but they did not wear riot gear as they had at previous demonstrations. Senegal is considered one of West Africa's more stable democracies and is the only country in the region never to have had a military coup.

As Thaksin goes free, questions about his political future loom

BANGKOK: Thailand's jailed former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has been released on parole after being detained for six months at a police hospital over corruption-related offences. Thaksin's release, the culmination of a period of reconciliation between his populist movement and the country's conservative establishment, raises questions about what role the former telecoms tycoon might play in Thai politics going forward.

Thaksin, a towering but divisive presence in Thai politics whose populist policies appealed to rural dwellers who felt neglected by the country's ruling elites, led Thailand between 2001 and 2006, when his government was toppled in a military coup. Even after fleeing the country in 2008 to avoid punishment for abuse of power and other offences while in office, Thaksin, 74, exerted a looming presence over politics in Thailand. Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra served as Thailand's first female prime minister from 2011 until 2014, under the banner of the Pheu Thai Party, which was born out of the remnants of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai. Thaksin's return to Thailand in August following nearly 16 years of self-imposed exile coincided with the Pheu Thai Party's return to power after it formed a coalition government with the pro-military Palang Pracharath Party and United Thai Nation led by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. The Move Forward Party, the winners of elections in May, were blocked by the military-appointed Senate from forming government amid an establishment backlash to proposed reforms to the military and the monarchy, including a pledge to amend Thailand's controversial lese-majeste law.

The timing of Thaksin's return and his receipt of a royal pardon, which reduced his eight-year sentence to one year, has led to speculation that a secret deal was made to allow him to come home on favourable terms. Move Forward, the leader of the opposition in parliament, said in a statement that the circumstances of Thaksin's release raised questions about whether there are double standards in the justice system. The Pheu Thai Party, which is led by Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn, has denied striking a deal to win the former prime minister leniency. For support-

ers of Thaksin, whose arrival at his home in western Bangkok was met by a scrum of media and well-wishers, his release is a small measure of justice for a man unfairly hounded for taking on the establishment.

Peemai Sirikul, a Thaksin supporter, said the former leader's release meant "mission accomplished". "He shouldn't have been punished as he did nothing wrong, - it's because of the coup d'état," she told Al Jazeera. "Thaksin lost his life unfairly for 17 years." Others see Thaksin as a recipient of special treatment. Within hours of being sentenced last year, Thaksin complained of health issues and was transferred from prison to Bangkok's Police General Hospital where he spent the next six months. While the exact conditions of Thaksin's parole are unclear, local media have reported that he is expected to spend the remainder of his one-year sentence at home. Dozens of protesters gathered outside Thailand's Government House to object to Thaksin's parole. One activist wore a makeshift sign stating, "Where is Thaksin the prisoner?" Pichit Chaimongkol, the leader of the Students and Peoples Network for Thailand Reform, said he wants to see justice. "Thaksin didn't go to the right jail. He took a rest and was very comfortable," he told Al Jazeera. "Against the politics of Thailand and every law, we say he should go to the right jail. We are asking for real justice from the government. Thaksin did some wrong things, so how does he have the right to be very comfortable and not go to jail?" Mark S Cogan, an associate professor of peace and conflict studies at Kansai Gaidai University in Japan, said Thaksin's release sends the wrong message.

"Thaksin's release sends a terrible message to the Thai people, that there are criminal repercussions for violations of draconian laws, which have ensnared many human rights and democratic activists, but rich, connected elites like Thaksin, who were once accused of serious crimes, have an off ramp and an escape back into wealth and power," Cogan told Al Jazeera. Thailand experienced major political unrest in 2020 and 2021 as large street demonstrations called for a change in government and reform of the monarchy. In recent years, hundreds of people have been arrested

under Thailand's lese-majeste law, known as Article 112, which carries lengthy prison terms for defaming, insulting or threatening the monarchy.

Cogan said that Thaksin is likely to again get involved in Thai politics following his release. "Now a relatively free man, he will inevitably reinsert himself into national affairs, calling into question the legitimacy of the Srettha government due to his control over the Pheu Thai Party," he said. But Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political science professor at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, said Thaksin may not have the influence he once did. "Thaksin is seen as having sold out by some of the Pheu Thai base by forming government with pro-military parties and cutting a deal with the establishment just to get himself home," he told Al Jazeera. "His commuted sentence from eight years to one and then to be paroled in six months without a day in jail will reinforce the sense of inequality and injustice. His extraordinary stand-alone treatment is unlikely to boost the Pheu Thai's popularity." "Thaksin's political power is much less than it used to be after all the ups and downs over two decades," Thitinan added. "His Pheu Thai party is not so dominant now as it lost the election for the first time last May to Move Forward." Despite his parole, Thaksin is not completely out legal jeopardy.

On Monday, the billionaire ex-prime minister met with prosecutors investigating a royal insult complaint stemming from remarks he made in South Korea in 2015. Thailand's attorney-general's office said in a statement that further investigation would be needed before deciding on charges. Pravit Rojanapruk, a journalist and political analyst, said Thaksin's release ultimately brings more questions than answers. "The question, if his health permits, is what kind of role will Thaksin play? Will he take a de-facto driver seat and direct the Pheu Thai government's policies in a very public way through posts on social media, thus risk making Srettha Thavisin look like a marionette?" Pravit told Al Jazeera. "Or will he be content with working quietly behind the scenes as kingmaker and supreme adviser of the government and the Pheu Thai Party?" — Aljazeera

Africa's 'flying presidents' under fire

JOHANNESBURG (BBC): Since Kenya's William Ruto and Nigeria's Bola Tinubu became presidents, they have faced similar criticism over their frequent trips abroad. The two men have been the subject of unflattering descriptions - the costs associated with their alleged penchant for air travel often contrasted with tough economic conditions at home.

A Kenyan newspaper, the Standard, nicknamed Mr Ruto the "Flying President". It said "so great is his love for flying that it appears that he cannot pass up any opportunity" despite pressing domestic demands, such as dealing with the high cost of living. Last month, as Mr Tinubu made yet another trip to Europe, Nigeria's opposition leader Atiku Abubakar said on social media that Nigeria does not need a "tourist-in-chief". He criticised the president's private visit "while Nigeria is drowning in the ocean of insecurity". This in some ways can be seen as a cheap shot, easily levelled by any critic. Presidents need to attend heads-of-state meetings and nurture foreign relations. This is important not only for diplomatic reasons, but also

economic ones, as lucrative investment deals can be negotiated. But some have pointed out that late Tanzanian President John Magufuli never travelled outside Africa in his six years in office. "Personal glorification" Kenyan foreign policy analyst Prof Macharia Munene acknowledges that some trips are necessary but says others are undoubtedly "wasteful".

"You have presidents who love to be in the air... Some of these trips are personal glorifications, not so much for the country," he told the BBC. Mr Ruto and Mr Tinubu and their spokespeople defend their trips as being vital to help address the very problems they are accused of ignoring. In the eight months since his inauguration, Mr Tinubu has made 14 trips - an average of just under two a month - but this is dwarfed by Mr Ruto, who has made about 50 journeys abroad since he became president in 2022 - averaging more than three a month. In comparison, Mr Ruto's predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, averaged just over one foreign trip a month in his decade in charge, similar to the record of Nigeria's previous president,

Muhammadu Buhari. Other world leaders have also notched up the air miles, but Mr Ruto and Mr Tinubu face continued questions over whether every trip is necessary. The Nigerian and Kenyan leaders were both in Europe at the end of last month - Mr Ruto in Italy attending the Italy-Africa summit while Mr Tinubu was continuing his unexplained "private visit" to France, the third time he has been in the country since last May. Since then, Mr Ruto has been on other trips. In June 2023, just three weeks after assuming office, Mr Tinubu travelled to Paris for a two-day climate summit. He had already been there months earlier "to rest" and plan the transition shortly after being elected president.

From Paris he went on to the UK for private talks with his predecessor, who had also travelled to "rest" after the elections. A week later, Mr Tinubu went to Guinea-Bissau for a meeting of West African bloc Ecowas, followed by a trip to Nairobi. In August he visited Benin, and in September India, the United Arab Emirates and the US for the UN General Assembly before returning to

Paris. He was home for the whole of October before resuming travels with a trip to Saudi Arabia, then Guinea-Bissau and Germany at the end of November and a week later travelled to Dubai. The Nigerian presidency has said the trips are important for attracting foreign investment. "On every foreign trip I have embarked on, my message to investors and other business people has been the same. Nigeria is ready and open for business," President Tinubu said in his 2024 New Year message. Mr Ruto's travel schedule since his inauguration in 2022 has been even more hectic. Between September of that year and last December he had travelled abroad at least twice every month. In May 2023 he made five trips. He has travelled to various African countries, Europe and the US for global events and bilateral meetings. This year, in January, he has been in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Italy. And already this month, Mr Ruto has been to Japan and the UAE. There is not just the question of frequency, but also the question of cost. Mr Tinubu is said to have spent at least 3.4bn naira (\$2.2m;

£1.8m) on domestic and foreign travel in the first six months of his presidency - 36% more than the budgeted amount for 2023, the Nigerian newspaper Punch reported, citing GovSpend, a civic tech platform that tracks government spending. In Kenya, the Controller of Budget, an independent office that oversees government spending, showed a significant increase in the office of the president's travel expenditure in the year to July last year - which included nine months of Mr Ruto's presidency.

Overall spending for both domestic and foreign travel for the year was over 1.3bn Kenyan shillings (\$9.2m; £7.3m), exceeding the travel budget for the previous year by more than 30%. The Kenyan government spokesman did not respond to the BBC's questions about Mr Ruto's trips, though the president and the spokesman have often justified them. Mr Ruto himself has said he does not "travel like a tourist" and the trips are necessary to get foreign investment and create employment for Kenyans abroad - he recently said he had secured more than 300,000 job opportunities through negotiations.

After the recent trip to Japan, Mr Ruto said he had secured deals worth more than \$2.3bn. While stressing the benefits of the presidential trips, both Nigeria and Kenya have also taken some action to counter the criticism of government employees travelling abroad. Kenya said it had cut its civil service travel budget by 50% in the wake of accusations of "wastage" on domestic and foreign trips. But this does not seem to have affected the president himself, who has said he will not shun trips as long as they are beneficial.

Last month, the Nigerian president announced a reduction in the official travel delegation by about 60%. The directive announced by his spokesman Ajuri Ngelale included cutting down the president's own travel entourage, but did not say whether he would cut the number of his trips. Yet is not just Kenya and Nigeria where the cost of travel has been a concern. As Congolese citizens prepared to go the polls last year, one of the criticisms of President Félix Tshisekedi was the number of trips he had made, with allegations that there was little to show for it.

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The future of Ukraine war

RUSSIA has gained full control of the Ukrainian town of Avdiivka after Kyiv's troops withdrew, following a weeks-long deadly urban battle between the two armies that turned the border town into a completely depopulated wreckage. According to the Russian Ministry of Defence, Russian troops are pressing forward into the large chunk of the 1000 km frontline on the Russian-Ukraine border.

The war in Ukraine is nearly completing its two full years, wherein continued airstrikes, armed drones, missile attacks, and indiscriminate bombing have turned a majority of cities in Eastern Ukraine into unlivable ruins and destroyed infrastructures. The fall of Avdiivka is Russia's biggest achievement since Moscow captured the city of Bakhmut in May 2023. The Russian government and its military are celebrating their hard-earned victory that fell almost after eight months. Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, his government, and the public are much worried about the series of events as the war enters its third phase with more lethal Russian offensive, Ukraine's Western allies are holding back their support that has almost dried up Ukraine's ammunition and logistics reserves, seriously undermining Ukraine's war efforts at the crucial point in time. Hence the future of war is uncertain and the fate of independent Ukraine also casts doubts if Kyiv can't receive sufficient backing from the West.

Historically, the Ukraine war has not only marked the worst economic impact on the global economy but divided the entire world into three political blocs mainly, pro-Ukraine western bloc, pro-Russia or anti-US bloc, and non-aligned or impartial nations. President Zelenskyy and his team purely depended on Western support during their war against several times bigger enemy that was not only equipped with modern sophisticated weaponry, armed drones, long-range missiles, and nuclear arsenal but more ruthless and indiscriminate in their use against its weak neighbour. The United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU), who fuelled the Ukraine war since beginning about two years ago, provided military assistance to Kyiv with about \$ 100 billion consisting of main battle tanks, artillery guns, and other armaments which played an effective role in Ukraine's defense. As the war got prolonged, Kyiv's supporters, the United States and the European Union (EU) divided internally on the issue of Ukraine's economic and military assistance during its ongoing war against Russia. The EU assistance package for Ukraine faced staunch opposition from Putin's strong confederate Viktor Urban in getting a nod at EU Parliament while the \$ 60 billion aid package devised by the Biden administration met the same fate in US Congress, where Republicans offered utmost opposition to Ukraine aid bill under Trump's America First policy.

After waiting for the US and EU help for the past several months, the Ukrainian Army left a vital border outpost to avoid the life losses of its troops. American President and EU foreign policy Chief still assuring Ukraine of their unwavering support but they are helpless until the competent forums approve the aid bills where anti-Ukraine war groups are positioned and offer unimaginable resistance to aid packages. Serious doubts loom over the future of the Ukraine war, while a political and military backlash is likely to be suffered by Ukraine and its people. Russian President termed the Ukraine war a matter of survival for the Kremlin, the same situation exists in the case of Kyiv, wherein Ukraine has reached the verge of an all-out collapse if it did not receive funds from the West. There are multiple questions and diverse scenarios about the conflict in Eastern Europe, which has the potential to turn into a global war if the syndicate's interests are not met otherwise President Zelenskyy and his supporters might accede to Russian dominance at some time in the future.

Horde of fake housing schemes

RAWALPINDI Development Authority (RDA) has geared up its ongoing operation against illegal housing schemes in the district. According to the RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate of RDA has issued notices to the owners of two private illegal housing schemes and 11 illegal subdivisions of the land namely Ittehad Town. As said, the department has filed an FIR against illegal housing societies and taking action against unlawful advertisements and marketing campaigns in that regard. The authorities also requested the FIA Cyber Crime Wing to take legal action against the misleading advertisements of illegal housing schemes which have looted the millions of rupees hard earned money of innocent citizens through fake advertisements and false claims.

The real estate sector has shaped into a most lucrative business that is enormously spreading its jaws all across the country without any control, monitoring, or regulation from the relevant government departments. The cabal of land developers and real estate tycoons used to buy barren land from poor masses on meager prices, and propagated it as model town, and luxuries housing societies in suburbs of the major cities, without complying with essential regulatory requirements and environmental and social codes set for such colonies in the country.

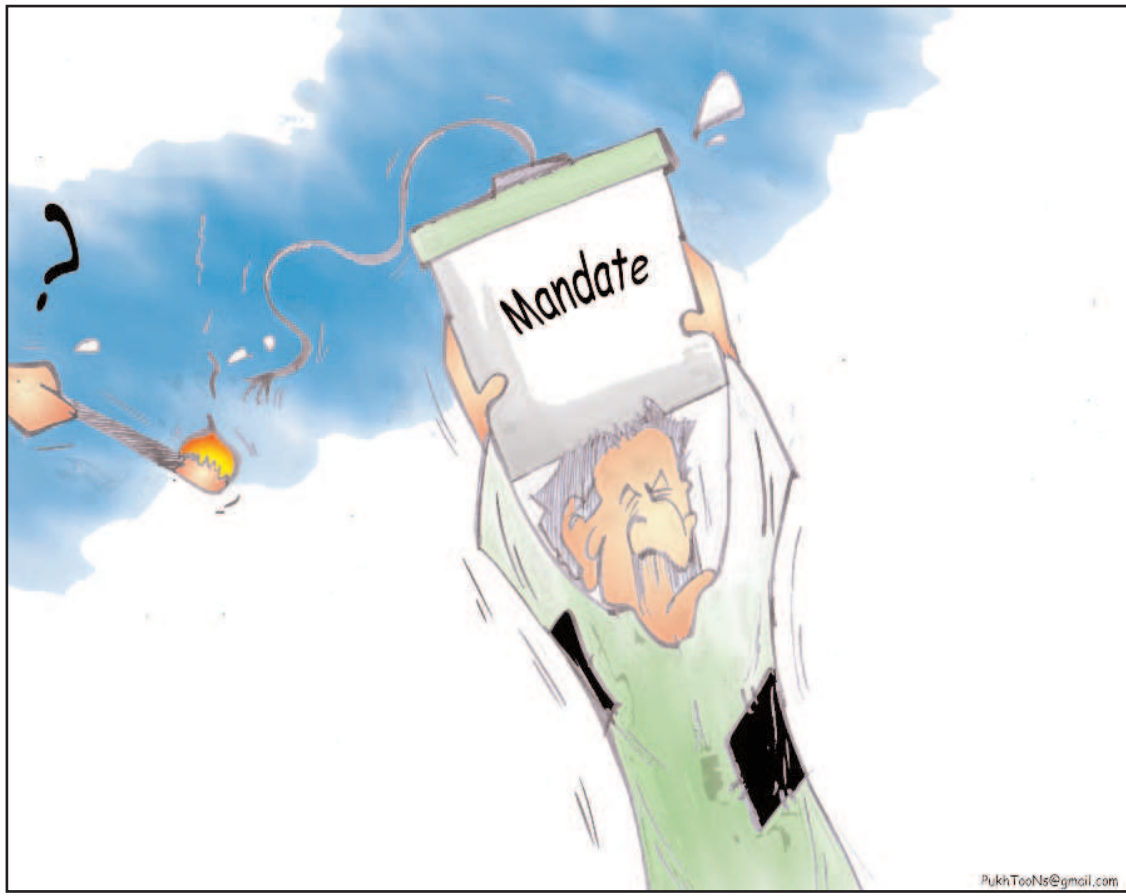
Unfortunately, numerous people invested their lifelong savings or pension into such flimsy schemes and a majority of them could not get their dream home because of fraudulent schemes, construction delay or other legal issues which made their lives miserable. The situation is worse as the influential property tycoons have nexus within the political circles, destroying administration while each of them hired a platoon of lawyers to engage police and courts thus poor masses are compelled to suffer at the hands of those white collar criminals.

Realistically, the devilish housing societies business has flourished unhindered over the past decades, and countless cases of fraud, fake housing societies, and non-deliverance of projects occurred so far but the government authorities did nothing to permanently forestall such incidents except making money by issuing NOC and LOP without evaluating onground situations and environment.

The government must set a transparent and time-bound procedure, fix land prices, and development charges, along with ensuring the provision of utilities, and essential recreational and social amenities for each society/ project so that the real estate mafia neither dodges the public nor escapes the writ of the state in any case. Wherein, this uncontrolled monster could be kneel down in accordance with the state and the public needs in the future.

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Only strength and punishment can defeat Putin

Daniel Hannan

WHAT, you might ask, is one more dead Russian among so many? Vladimir Putin's latest war has, according to the Pentagon, claimed 60,000 of his countrymen's lives. And, long before he invaded Ukraine, people who stood in the way of the unsmiling despot had the habit of dying. Sometimes they were journalists (Anna Politkovskaya, Natalia Estemirova), sometimes defectors (Alexander Litvinenko, Boris Berezovsky), sometimes oligarchs (Pavel Antov, Ravil Maganov), sometimes people who were in the wrong place (Dawn Sturgess, the mother poisoned in Salisbury).

So the death of Alexei Navalny in an Arctic penal colony is unsurprising. Indeed, the only shocking thing about it is how unshocking it is. Vladimir Putin occasionally poses as a defender of Christian civilisation, but his regime has abandoned the Ten Commandments as comprehensively as it has abandoned liberal humanism. Navalny's mother and lawyer have been told that he died of "sudden death syndrome". The sarcasm serves a purpose, like the official denials that followed the Skripal hit, or the blowing up of Prigozhin's plane. Putin likes us to know when his regime has dealt with someone who crossed him.

So, to repeat the question, why is one more death so significant? Navalny was hardly a goody-goody liberal. Before he began to seek the approval of Western politicians, he was a Russian nationalist with spicy views about immigrants from the Caucasus. He was not even the first opposition leader to be bumped off. Indeed, he got that role because it was suddenly vacated by Boris Nemtsov, who was shot in the back as he crossed the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky bridge in 2015. Perhaps Navalny's death has caught people's imagination because of the contrast it represents. On the one hand, the (literally) suicidal courage of a dissident who would not abandon the cause of a democratic Russia, who chose to return to his country even after its regime had tried to

assassinate him; on the other, the wretched cowardice of a dictator who has again resorted to murder at a distance.

We knew Putin was a dictator. We knew he was a kleptocrat. We knew he was a bully. But to have someone bumped off in prison is the act of a mafia capo. Once again, we see that the Russian Federation is a crime syndicate with a country attached. Drawing attention to this grim truth is what got Navalny rubbed out. He was no threat at the ballot box, but the Kremlin could not abide the way he kept exposing the property empires and palaces owned by Putin and his former Leningrad KGB cronies. Navalny's supporters continued to produce their exposés from exile even after their chief had been sent to his Siberian hellhole. To Putin, it was insufferable.

There are still, incredibly, people in the West who portray the grim Dobby the House Elf look-alike as some kind of anti-woke tough guy. They are especially vocal on the fringes of America's Maga movement. "Every member of Conservative Inc that backs this Ukraine war is a simp," says Steve Bannon, Trump's former consigliere. "I think we should probably take the side of Russia if we have to choose between Russia and Ukraine," says Tucker Carlson, who has been made an even greater fool by this latest horror. "Putin - unlike someone else we know - LOVES his country & FIGHTS for its interests," says the Trumpian writer Dinesh D'Souza.

Really? Loves his country? He has looted, impoverished, dishonoured and brutalised his country. If anyone loved Russia it was Navalny, who sacrificed everything for it. It was Navalny's very patriotism that Putin found intolerable. Opponents of the Ukraine war in the US and in far-Right European parties paint Putin as a strongman, a warrior defending his people against woke, liberal deviancy. But is it a sign of strength to have prisoners murdered and then deny it? To strike at your critics with poison and assassin's bullets? To rain missiles on women

and children? In Ukraine, Putin's regime has been anything but strong. Sure, he can be tough when it comes to assassinating the unarmed; not when he comes up against soldiers.

I write with feeling this week, having finally been sanctioned by the Kremlin. I had been feeling left out. But, a few days ago, I got the happy news that I was one of 18 newly sanctioned British politicians and academics, along with Lord Ashcroft, the Earl of Oxford and the historian Orlando Figes. According to Pravda, we were "Russophobic ally charged". If by "Russophobic ally charged" they mean "hoping that Russia will lose the unprovoked war that it launched against a neighbour that offered it no threat," then I plead guilty.

For here is a hard thing that needs saying. Putin is not forcing his brutality on a resentful population. His approval ratings hover at around 85 per cent. You might argue that this simply reflects the tendency of all populations to rally to their regime in times of war. But Putin remains popular by constantly starting wars. A besieged population, wavering between self-pity and irredentist vindictiveness, is precisely the kind of population that backs dictators. Many Russians support Putin not despite his cruelty but because of it. They always have. The criminal nature of Putinism was visible from the start.

Navalny believed, as do many Western analysts, that the 1999 Russian apartment bombings, blamed at the time on Chechen separatists, were in fact a work of FSB provokatsiya designed to bring Putin to power.

Whether or not that is true - and Putin has blocked attempts to investigate it - we saw the nature of the new regime in 2002, when real Chechen separatists seized a theatre in Moscow, taking the audience hostage. Putin's response was to pump in a chemical agent and then go in shooting. The terrorists died, and so did 130 innocent theatre-goers. The response of the Russian population? To cheer wildly for a leader who was not afraid to get things done.

Since then, Putin has steadily tightened his grip. Western-oriented Russians have emigrated, and much of what remains of his beaten, servile population has normalised repression and violence.

Putin's removal is a necessary precondition for the return of Russian civilisation, but not a sufficient one. The country needs to understand the cost of adventurism and bellicosity. Is there a chance of that happening? It depends on the West's resolve. If Putin wins in Ukraine, he will continue to terrorise Russia and the world. He sees wars as the way to gain approval from his bloodthirsty electorate. He sees the Baltic states as part of Russia. He has lined up with revanchist leaders in China and North Korea. If, on the other hand, he loses, then Russia can begin to heal, making an honest reckoning with its past. By "losing", I mean palpably failing to meet his objectives in Ukraine. This is not really a fight over a few hundred acres of black earth, however rich the hydrocarbon deposits beneath it. The war will be determined, not by the position of the front lines, but by economic resilience, production capacity and readiness to sustain losses. It was these things, in the end, which told against Germany in 1918. It still controlled large swathes of conquered territory when it ran out of resources and toppled its leader. Many First World War parallels have been drawn with the Ukraine conflict. But here is another hard thing that needs saying. France, which in 1914 had a population fractionally smaller than Ukraine's today, ended up mobilising eight million men. Ukraine has still not mobilised a million.

Winning this war will require resolve from all sides. From Ukrainians themselves, and from American and European leaders, who must explain to sceptical voters that they should continue to pay for Ukrainian drones, air defence systems and artillery. This needs a great deal of courage. Then again, think of the courage Navalny showed when he went home to face trumped-up charges from a regime that wanted to kill him. What's our excuse?

North Korea teases potential thaw in Japan relations

William Gallo

AT the beginning of the year, as western Japan reeled from an earthquake that killed more than 200 people and damaged tens of thousands of homes, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un sent Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida a message of "sympathy and condolences."

Kim's message, published in North Korea's main newspaper, was brief and in many ways unextraordinary. However, it was also unusually conciliatory, given that the two countries have no formal ties and that North Korean state media propagandists regularly lob fiery insults at Japanese leaders. More than a month later, North Korea is now giving more hints that it may be willing to improve relations with Japan, although many analysts are skeptical that will happen.

In a statement late Thursday, Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korea's leader, cautiously praised the "positive" statements of Kishida, who last week told Japanese lawmakers it is "extremely important" that he take the initiative to build top-level ties with Pyongyang. "I think there would be no reason not to appreciate his recent speech as a positive one, if it was prompted by his real intention to boldly free himself from the past fetters and promote the DPRK-Japan relations," Kim said, using an abbreviation for Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name. Kim, who insisted the comments reflect only her "personal view," also seemed to refer to Kishida's oft-stated desire to hold a summit with her brother. However, she said, a Kishida visit to Pyongyang would only be possible if Japan stopped objecting to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and does not raise the "already settled" issue of North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals. Japan may find it difficult to accept those conditions. On Friday, Yoshimasa Hayashi, the Japanese government's top spokesperson, would not say how Tokyo views Kim's comments, but he said Japan cannot accept that the abduction issue has been resolved.

"We remain unchanged - Japan intends to comprehensively resolve pending issues, such as nuclear and missiles and the abductions," Hayashi told reporters. The abduction issue has for decades been a barrier to improving Japan-North Korea relations. Japan says North Korea abducted 17 Japanese citizens as part of efforts to train its spies in Japanese language and culture in the 1970s and '80s. North Korea has only ever admitted to kidnapping 13 Japanese nationals. In 2002, North Korea issued an apology and returned five of those who had been abducted, while claiming the others had already died. Many in Japan continue to believe that some of the victims of the effort are still alive. Public opinion polls consistently suggest the abduction issue is a top priority for Japanese voters, Jeffrey J. Hall, a Japanese politics specialist at the Kanda University of International Studies, said.

"Almost every single Japanese conservative politician wears blue label pins on a daily basis to signal their belief that the abductee issue is extremely important and has not been adequately resolved," Hall told VOA. "Kishida cannot simply side-

step the issue and hold a bilateral summit that only focuses on other issues," he added. Any progress on the abductions issue could provide Kishida a much-needed boost. The approval rating for his Cabinet is just 25%, according to a recent poll by public broadcaster NHK, amid economic woes and a ruling party scandal related to political funds.

However, very few analysts predict Tokyo and Pyongyang will find a path forward - in large part because former North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, father of Kim Jong Un, declared the abductions issue resolved. "It's very hard for the administration in North Korea to go back on that," said Christopher Green, a Korea specialist and assistant professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands. "As we can see in Kim Yo Jong's statement, the North Koreans are already setting out their stall clearly, saying that the abductions issue must not be central, because it has already been dealt with," Green added. North Korea, though, may still find it worthwhile to engage Japan because it may believe it can "force open some cracks" in the recently expanded trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea, according to Green. "If by some very unlikely turn of events the long-standing issues in their bilateral relationship can be resolved, so much the better. If not, well they still caused angst between Tokyo and Seoul, and Pyongyang will find a way to blame the perfidious Japanese for the failure. It is a win-win for the North; or at least there is no chance of Pyongyang losing," he added. Under conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, South Korea has pursued closer relations and defense ties with Japan, Korea's former colonial ruler.

However, the convergence among South Korea, Japan, and the United States remains fragile, reflecting lingering differences over shared history and US political volatility, according to Robert Ward, senior fellow for Japanese security studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

"Kishida will be mindful to keep both Seoul and Washington abreast of developments with Pyongyang to reduce the risk of undesirable surprises," Ward told VOA. "Kishida will be visiting Seoul in March and Washington in April - these would be important signals of alignment between the three, particularly if a Kishida-Kim meeting goes ahead," Ward added. So far, there are no public signs of tension in the trilateral relationship. Jung Pak, a senior US State Department official, told reporters Thursday that Washington supports Japan's attempts to engage North Korea. South Korea and Japan are also "closely communicating" on the issue of North Korea and any future dialogue with Pyongyang, according to a South Korean official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was quoted Friday by South Korea's Yonhap news agency. Any contact between Japan and North Korea should be made in a way that would "help promote the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula," the South Korean official was quoted as saying.

VOA

Don't misread Trump's loss in his civil trial

David Orentlicher

BETWEEN March and August, prosecutors indicted former President Donald Trump four times for alleged crimes. In September, New York civil court Judge Arthur Engoron ruled that Trump had committed business fraud when seeking financing for his real estate deals, and on Friday Engoron imposed his penalties for the civil offenses: The judge ordered Trump to pay \$355 million in damages; he also banned Trump from serving as an officer or a director of a business in New York for the next three years.

While Friday's ruling seems like a significant setback for Trump, it more likely will end up as a defeat for the legal system. So far, the prosecutions of Trump have been followed by an increase in his support and a decline in public trust in the legal process, at least among Republicans. From July to

December, Trump's support among Republican primary voters rose from 54% to 64%. Last month, Trump trounced his competition in the Iowa caucuses, more than doubling his 2016 Iowa vote, and he also cruised to a first-place finish in the New Hampshire primary. Even among all Americans, Trump seems to be doing better. In Wall Street Journal polls, President Joe Biden's 2 point lead in December 2022 flipped to a 4 point Trump lead this past December.

It is essential to hold Trump accountable for his misconduct, and he may ultimately serve time in prison once courts decide his four criminal cases. But so far, public officials have done more damage to the law than to Trump, pushing too far in their efforts to punish the former president. Instead of leading many voters to distrust Trump, the legal cases are leading voters to distrust the legal system. After Special Counsel Jack Smith

indicted Trump in August for his efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, an ABC News poll found that 46% of surveyed Americans believed the charges to be politically motivated, with only 40% not thinking so. In June, more than 60% of Americans polled said that they thought political motivations explained Smith's indictment of Trump on charges of mishandling classified documents. A majority of Americans similarly told pollsters that they did not see a legal basis behind charges related to the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol or hiding hush money payments to cover up an extramarital affair.

It's important for the public to feel that the Trump prosecutions are legitimate. It's especially important for those who will be rendering verdicts on Trump. But some of the prospective jurors in his damages trial for defam-

ing E. Jean Carroll said they believed that Trump is being treated unfairly by the legal system. Other polls also reveal worrisome trends. In Gallup's 2022 and 2023 surveys about major societal institutions, public confidence in the US Supreme Court - which will have the final say on whether Trump should serve time, be disqualified from running again for the presidency or go unpunished - plummeted to new, troubling lows. It is essential that, whichever way the courts decide the Trump cases, the public thinks he got a fair shake by the legal system. But in their zeal to pursue the former president, prosecutors and judges are diminishing public trust by pushing the limits of the law.

In the business fraud case, for example, Engoron has stretched the law in problematic ways. When he concluded that the former president

had fraudulently inflated his net worth in financial statements to banks and other lenders, the judge initially ordered that Trump's New York companies be dissolved. Moreover, his order applied to all of the companies, not just the ones implicated in the wrongful statements.

But according to experts in New York law, the applicable statutes only allow Engoron to punish the companies charged with fraud, and even for those, it doesn't give Engoron the authority to shut the businesses down (which may explain why an appeals court placed the dissolution order on hold, and why Engoron did not incorporate dissolution into Friday's judgment). Other cases also are troubling. And in disqualifying Trump from the primary ballot, the Colorado Supreme Court and Maine secretary of state relied on discredited punishments of slavery opponents, advocates for workers' rights

and war protesters. For many Americans, all of these distortions validate their sense that the Trump prosecutions are partisan. As they erode public trust, public officials solidify Trump's support. It is not surprising that Trump seems to be benefiting from his legal troubles. Trump regularly mobilizes his constituency by claiming that his prosecutions are politically motivated and designed to shut him and his supporters down. Stretching the law in dubious ways only reinforces those claims.

To be sure, law enforcement officials should not stay their hands just because Trump might exploit efforts to hold him accountable. But officials need to act much more scrupulously in their efforts. When prosecutors or judges overreach, they play into Trump's strategy of victimhood, increasing his chances for reelection and compromising the public's faith in our legal system.

Navalny has entered history books, but his words will live on

THAT Navalny was still alive in 2024 was something of a miracle. If he had survived for so long, then, the "Wonderful Russia of the Future" for which he fought all his life might come true, someday. But miracles are hard to come by in Putin's Russia, even though Russians say that "hope is the last thing to die."

Navalny died yesterday, and many in Russia saw hope die with him. We know why Navalny died - or, rather, was killed - and we know who did it. Many members of the Russian opposition have shown great courage. Some have lost their lives. Not only did Navalny survive a gruesome assassination attempt in August 2020, but he managed - along with his team and allies abroad - to find the culprits and expose them in a dramatic prank call to one of the assassins. In the video of the call, Navalny was triumphant, saying: "I called my killer. He confessed." How many other people can say that? When he beat that attempt on his life, he returned to Russia in 2021. Was this an act of folly, as many argued? Why did he come back, as people asked him a million times? Navalny was adamant that he had to: "I have my country and my convictions. I don't want to give it up or ever betray it. If your convictions mean something, you must be prepared to stand up for them and make sacrifices if necessary."

Sure, people have left Russia for their own safety. But he wouldn't. "I participated in elections and vied for leadership positions. The demand for me is different. I traveled the entire country, declaring from the stage everywhere," he said. "I promise that I won't let you down, I won't deceive you, and I won't abandon you." And he didn't. As some have pointed out, his life

took on a mythical, almost religious significance. A muckraker, a politician, a protester, Navalny was more than just a dissident. Yet he shared with the Soviet dissidents an unflinching determination and a deep sense of moral rectitude - often exercising vengefulness against his opponents or even former allies. Navalny was not above the fray just because of his courage and persistence. Especially after he was poisoned and turned into a global icon of democracy, it became easy to forget how much of the infrastructure of opposition he built for others to use. He was the frontman, but behind him were whole teams of dedicated and talented professionals. For the Russian public, at the end of the 2000s, Navalny was an anti-corruption blogger. But soon his blog exposing corruption in all spheres of Russian life birthed multiple small organizations - RosPil to investigate corrupt government procurement, and RosYama to expose how the ubiquitous potholes in Russia's roads were a symptom of the powerful siphoning away of money that should have been spent improving the lives of ordinary people.

The projects got bigger and bigger, until they were merged into the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), with local chapters in regions across Russia. Navalny may have lived in Moscow, where he was a fixture of this little world of opposition politicians, journalists and intellectuals that Russians called the tusovka - the clique. But he saw the bigger picture there was no reason not to find activists in smaller cities, in the whole country. In all his projects, Navalny used a similar formula. It's easy to say that corruption is bad. Everyone agrees with that, even

Morvan Lallouet

Putin. It's more difficult - and more dangerous - to say who is corrupt, how they get the money, and where it goes. Navalny and a brilliant team of lawyers and investigators, Lyubov Sobol, Georgy Alburow, and Maria Pevchikh, did just that. They wrapped investigations filled with superficially dry financial reports and company records a captivating and funny story - full of anger, sarcasm and memes. Many of Navalny's supporters tell the same story of how they discovered him: they read his blog and felt that it contained something new and powerful. When Navalny was convinced by his team that YouTube was the place to be, he turned his investigations into professionally produced documentaries. They frequently went viral - over 100 million people watched his expose of Putin's mammoth secret palace.

What did he stand for? At heart, since he was a teenager, and for the rest of his life, he was a Russian liberal. He wanted Russia to be a rule-of-law, democratic, free-market country. Alongside his many ideas, came many compromises. In the 1990s, when Navalny was in his 20s, he thought that market reforms justified crushing the livelihoods of the weak, and that democratic reforms required the strong hand of Boris Yeltsin. Later, he would loudly apologize for that belief. As a liberal party operative for Yabloko in his 30s, he thought that anti-immigrant nationalism would revive a moribund democratic movement - he partly recanted that, too. As a would-be presidential candidate in his forties, he thought liberals needed to move to the left and embrace a form of welfare state. Many in Ukraine see him as a would-be Putin, and never forgave him for

initially thinking that Crimea should remain under Russian control - even though he condemned the war without ambiguity, and later called for all Ukrainian territories to be returned to Kyiv. Had he ever held power, would he have delivered on his core belief and promise of a democratic Russia? We will never know. There's no consolation prize in the fight against dictatorship. In a democracy, Navalny would probably have ended up a minister in a coalition government, or the mayor of a big city. He was a proud politician who was happy to tour his country, taking inspiration from American campaigns. But in a dictatorship, he could only win or be crushed. And he didn't win. For all his attempts, liberalism remains a minority faith in Russia. Offering liberal solutions to universally reviled corruption was not enough. His successors, the minority of Russians who found inspiration in him, will have to find something else. But Navalny has entered the history books, becoming the latest of a long line of men and women, from the Decembrists to Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, who fought so that Russia could be free.

In the shop window of a Russian publishing house in Paris, you can see the lead letters that were used to print The Gulag Archipelago 50 years ago. Solzhenitsyn had been just a writer facing a Soviet regime that seemed like it would last forever. If we take Russian propaganda at its word, Navalny was just a blogger. Without Putin, they say, there is no Russia. But in a sense, Solzhenitsyn's words did win in the end. Eventually the crimes and lies of the regime were just unbearable and the regime fell. Let's hope that Navalny's words will one day win too.

The Moscow Times

One man who stood up to a dictatorship

Richard Galant

IN the closing days of World War II, Soviet agents arrested artillery officer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for derisively calling dictator Joseph Stalin "the man with the mustache" in a letter to a friend. He would spend eight years in prisons and labor camps, an experience he channeled to the world through his novels about the USSR's Gulag, its vast apparatus of repression that silenced intellectuals and dissidents.

"You only have power over people as long as you don't take everything away from them," he wrote in "The First Circle," published in 1968. "But when you've robbed a man of everything he's no longer in your power - he's free again." By that standard, Alexey Navalny died a spiritually free man, even though he was imprisoned in IK-3, a prison colony above the Arctic Circle, which according to the Moscow Times, "was founded in 1961 on the site of a former Soviet gulag forced labor camp."

The most prominent of Russian President Vladimir Putin's critics, Navalny showed remarkable courage in 2021, when he opted to return to his country from Germany after recovering from a poisoning that he and others attributed to Russian security forces, who denied responsibility. He was detained, prosecuted and imprisoned, but Navalny's persistence in calling out corruption and speaking fearlessly won him support around the world, even as Putin clamped down on dissent amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. "In his courageous and too short life," wrote Russia scholar Daniel Treisman, "Navalny became a symbol of hope for the younger generations of his compatriots. Understated, witty, often self-mocking, he had the style and presence to inspire a broad cross-section of followers." "His team's drone videos of the pleasure palaces of Kremlin insiders made it impossible for anyone to deny the accusations of corruption at the regime's core. (Except, that is, for Kremlin spokesmen, who dismissed Navalny's claims as "propaganda rants" and "a bunch of nonsense.") Navalny led mass protests against corruption on multiple occasions.

"He never gave up on the prospect of what he called 'the beautiful Russia of the future,'" Treisman noted. "For a beautiful Russia of the future" to emerge in coming years, Putin must lose the war he started. Navalny understood this. "Navalny's death represents the extinguishing of all hope for Russia's turnaround," wrote Sasha Vasilyuk. "When I met him in 2012, some Russians believed in their country's potential to choose an alternative path to the autocracy offered by Putin. That sense has been gone for a while. And yet, throughout the country Friday, some brave people laid flowers despite the fear of arrest. That speaks of Navalny's power to inspire small acts of courage, even if they won't bring any real change in the face of overriding fear," she added. "We don't yet know the exact details of jailed Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny's death, as reported Friday by the Russian prison service - and we may never find the precise truth," wrote Peter Bergen. But "what better way to communicate that the Russian opposition is effectively dead, than by silencing its most prominent leader, Navalny, who is as much a well-known dissident in the West as physicist Andrei Sakharov and author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn were during the Soviet era."

Putin famously grieved the collapse of the Soviet regime and seems to be styling his own reign along the lines of Stalin's, who "ruled with an iron fist" Bergen noted. "After all, Putin has essentially fixed the Russian constitution so he can continue seeking election as the country's leader until 2036." President Joe Biden blamed Putin for Navalny's death and expressed outrage that House Republican leaders launched the chamber on a nearly two-week vacation without passing Ukraine aid approved by the Senate. Former President Donald Trump, who opposes more aid to Ukraine, said last weekend that he wouldn't abide by NATO's mutual-defense obligations for countries that fail to spend enough on their militaries. What if Russia attacks such a country? "No, I would not

protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want." At a time when he is battling an array of prosecutors and plaintiffs in New York, Washington and Georgia, Trump is running a campaign focused on loyalty to him as a strongman leader, choosing to express more affinity for authoritarians like Putin than for freedom fighters.

Former US Defense Secretary James Mattis called NATO the "most successful and powerful military alliance in modern history," Peter Bergen noted. "Why a newly elected Trump would choose to try to undercut such a successful alliance or even break it up is a confounding mystery." With the Super Bowl on the line and his team just short of a first down, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes ran up the middle for a pivotal 19-yard gain in overtime last Sunday. It was just one of the clutch plays that enabled the Chiefs to nab yet another Super Bowl victory and further talk of a football dynasty, thanks to coach Andy Reid's strategic coaching prowess and Mahomes's steady and methodical ability to move the ball down the field," noted Amy Bass. Two days later on a different field, New York Democrat Tom Suozzi seized the political middle, flipping the New York seat formerly held by ousted Rep. George Santos.

"This race was fought amidst a closely divided electorate, much like our whole country," Suozzi told cheering supporters. "This race was centered on immigration and the economy, much like the issues all across our country. We won this race. We, you, won this race because we addressed the issues and we found a way to bind our divisions." While the party primaries and partisan media lavish attention on the extreme voices, the middle is where the votes are. Forty-one percent of Americans consider themselves independents, a far larger slice of the electorate than either the Democrats or Republicans can command. Suozzi didn't hesitate to dissociate himself from Biden and, as SE Cuff pointed out, to criticize, "the progressive wing of his party, which he believes isn't getting it when it comes to issues that are high priorities for many voters."

"That includes immigration, crime, and the economy, three issues about which Democrats have at times painted a far rosier picture than many voters are feeling." Suozzi began his political career as mayor of the small city of Glen Cove, on Long Island's north shore. It was a town with a large working-class population and many immigrants. His father and his uncle were among Suozzi's predecessors as mayor, and his cousin would later be elected to that post, practicing a form of politics that was more about family than ideology. "Democrats don't need to worry they can't win in this environment," wrote Max Burns, a Democratic strategist. "It likely didn't hurt that the Republicans in power now have been making headlines for infighting, gridlock and dysfunction."

The Democrats' victory in the special election came as welcome relief to a party that had been thrown off kilter by special counsel Robert Hur's report on Biden's handling of classified documents. Norm Eisen, Richard Painter and Joshua Kolb took "exception to comments in Hur's report that gratuitously attack Biden's age and memory beyond what is necessary in our view for a prosecutorial assessment. In what has already become the most quoted line in the report, Hur characterized Biden as 'a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.'" That statement and others like it contravene longstanding Justice Department principles about what prosecutors can and should say publicly when they decide not to bring charges. Hur showed terrible judgment in making these comments, which will only exacerbate the political firestorm around Biden's age." Days after a woman fired an AR-15 in Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, shots rang out at the end of a joyous rally celebrating the Super Bowl champions in Kansas City, killing one and injuring more than 20 people.

"To live in America is to seek out moments of celebration and community

while balancing the inner fear that a horrifying act of gun violence could occur at any time - on a parade route, at a July Fourth celebration, or on a completely ordinary day at a school filled with high school students," wrote Mark Dent. "Nothing is unthinkable anymore when it comes to gun violence in this country." In Kansas City, Dent added, the Chiefs are seen as "an equalizer, a conversation topic that bridges divides of politics, class and race. The team also provided a respite, a refuge from the cares of daily life - like crime and gun violence." "Going forward and perhaps forever after, the boundless joy (Kansas Citians) felt will be tempered by a twinge of fear, as they recall the shock and violence of this saddest and most tragic Super Bowl celebration." Trying to follow the blizzard of legal moves in the civil and criminal cases involving Donald Trump is an epic challenge. In the space of just five days, the former president: Asked the Supreme Court to pause an appeal court's ruling rejecting his claim of absolute immunity from criminal charges in the federal election interference case. Learned that he will stand trial in his New York "hush-money" criminal case in March. Saw the prosecutor in his Georgia election interference case take the stand to rebut charges of impropriety in her relationship with a special prosecutor she hired to assist with the sprawling case.

"Willis and Wade should recuse themselves because these controversies and even the appearance of corruption simply cannot be allowed to reach the jury and infect the trial." Rajae Batniji is a physician, entrepreneur and political scientist who was born in Gaza and now lives in San Francisco. He chose to be among those meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, unlike some other Palestinian Americans who boycotted the meeting in protest of US policy. Batniji says 65 of his relatives were killed in the past four months in the Israel-Hamas war and others are homeless. In a piece addressed to Blinken, he wrote, "I ask you to use your power, which can stop the killing of our families, to call for an immediate ceasefire and to stop sending weapons to Israel. You and the president may be the only two people with the power to make this stop." Frida Ghitis observed that Hamas' October 7 terrorist attack on Israel created "unwinnable moral dilemmas ... By launching a brutal attack on Israel, committing large scale sexual violence, and taking hundreds of hostages, it ensured that Israel would counteract with overwhelming force. By embedding itself in the population, it guaranteed that Israel's response would bring enormous suffering to Palestinians, knowing that Israel would take the blame and Hamas's support would surge, particularly in the West Bank, where Fatah, its Palestinian rival, dominates." "The crux of the matter remains how to make Hamas relinquish power in Gaza. If Hamas leaders leave, surrender, or lay down their arms, the war could end."

In his much-anticipated return to "The Daily Show" Monday, Jon Stewart skewered Trump and Biden over the age issue, wrote Bill Carter. But the host didn't spare himself. "The mutual assured destruction of the candidates over their age focus, which Stewart defended as totally fair because voters have the right to question the acuity of candidates, reached a high point when he stressed that these two men are by far the oldest people ever to run for president, 'breaking, by only four years, the record that they set!'" As a visual exclamation point, Stewart brought the camera in tight, pointing to his own more-lined face, gray hair and beard, saying, 'Look at me: Look what time hath wrought.' He noted that he is about 20 years younger than the two candidates and they could only wish to look only as old as he does. (He's 61.)" "Stewart was greeted by a wildly enthusiastic standing ovation from the studio audience, which looked younger than most late-night audiences, one reason perhaps for the heavy commercial load and extra length, coming in at about 50 minutes rather than 30. The show was a big draw for advertiser-coveted younger viewers during Stewart's previous run."

CNN

Lebanon's very existence imperilled by this escalating war of egos

INTENSIFYING regional conflict is being fueled by a raging war of words as extremist Israeli leaders relentlessly beat the drums of war against Lebanon. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant pledged to intensify operations against Hezbollah, warning that Israel could attack to a depth of 50 kilometers "toward Beirut and anywhere else."

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah reciprocated with a threat that Hezbollah's "precision missiles" could target any location from Kiryat Shmona in the north to Eilat in the south. Nasrallah further asserted: "The enemy will pay the price of spilling blood with their own blood," and pledged to "escalate resistance activity at the battlefield."

At last week's Munich Security Conference, Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz warned: "If a diplomatic solution is not found, Israel will be forced to act to remove Hezbollah from the border" to return 70,000 displaced Israelis to their homes. "In such a case, Lebanon will also pay a heavy price," he said. He failed to mention that nearly 100,000 Lebanese have also been displaced by the conflict, a number that will soar in the event of a full Israeli invasion. Lebanon's already bankrupt economy has suffered further damage estimated at \$1.6 billion.

A newspaper poll suggested that 71 percent of Israelis want a major military operation against Lebanon. A politically mortally wounded Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may find it difficult to resist such pressures as an illusory route to rebuilding his popularity, even though it would be massively destructive for both sides, given Hezbollah's huge missile arsenals and Israel's access to unlimited US weaponry.

The rapid trajectory of this escalation illustrates how such retaliatory cycles can be self feeding: Israel in recent days struck Nabatieh and Al-Sawana, resulting in numerous Iranian casualties, and Hezbollah retaliated by firing dozens of rockets into northern Israel. Over 170 Hezbollah fighters are among the 200 Lebanese deaths so far.

This trajectory is further reinforced by Israel's remorseless airstrikes on Iran's proxy assets in Syria, including the assassination of Republican Guard leadership figures. Hezbollah-aligned paramilitaries have been strengthening their presence in southwest Syria with the objective of ensuring that Israel would be fighting on a widened northern front in the event of conflict fully erupting.

In the view of Israeli military hawks, the encircling chain of Iranian proxies linking Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Sanaa makes it necessary for Israel to strike a blow against this amassed "resistance" before it becomes all prevailing. Indeed, Israel's direct war with Tehran appears to have already begun, with a series of devastating sabotage attacks against gas infrastructure across Iran. Israel has in the past used such tactics against Iranian military and nuclear sites. Immediately after Oct. 7, only vigorous US diplomatic intervention deterred a vengeance-thirsty Netanyahu from striking an immediate and massive blow against Hezbollah. With the recent deterioration in relations between the prime minister and US President Joe Biden, America's ability and will to moderate Israeli military policy is diminished. Despite supposedly working to end the conflict, the US is preparing to send large volumes of additional

Baria Alamuddin

weaponry to Israel.

French and US initiatives for defusing the crisis are premised upon implementation of UN Resolution 1701, i.e. Hezbollah withdrawal to behind the Litani River. This is a dim prospect in the current circumstances, unless Hezbollah is offered political concessions, which would be destabilizing for Lebanon; or if Israel militarily intervened to enforce Hezbollah's withdrawal, which would result in a bloodbath.

The Gaza carnage has aroused global anger, but war in Lebanon would be an entirely different prospect: first, because it would enmesh the US and Western and Arab states further into the conflict; but also because of the vast Lebanese global diaspora, including highly influential figures. Lebanese citizens of the Shiite-majority rural south take enormous pride in building and establishing their homes, so the massive destruction of 2006 and the bombardment of recent weeks have been particularly traumatic. Likewise, the massive disturbances to agriculture due to shelling, phosphorous bombs and cluster munitions, as well the displacement of laborers, have taken their toll. Citizens who've already lost so much fear that far worse is yet to come.

With Netanyahu basing his political choices on gambits for remaining in power; Biden premising his Gaza policies on requirements for re-election; Nasrallah seeking to match Israel's bellicose language blow for blow; and Russian President Vladimir Putin perpetuating his own conflict in order to avoid having to lose face - international politics has become a grudge match of posturing, muscle-flexing egos and warmongering rhetoric. Lebanon, Israel, Gaza

Cultural, tourism integration via museum craze

Hui Ming

CULTURE is the soul of tourism. Drawing on the successful experiences of the countries and cities that attract the highest number of tourists, tapping into various cultural resources such as museums, industrial and intangible cultural heritages, theater performances, and more to attract more visitors is an important way of upgrading China's cultural tourism industry.

Thanks to mobile internet and digital cultural technology, the integration of the culture and tourism industries has been progressing at a fast pace. China has more than 5,000 cultural relic protection and exhibition institutions, with about 760,000 immovable cultural relics nationwide and 108 million movable cultural relics in national museums.

Protecting these cultural relics is an extremely arduous task. And since the strict security needed to protect these relics prevents many from viewing them, China's cultural relic protection departments have built digital museums which have 3D digital archiving and cloud exhibitions, allowing not only people to admire them but also developing a new mode of cultural heritage dissemination. This has enabled the preservation of cultural relics and heritage. The digitalization of cultural resources and the construction of digital museums facilitate the creative transfor-

mation of traditional Chinese culture and development of the tourism and digital cultural industries. A large number of digital presentation projects of cultural relics have been developed, such as the "Digital Palace Museum" and "Digital Hall of Treasures" by the Palace Museum (Forbidden City), the "Digital Dunhuang" and "Digital Cave of Scriptures" by the Dunhuang Academy, "Cloud Tour of the Great Wall" jointly developed by Tencent and other institutions, the "Tang Dynasty Palace Night Banquet" and the stunning underwater dance "Prayer" presented by the Henan Museum, as well as the "Zhou, Qin, Han, Tang" digital cultural spectrum course launched by the Shaanxi History Museum.

These projects have greatly stimulated people's love and interest in China's historical and cultural heritage. Museums across the country are using digital technology to exhibit various cultural relics and heritage online, arranging for professionals to conduct museum tours through livestreaming, providing virtual immersive museum experiences. The implementation of targeted policies has increased the public's interest in museums. The museum craze has five prominent manifestations. First, the public's enthusiasm for visiting museums has reached an unprecedented

level, with rapidly increasing visits. According to National Bureau of Statistics data, from 2012 to 2019, the number of museum visitors nationwide increased from about 560 million to 1.2 billion, with an average annual growth of 79.74 million. After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2023 museum visits in China saw an explosive growth. Last year, the National Museum alone recorded 6.76 million visitors, up 314 percent year-on-year. Second, the internet has become a main source of museum communication. According to the "2023 Museum Data Report" of Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), in 2023, the total number of museum-related video views on Douyin alone reached about 51.3 billion, equivalent to 66 times the annual number of visitors to museums nationwide.

Third, themed TV programs on cultural relics and museums continue to be popular. They innovatively use different methods to enhance the audience's perception and depth of understanding of China's culture. Fourth, museum cultural and creative products and intangible cultural heritage products continue to sell well, and continue to attract visitors to museums and boost the sales of cultural and creative products. And fifth, museums have helped young students to

study, better understand history, learn about cultural dissemination, and enhance their aesthetic knowledge. The museum craze in China is the result of various factors, including the overall improvement in the level of museum services and people's quest for a better life. But the core factor that has ignited the museum craze is undoubtedly the arrival of the digital culture era. Digital technology has transformed the existence of museums, allowing traditional museums, which were previously confined to physical spaces, to have digital counterparts online. The integration of culture and tourism has thus entered a new digital stage, with an unprecedented increase in its depth and breadth.

Behind the museum craze is also the significant enhancement of the historical and cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. The digital integration of culture and tourism continues to create new aesthetic forms of modern Chinese civilization, consolidating the common consciousness of the Chinese nation among the people and enhancing the public's sense of cultural attainment and happiness. The status of digital museums will be further elevated in the national digital culture strategy. And the integration of culture and tourism led by digital culture will propel China toward a new height of digital civilization.

Arab News



PSX witnesses bullish trend, gains 586 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bullish trend on Monday, gaining 586.79 points, a positive change of 0.98 percent, closing at 60,459.75 points against 59,872.96 points the previous trading day.

A total of 261,799,826 shares valuing Rs 9.907 billion were traded during the day as compared to 314,247,768 shares valuing Rs12.243 billion the last day.

Some 330 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 170 of them recorded gains and

139 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 21 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were PIAC(A) with 21,406,500 shares at Rs 11.06 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 20,034,698 shares at Rs 1.23 per share, and Pak Refinery with 15,164,705 shares at Rs 25.33 per share.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 373.35 per share price, closing at Rs 9,739.00, whereas the runner-up was Indus Motor

Company Limited with a Rs 51.28 rise in its per share price to Rs 1,501.94.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 289.89 per share closing at Rs 7,910.11, followed by Pakistan Engineering Company Limited with Rs 38.25 decline to close at Rs 471.75.

Gold rates increase by Rs 1,100 per tola to Rs 214,300

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 1,100 and was sold at Rs 214,300 on Monday compared to its sale at Rs

213,200 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 943 to Rs 183,728 from Rs 182,785 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs 168,417 from Rs 167,553, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained stagnant at Rs 2,550 and Rs 2,186.21 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$8 to \$2,042 from \$2,034, the Association reported.

Graana.com and Agency21 announces strategic partnership



F.P. Report

LAHORE: Graana.com, has entered into a strategic partnership with Faisal Platinum Builders & Developers, securing exclusive marketing rights for the launch of Sivna Vital Homes, while Agency21 International was granted exclusive sales rights.

Nestled in the prime locality of A block in Etihad Town Phase II, Lahore, Sivna Vital Homes are 5 Marla constructed villas offering a unique amalgam of quality and affordability to the residents of Lahore.

The signing event, held at the Graana Regional office in Lahore, saw the presence of industry stalwarts including Bilawal Khokhar and Sheikh ShujaUllah Khan. The leadership teams of central regions from Graana.com and Agency21 International were also present at the occasion.

Farhan Javed, Group Director at Graana.com, in his remarks on the partnership, stated, "We are thrilled to embark on this journey with Faisal Platinum Builders & Developers. Sivna Vital Homes is not just a project;

it's a commitment towards enabling home ownership in Pakistani families in a community that promises not only a prestigious lifestyle but also a secure and enriching living environment."

Sharjeel A. Ehmer, Group Director at Agency21, remarked, "This collaboration with Faisal Platinum Builders & Developers marks a milestone in our mission to bring innovative and sustainable housing solutions to Lahore. Sivna Vital Homes is set to become a benchmark for luxury and affordability in Lahore."

Bilawal Khokhar, Sponsor, Etihad Town Phase II, shared his vision for the project, saying, "Sivna Vital Homes represents our dedication to providing high-quality, accessible housing options. We are committed to empowering families by offering them the opportunity to own a home that ensures a sense of belonging and security in one of Lahore's most desirable locations."

The COO of Etihad Real Estate Division, Mr. Sheikh ShujaUllah Khan highlighted the Etihad Group's broad spectrum of achievements, "Our diversified ventures across engineering, production, hospitality, and energy sectors have positioned us as a leader in Pakistan's business landscape. Sivna Vital Homes solidifies our commitment to excellence and innovation in the real estate sector."

The partnership between Graana.com, Agency21 International, and Faisal Platinum Builders & Developers for Sivna Vital Homes is a landmark initiative aimed at setting new standards in residential living, promising a blend of luxury, convenience, and security that will significantly enhance the quality of life for its residents.

WIBCON 2024 empowers women to 'Rise in Sync'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The 14th Annual Women in Business & Leadership Conference (WIBCON x RISing 2024), hosted by Pakistan Society for Training and Development (PSTD), brought together a diverse group of professionals on February 20th at the Serena Hotel Islamabad. With the theme "Rise in Sync - Collective Empowerment," the conference provided a platform for discussing pressing issues faced by women at work and beyond, offering practical solutions for their success. Red Team designed the event.

Engaging Sessions and Insights:

Emcee Xenab Ansari kicked off the event, followed by an opening keynote by Masarrat Mishbah, CEO of Depilex Group and founder of the Smile Again Foundation. A panel discussion fea-

turing corporate champions, Zainab Khan (CEO & Lead Consultant, Zeeshan Hasib Baig (Country GM, Syngenta), Saima Kamila Khan (Chief Legal Officer, Jazz), Shakeel Ahmad (Sales Director, Nestle) & Mujeeb Zahur (MD, S&P Global) shed light on strategies to achieve inclusivity and bringing transformational change.

Renowned speakers including Nigar Nazar (First Female Cartoonist of the Muslim World), Sobia Amin (Head of B2B Digital Transformation Telenor), Daniela Dragoulis (Intercultural Trainer and Consultant, cultural Pathways), Tahira Amjad (Female sales technical Officer, Syngenta Group), Beenish Fatima (SP Officer), Usman Nazir (Director Business Systems & Business Analysis, S&P Global), Maria Saleem (General Manager, Fatima

Group) shared their expertise through talks and engaging breakout DEI sessions.

Faiza Imtiaz (Head of Talent, Culture & Inclusion, BAT Pakistan) led a valuable Dare to Dream Workshop along with the following mentors: Nida Tanoli (Group VP People & Organization Expertise, PTCL | Ufone), Farah Sheikh (Head Talent, Learning and Culture, Jazz), Sonia Farooq (CHRO, U Microfinance Bank), Rizwana Halepoto (Head of HR & Admin, Engro Vopak Terminal Limited), Nausheen Akhtar (Head of OD & Talent Management), Fauzia Ahmad (CHRO, Mari Petroleum Company Ltd.), Mariam Qasim (Director/Vice President Academics & International Partnerships, IVY International College, Saira Gabol (Chief Human Resources, Khushaali

Bank), Dr. Maha Syed (Chief Executive Officer, Blanchard Pakistan®) and Qasim Hassan (Head of HR, Engro Enfrashare).

Shireen Naqvi (Senior Associate, Carnelian) conducted an amazing workshop on building communities.

Sponsors Drive Success: WIBCON's success was made possible by title sponsor Fatima Group, gold sponsor Oil and Gas Development Company, tea sponsor Tapal Tea Pvt Ltd., media partner Dawn Media Group, beverage and snack sponsor Pepsico and support sponsors Beaconhouse School System, Descon, Foodpanda, S&P Global and Syngenta.

Registration Open for Lahore: Interested individuals can register for the upcoming WIBCON conference in Lahore until February 27th, 2024. Visit marketing@pstd.com.pk for more information.



SARGODHA: A vendor selling fishes at Club Road.

US dollar thrashes Pak Rupee

ISLAMABAD (INP): The United States dollar on Monday gained record 42 paisas against the Pakistani Rupee and reached Rs279.80 amid the political uncertainty over the government formation.

The PSX-100 index also fell by 455 points as investors struggled to find a trust in investing amid the dwindling state of affairs on the upcoming governments in Center and in Punjab and Balochistan.

Last year in August, for the first time in Pakistan's history, the country's currency plummeted in value to more than 300 rupees against the US dollar.

The devaluation of local unit leads to raising fears that everyday items could get more expensive as consumers continue to face back-breaking inflation.

Pakistan has to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation for the last tranche of the loan program.

In January, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) board has approved a roughly \$700 million loan for Pakistan under a \$3 billion bailout, the fund and the finance ministry said on Thursday.

The IMF's completion of its first review of the programme and the board's decision brings the total disbursements under the Standby Arrangement (SBA) to about \$1.9 billion, the fund said.

"There are now tentative signs of activity picking-up and external pressures easing," said in a statement Antoinette Sayeh, a deputy managing director at the fund.

POL import bill shrinks by 12.06%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall petroleum group contracted by 12.06 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-January (2023-24) stood at \$ 9,332.322 million against the imports of \$ 10,611.727 million during the same period of last year.

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 25.94 percent, from \$ 4,889.799 million last year to \$ 3,621.420 million during the period under review year whereas petroleum crude dipped by 3.96 percent from \$ 3,100.481 million to \$ 2,977.671 million.

However, the imports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) increased by 4.82 percent from \$ 2,192.489 million last year to \$ 2,298.144 million while the import of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) went up by 1.47 per cent in the first seven months and stood at \$434.991 million as compared to \$428.687 in the corresponding period in 2022-23.

Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the petroleum group imports witnessed an increase of 0.03 percent during the month of January 2024 as compared to the same month of last year, from \$ 1,326.205 million to \$1,326.540 million.

CAD declines by 71% to \$1.09b: SBP

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Current Account Deficit (CAD) has significantly slid down by 71.2 percent to \$1.093 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year as compared to the deficit of \$3.796 billion during the same period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported Monday.

"Current account balance (CAB) showed a deficit of \$269 million in Jan 2024. Cumulatively, CAB improved significantly to a deficit of \$1.1 billion in Jul-Jan FY24 compared

to \$ 3.8 billion in Jul-Jan FY23," SBP posted on the social media website X (formerly Twitter).

On a year-on-year basis, the CAD witnessed a deficit of \$269 million in January 2024 compared to a deficit of \$167 million in January 2023.

According to the latest SBP figures, the merchandise trade deficit during July-January (2023-24) was recorded at \$11,783 million as compared to the deficit of \$17,032 million in July-January (2022-23).

Likewise, the services' trade deficit was recorded at \$1,720 million during FY2023-24 compared to the deficit of \$233 million during the corresponding period of last year.

The overall trade deficit in goods and services was recorded at \$13,503 million during the current fiscal year compared to the deficit of \$17,264 million during last year.

Meanwhile, the balance on primary income stood at negative 4,402 million against \$3,153 million last year, according to the SBP data.

Ambassador Tirmizi inaugurates Pak Pavilion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan to United Arab Emirates Faisal Niaz Tirmizi Monday inaugurated the Pakistan Pavilion at the World Trade Center Dubai.

On this occasion, he visited various stalls and had detailed discussions with the Pakistani exhibitors.

According to the Press Counselor of Pakistan in Dubai, the Pakistani ambassador to the UAE also spoke to media after inaugurating and visiting the pavilion set up by the Trade Development Auth-

ority of Pakistan (TDAP).

Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi said that almost a hundred Pakistani companies associated with the food industry have gathered here, which is a welcome sign.

He said that Pakistan's exports especially rice and meat have increased significantly compared to last year.

Expressing pleasure over his interaction with the organizers and representatives of TDAP, he said that Pakistan is the third largest country in terms of milk

production in the world adding that Pakistan, for the first time has entered the market of Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia.

He said that he was very happy to see that Pakistani dairy producers are participating in Gulfood in large numbers.

The ambassador said Pakistan's economic development was directly linked to the country's exports. He said Pakistani businessmen and growers are backbone of the country's economy and their focus should be on increasing exports.

Korean company acquires shares in hydro power entity

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved a merger that will see a Korean company investing in Pakistan's hydropower sector.

The transaction involves Korea-based M/s. DL E&C Co. Ltd (Acquirer) acquiring shares in Pakistani company M/s Mira Power Limited (MPL), which operates the 102 MW Gulpur hydropower plant, from M/s. DL Holdings Co. Ltd (Seller).

The Acquirer is a Korean registered company, which mainly operates as a construction company, and also provides engineering, pro-

curement, and construction solutions in South Korea and internationally. On the other hand, MPL is a public limited company (Unlisted) existing under the laws of Pakistan.

MPL is a subsidiary of Korea Energy (KOEN), a South Korean based electricity generating company. MPL has been successfully generating power since 2020 in Pakistan via the 102 MW Gulpur hydropower plant located in Kotli district, Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

MPL had submitted a pre-merger application to the CCP pursuant to Section 11 of the Competition Act, 2010. Both the

Acquirer and Seller entered into a Share Purchase Agreement for the sale of shares back in July 2023.

In its competition assessment, CCP determined that MPL's estimated share in the market is less than 1%, and this transfer of ownership will not result in any modification of the MPL's presence in the market. The proposed transaction will not lead to the dominance of the Acquirer in the relevant market post-transaction, and therefore, the merger was authorized. Moreover, it is a significant vote of confidence of international investors' appetite for Power Sector in Pakistan.

MoU signed to make Pakistan food self-sufficient

ISLAMABAD (APP): MoU on Monday signed between Green Corporate Initiative and Organic Pakistan to Revolutionize Agriculture to ensure food sovereignty and environmental sustainability in Pakistan.

The Green Corporate Initiative (GCI) and Organic Pakistan (OP) have officially inked MoU to spearhead a transformative journey towards smart and sustainable agriculture,

environmental conservation, and urban farming practices to make Pakistan food self-sufficient.

The agreement signed for ensuring Pakistan to move from food import and dependency to a self-sufficient food exporting nation.

The partnership is also aimed to improve the status of the farmers by bringing them into the mainstream economic development, particularly the agriculture policy debate.

The MoU, signed at the Green Corporate Initiative Pvt. Limited's head office, establishes a robust framework for collaboration between Green Corporate Initiative and Organic Pakistan, with a shared vision to make Pakistan food self-sufficient.

Through strategic partnerships, knowledge exchange, and innovation-

centric initiatives, both organizations aim to foster resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity within the agricultural sector.

Commenting on the MoU, Shahid Nazeer, Chief Executive Officer, Corporate Green Initiative said, "This partnership marks a significant milestone in our collective efforts to drive smart sustainable development and environmental stewardship in Pakistan. By combining our expertise, resources, and networks, we are poised to create lasting impact and empower communities across the country."

Nadeem Iqbal, Chief Executive Officer, Organic Pakistan, said, "We are excited to embark on this journey of collaboration with the Green Corporate Initiative. Together, we aim to harness the transformative power of agriculture to

address pressing challenges and build a more resilient and prosperous future for Pakistan. Our ultimate aim is to empower "the Kisaan of Pakistan, and make him/her the custodian of Pakistan's prosperity."

Green Corporate Initiative (GCI) is a strategic initiative, dedicated to ensuring food security.

Founded on the principles of environmental stewardship and social responsibility, GCI leverages its expertise and resources to address pressing challenges in agriculture, environmental conservation, and community empowerment. With a focus on Pakistan's food self-sufficiency.

Organic Pakistan is a pioneering organization committed to advancing sustainable solutions in Agriculture, Food, Health, and Environmental Security.

Name correction

In my educational documents my father name is written MUHAMMAD AZAM KHAN, while in actual it is MUHAMMAD AZAM KHAN KHAT-TAK. Kindly correct my father's name in all of my Secondary and Intermediate educational documents.



In brief

PSL security reviewed

MULTAN (APP): The security for the ongoing mega event of the Pakistan Super League ninth season was reviewed and the decision was made to make more arrangements for ensuring foolproof security during the matches. In a meeting held here on Monday which was chaired by the City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali. It was decided in the meeting that police with other law enforcement departments would ensure foolproof security arrangements during the PSL and the monitoring of the routes would be through the latest technology and drones. SSP Operations Arsalan Zahid, SSP Investigations Rana Muhammad Ashraf, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Jalil Imran Ghalzai and other concerned officers also attended the meeting.

Cholistan desert rally

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP) in collaboration with Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) will organize the Cholistan Desert Rally 2024 from Tuesday. Talking to APP, a PTDC official said that a larger number of national and international drivers will participate in the rally to experience the thrill and adventure of the desert. He said the Cholistan Desert Rally 2024 is a cultural program aimed to highlight the tourism potential of southern Punjab and attract international participants for the upcoming rally. The Cholistan Desert Rally is an annual event organized by TDCP in the Cholistan Desert of Bahawalpur Division, he added. The official said the rally covers a distance of over 500 kilometers and features various categories of vehicles and drivers. The rally also showcases the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of the region, which is home to historical forts, temples, shrines, and wildlife. The Cholistan Desert Rally is scheduled to take place from February 20-25, he concluded.

Merlier wins opening stage of UAE Tour

ABU DHABI (AFP): Soudal-Quick Step rider Tim Merlier burst from the middle of the bunch to storm past his rivals and win stage 1 on the UAE Tour at Liwa on Monday. The finale was marred by a high-speed fall with around 20 riders hitting the tarmac hard and three-quarters of the peloton caught behind it. The fall was caused by a shoulder barge with some riders taken away by ambulance. Merlier had predicted a fight for the opening stage due to the quality of the field. "It's my first win of the season so I'm very happy," said the 31-year-old who has previously won stages at the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France. "I made the decision to ride round from the side because I was blocked. I saw (Fernando) Gaviria (Team UAE) go. I could see the finish line so I went for it," said the broadly smiling Belgian at the finish line. Contrary to the weather forecast, there were no cross winds in the finale and very little sand on the road during the 141km opening run through the dunes. Of the field of top sprinters at the seven-stage event, which includes four flat stages, two climbs and one time trial, British veteran Mark Cavendish and Dutch fast-man Dylan Groenewegen were caught behind the fall while Elia Viviani fell hard.

Nafay-inspired Gladiators stun holders Qalandars in high-scoring encounter



LAHORE: Jason Roy slices one away, Lahore Qalandars vs Quetta Gladiators PSL 2024.

Khawaja Junaid urges Maryam to prioritize hockey

LAHORE (APP): Hockey Olympian Khawaja Junaid has urged the Chief Minister Punjab designate Maryam Nawaz to put sports and revival of national sport hockey on top of her agenda when she takes oath of the office of the Chief Minister Punjab.

Talking to APP at the National Hockey Stadium here on Monday, he said the national sport hockey has suffered due to neglect during the past three decades and it is time that the political leadership of the country plays its active role in the revival of hockey in the country.

Hockey Olympian Khawaja Junaid who runs a hockey academy for children aged 7 and above in collaboration with the Punjab Sports Board (PSB)

and Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy (KJHA) has invited Dutch hockey club OHC Bully to play three matches against HEC Youth team.

"Maryam Nawaz leads the youth and is a visionary politician. It is a good omen that a woman will take assume the seat of Chief Minister in Punjab," Khawaja said, adding that national sport should be on the top of her agenda for the next five years.

He invited the designate Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz to be among the youth at the National Hockey Stadium on February 21 (Wednesday) even before assuming power. He called upon the Chief Organizer Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) to watch the match between visiting Dutch

OHC Bully and the HEC Youth team and meet the budding local hockey stars and international players.

About the visit of a European hockey club after a lapse of 21 years, Khawaja Junaid paid rich tribute to Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, ambassador of the Netherlands embassy in Pakistan Ms. Henny Fokel de Vries for their support in making this visit of a European hockey club possible.

He expressed the hope that visit of the Dutch hockey club will enhance soft image of the country abroad and serve as a gateway for the other hockey teams to visit Pakistan.

Mathews gives Sri Lanka unassailable Afghanistan T20 series lead

DAMBULLA (AFP): All-rounder Angelo Mathews started with a quickfire 42 and two wickets as Sri Lanka secured the three match T20 series against Afghanistan by winning the second match by 72 runs on Monday.

Sri Lanka wrapped up the series with a game to spare in front of a capacity crowd at Dambulla on Monday.

"It is all about the mind," Afghanistan's skipper Ibrahim Zadran said after the match. "If you do not execute your plans, you cannot win." Former skipper Mathews was doubtful for the game in the afternoon with tightness in the hamstring, but the 36-year-old smashed an unbeaten 42 off 22 balls with four sixes and two fours.

He was particularly harsh on Azmatullah Omarzai, hitting him for three consecutive sixes in the penultimate over. "Whatever the team wants me to do, I am willing to adapt myself according to the situation," Mathews said.

His big hitting gave much needed momentum, and Sri Lanka finished on 187 for six in 20 overs, with 34 runs coming in the last two overs.

"Credit to the batters' Mathews was involved in a 66-run partnership for the sixth wicket with Sadeera Samarawickrama, who posted the only half-century in the game.

Samarawickrama's 51, which came in 42 balls with five fours, is his career best score in this format.

"Credit goes to the batters," captain Wanindu Hasaranga said. "They batted really well," he added, giving credit to Mathews and Samarawickrama who "finished well to get to a big score". Mathews then took the new ball and dismissed the openers in his first two overs to put the Afghans on the back foot.

After Maheesh Theekshana trapped Rahmanullah Gurbaz leg before wicket, Binura Fernando claimed two wickets in an over to reduce Afghanistan to 31 for five inside five overs.

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Khawaja Nafay scored an unbeaten half-century to spearhead Quetta Gladiators to a five-wicket victory over defending champions Lahore Qalandars in the fourth match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 here on Monday.

Set to chase 188, the Gladiators amassed the target on the first delivery of the final over when their star batter Nafay struck Zaman Khan for a boundary.

Earlier, the in-form opening pair of Saud Shakeel and Jason Roy once again gave the Gladiators a flying start, adding 69 runs for the first wicket in less than seven overs. But both the openers fell in the span of just three deliveries, allowing the hosts to force a comeback.

Saud struck seven boundaries and a six on his way to a 23-ball 40 while Roy scored 24 off 19 deliveries.

Coming out to bat at No.3, Khawaja Nafay, knitted crucial stands with skipper Rilee Rossouw (18), Sarfaraz Ahmed (11) and Sherfane Rutherford (14), making sure that the Gladiators do not lose momentum by hitting boundaries at regular intervals. But with Rutherford's dismissal in the 17th over, the home side attempted to force a late comeback, bowling tight lengths and making it tough for the batters to score freely.

Nafay, however, displayed nerves of steel and batted sensibly to guide the 2019 champions over the line in the final over after a sensational partnership with

Akeal Hosein, who scored an unbeaten run-a-ball nine.

Khawaja Nafay top-scored for the Gladiators with his maiden PSL half-century, scoring 60 not out off just 31 deliveries, hitting four boundaries and three sixes. For the Qalandars, Shaheen, Haris Rauf, Sikandar Raza, Salman Fayyaz and Zaman Khan struck out a batter apiece.

Put into bat first, the Qalandars managed to register a formidable total of 187/7 on the board despite a dismal start. The hosts suffered an early blow to their batting charge when Akeal Hosein dismissed Fakhar Zaman (6) on the first delivery of the third over with just nine runs on the board.

Rassie van der Dussen then joined forces with Farhan and launched recovery. The duo put together an anchoring 53 runs for the second wicket before Abrar Ahmed brought an end to van der Dussen's scratchy 15-run knock to end by cleaning him in the ninth over. Farhan then knitted a one-sided partnership with Abdullah Shafique and brought up his second consecutive PSL 9 half-century in the process.

He smashed six boundaries and three sixes on his way to a 43-ball 62 and finally walked back in the 13th over after falling victim to Mohammad Hasnain. The Qalandars sustained another blow to their innings, just two balls later, when Hosein returned to provide another breakthrough to the Gladiators by getting Shafique (11) caught behind.

Hodgson steps down as Crystal Palace manager



LONDON (Agencies): Roy Hodgson has stepped down as Crystal Palace boss so the club can "bring forward their plans to appoint a new manager". Hodgson, 76, was "taken ill" during training on Thursday amid reports he was to be sacked. The Eagles have lost 10 of their past 16 Premier League games and are 16th in the table, five points above the relegation zone. "This club is very special and means so much to me," said Hodgson.

Palace visit Everton, who are 18th in the Premier League, on Monday night, with Hodgson's assistants Paddy McCarthy and Ray Lewington in charge of the team. Former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Oliver Glasner, 49, is the strong favourite to replace Hodgson on a permanent basis.

"I have fully enjoyed my time here across six seasons, as it has given me the chance to work with top-class players and staff doing what I love every day," added Hodgson.

"However, I understand, given recent circumstances, it may be prudent at this time for the club to plan ahead, and therefore I have taken the decision to step aside so that the club can bring forward their plans for a new manager, as intended for this summer. "I am confident that the season will finish well and I wish the team every success in the weeks, months and seasons to come."

The club said Hodgson was now out of hospital and "doing well". "Roy has a special place in Crystal Palace history and this will never be forgotten," said chairman Steve Parish. "After four years in which he led the club to maintaining Premier League status season after season, he once again joined us nearly a year ago to steady the ship, and worked wonders. Quite simply, we owe our continued Premier League status to Roy. "I would like to thank Roy enormously for his service and wish him the very best for the future; it's fair to say Roy has the keys to Selhurst Park and will always be welcomed back." Hodgson was in his second stint in charge of Palace, having returned for the final 10 games of last season when he signed a short-term deal to take over from Patrick Vieira.

PCB to operate directly under PM Office: report

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The affairs of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have been transferred from Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) to Cabinet Division. According to a notification issued today, the cricketing body will now run directly under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and will no longer be answerable to the Ministry of IPC.

Furthermore, the notification stated that the IPC Secretary will not be a member of PCB's Board of Governors. The development came after Mohsin Naqvi was elected unopposed as Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman.

The elections were held at the National Cricket Academy, Lahore, where Punjab's caretaker CM Mohsin Naqvi was elected unopposed as the 37th chief of the PCB. Naqvi will serve as Pakistan Cricket Board chairman for three years. Following the resignation of Zaka Ashraf as PCB chairman, caretaker PM Anwaarul Haq Kakar appointed Shah Khawar as the election commissioner of the Cricket Board.

In January, after serving for at least seven months as PCB

Management Committee chairman Zaka Ashraf stepped down from his position. In a statement, Ashraf said he was working for the betterment of Pakistan cricket.

However, expressing disappointment over the working conditions, he said he was unable to work amid such circumstances. "It's not the prime minister's prerogative to nominate new chairman," he added.

Sports games held in Degree college larkana

LARKANA (APP): In connection with the 6th Sindh College Games Region Larkana under the supervision of Directorate Colleges Larkana Region and hosted by Government Boys Degree College Larkana in the Badminton Hall of Government Boys Degree College Larkana interesting inter-district Larkana Boys Badminton and Table Tennis competitions.

Where in the first quarter-final match of badminton, the team of district Jacobabad defeated the team of district Qambar by 2.0 and reached the semi-finals. In the first semi-final match, the team of district Larkana defeated the team of district Shikarpur by 2.1 and reached the final. In the second semi-final match, the team of district Jacobabad defeated the team of district Kandhkot by 2.0 and qualified for the final.

In the final match, the team of district Larkana defeated the team of district Jacobabad by 2.0 and won the title of the final. In the first quarter-final match of table tennis, the team of district Jacobabad defeated the team of district Qambar by 2.0 and reached the semi-finals. In the first semi-final match, the district Shikarpur team defeated the district Kandhkot team by 2.0 and reached the final.

In the second semi-final match, the team of district Jacobabad defeated the team of district Larkana by 2.1 and qualified for the final. In the final match, the district Shikarpur team defeated the district Jacobabad team by 2.0 and won the final title.

Sad Pacquiao accepts his Olympic dream is over



MANILA (AFP): A "saddened and disappointed" Manny Pacquiao conceded Monday his Olympic boxing dream was over after the ring great was denied a berth at this year's Paris games.

The International Olympic Committee rejected a special request for Pacquiao to take part, the Philippine Olympic Committee announced Sunday. Pacquiao, 45, who hung up his gloves in 2021 before an unsuccessful presidential run, said he respected the decision of the IOC, which has an

age limit of 40 for Olympic boxers.

"While I am very saddened and disappointed, I understand and accept the age-limit rules," said a statement from Pacquiao, who won world titles at eight different weights during a glittering professional ring career spanning more than a quarter of a century.

The Philippines last year asked the IOC for a "universality place" for Pacquiao, who has never boxed in the Olympics.

Universality places are usually awarded to athletes

from smaller countries who struggle to secure slots in the Olympics through normal qualification.

Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham Tolentino claimed Sunday the IOC decision would deprive the country of a "sure podium or first ever gold" in Olympic boxing.

Pacquiao said he will continue to support and cheer for Filipino athletes competing in the Olympics.

He also reminded his fans that despite his retirement, he intends "to bring pride and honour to my country inside the boxing ring in the near future".

A Pacquiao aide confirmed to reporters Monday that Pacquiao will fight Thai kickboxer Buakaw Banachamek in an April 20 exhibition match in Bangkok.

The match against Muay Thai great Buakaw will be fought under international boxing rules, the aide said.

Miami expects trophies from Messi's first full season in MLS

MIAMI (AFP): Lionel Messi and Inter Miami get the new Major League Soccer season under way on Wednesday with pressure on the Argentine star to deliver trophies for his club and more eyeballs on the league.

The World Cup winner joined Inter from Paris Saint Germain in mid-July, the biggest name ever to move to MLS and his signing caused a massive spurt in interest in American soccer.

The eight-times and current Ballon d'Or winner, made an instant impact, leading Miami to the Leagues Cup title, packing stadiums and massively increasing subscriptions to Apple TV's MLS Season Pass broadcast package.

But the excitement waned as the 36-year-old struggled to maintain his fitness in the face of a hectic schedule and Miami were unable to overcome their poor early season results and make the playoffs.

Then Inter's decision to under-

take a gruelling overseas pre-season tour backfired with Messi and the team booed in Hong Kong after the star sat out a high-profile friendly due to injury.

Poor performances added to the sense that money-spinning trips to El Salvador, Saudi Arabia and Japan had been a mis-step for a team looking to hit the ground running this season.

A long and busy season awaits for Messi and his teammates who as well as competing in MLS, have qualified for the regional CONCACAF Champions Cup.

Miami will also aim to defend their Leagues Cup title -- against Mexican as well as MLS opposition -- and all those challenges come in a summer which will include Argentina's bid for the Copa America in the USA.

Messi has been joined in Miami by another veteran striker in Uruguayan Luis Suarez, making up a quartet of former



Barcelona players with midfielder Sergio Busquets and left-back Jordi Alba.

Coping with expectation No MLS team has ever been able to draw on players of such pedigree and experience and with that comes the expectation that they will land the club's first MLS title.

Messi is well used to such

pressure but it is a new sensation for some of the younger players in Gerardo Martino's squad.

Shanyder Borgelin, the 22-year-old striker who scored in last week's home friendly against Argentine club Newells Old Boys, says the team can cope with the high expectations. "That's expected when you have the greatest player in the world,

four of the greatest players in the world, but I think we're ready," he told the Miami Herald.

"We are all called up to a big task. I definitely think the (pre-season) losses and everything that comes with that made us a lot stronger," he added. Miami kick-off their campaign on Wednesday at home to Real Salt Lake with the rest of the league getting under way on Saturday.

Defending champions Columbus Crew start their title defense at home to Atlanta United with their French coach Wilfried Nancy looking to maintain the momentum of a playoff campaign which ended in victory over Los Angeles FC.

LAFc, the 2022 MLS Cup winners, host Western Conference rivals the Seattle Sounders in the biggest clash of the opening weekend. LAFc have lost four regular starters from last season's team including Italian Giorgio Chiellini, who has

retired. But Steve Cherundolo's side have added a World Cup winner of their own with France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris joining from Tottenham Hotspur.

Top-scorer Denis Bouanga remains with the club despite reports he could head back to France but the future of the team's talismanic Mexican forward Carlos Vela remains unclear. The 34-year-old Vela is a free agent after his contract with the club was not yet renewed.

There are some new faces on the bench with former Aston Villa manager Dean Smith taking charge at Charlotte and Phil Neville, the former Manchester United player and ex-Inter Miami boss now at the Portland Timbers.

The opening games are set to be officiated by replacement referees after talks over a new collective deal between the refs union and the league's Professional Referees Organization broke down.



In brief

Agha Talish remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The legendary actor Agha Talish was born in Ludhiana, India in 1926. His real name was Agha Ali Abbas Qizilbash. He made his cinema debut in 1947 with the Indian film Saray Key Bahar and later moved to Pakistan after Partition. In Pakistan, his first film was Jheel Kinarey. He inspired his fans in several movies including Umrao Jaan, Zeenat, Saat Lakh, Jheel Kinaray, Mela, Ye Aman, Qaidi, Baghawat, Aulad, Farangi, and others, private news channel reported. The versatile actor is also known by his character in Umrao Jan Ada and Zeenat. Talish starred in over 450 films and died on February 19, 1998, in Lahore.

ANF busts drug dealer group

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting a successful operation managed to bust a drug dealer group and arrested eight accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday. He informed that the operations were carried out simultaneously in three major cities of the country and the gang members were rounded up. The gang members were involved in selling CBD oil-laced vapes through online platforms, he added. Eight people were arrested targeting the inter-provincial drug dealer group involved in the distribution of vapes. During the operation, vapes filled with hashish oil, CBD oil, THC oil, and cigarette rolls made from hemp plant were recovered. Apart from this, marijuana oil, opium and other illegal materials including marijuana were also seized. The accused were involved in illegal activities under the guise of selling natural products and medicines. E-commerce platforms were being used to supply drugs, the spokesman informed.

Police arrest six kite flyers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to arrest six kite flyers and sellers on recovery of 1000 kites and seven kite flying string rolls, said a police spokesman here on Monday. He informed, Waris Khan Police arrested Yasir for having 700 kites and four string rolls while City Police rounded up Nadir with 20 kites, Rattaamal police held an accused namely Asmat for carrying 10 kites and Taxila police netted Khizer on recovery of 50 kites and Aziz with 40 kites. Rawat police rounded up Azam and recovered 210 kites and three string rolls from his possession. The spokesman said that the Divisional Superintendents of Police had directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers.

SSP hold open court to address grievances

RAWALPINDI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Investigation Rawalpindi, Zunaira Azfar here on Monday held an open court in Police Lines Headquarters to address public complaints. According to a Police spokesman, the SSP issued directives to the officers concerned to take action and submit detailed reports on the complaints submitted by the citizens. She said that negligence on the part of the officials concerned would not be tolerated. 'Open Courts' were being held to provide the citizens immediate relief and address their complaints besides it also helped improve standards of policing, she said and issued orders to the officers to complete inquiries and send reports within the given time frame.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani presiding over a Senate House Business Advisory Committee meeting at Parliament House.

Parliamentary leaders commend Senator Sadiq Sanjrani's role

ISLAMABAD (APP): During a meeting of the House Business Advisory Committee (HBAC) on Monday, the parliamentary leaders of various political parties in the Senate acknowledged and eulogized the role of Senator Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani for efficiently running the affairs of Upper House of Parliament during his tenure as Chairman of the Senate.

The leaders expressed these views in a meeting of House Business Advisory Committee (HBAC), said a news release.

A meeting of the House Business Advisory Committee was presided over by Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq

Sanjrani.

Members observed that Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani adopted all-inclusive and participatory approach for the House and provided ample opportunity to all the members to discuss and debate issues of national significance.

"Political acumen of Sadiq Sanjrani is highly praiseworthy and his approach is unique", members said.

Chairman Senate also thanked members of the HBAC and other senators. He expressed his gratitude for the cooperation extended by members during the last six years.

The Committee also discussed in detail legislative business to be transacted during the 335th Session of the Senate.

The session would take up discussion on other issues of extreme public significance.

The HBAC decided that the current session would continue for more than two weeks.

The meeting was attended by Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem, Senator Sherry Rehman, Senator Kamil Ali Agha, Senator Waqar Mehdi, Senator Sardar Shafiq Tareen, Senator Afanullah, and Senator Molana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri. Secretary Senate Mohammad Qasim Samad khan was also present during the meeting.

Excise deptt provides civic facilities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Under ICT doorstep initiative, the Excise department is providing civic facilities to residents of federal capital to get their vehicle registration as well as access of various essential services at Fatima Jinnah Park (Bolan Gate) on Monday.

On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, the excise staff would be stationed at the park's parking lot from 3.00 to 5.00 pm, and the citizens hailing from nearby areas of Fatima Jinnah Park Bolan Gate F-9 can get civic facilities through a dedicated van, ICT Spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said.

He said that whether you need a fuel permit for domestic or commercial use, or looking to register your motor vehicle seamlessly, the on-ground service will ensure a swift and straightforward process. This initiative aims to streamline processes and provide ease to the public regarding vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax procedures, he added. In addition to the vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax services, the Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will also be offering the following services: Domicile certificate, Birth certificate, Power of attorney, International driving permit, Fuel permit (domestic/commercial), Motor vehicle registration.

'WASA on high alert to cope with flooding'

RAWALPINDI (APP): Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi was put on high alert to cope with urban flooding following heavy rain on Sunday night while a rain emergency was also declared directing the residents settled along Nullah Lai and in low-lying areas to remain on high alert and move to safer places, said Managing Director (MD), WASA Muhammad Saleem Ashraf.

He informed that twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad received heavy rain on Sunday night and all the arrangements were finalized by the agency to deal with flash flood. He said that according to rainfall gauging stations, 27 mm rain was recorded at Saidpur Village, 23 mm at Golra, 17 mm at Bokra, 32 mm at Shamsabad, 26 mm at Chaklala, while water level sensor data showed 7 feet at Kattarian and 3.4 feet at Gawalmandi.

Judiciary last hope of country, says Dr Fowzia

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Country has been facing with very serious issues and in this situation judiciary is the last hope for the country, said Aafia Movement leader and noted neurophysician of the country Dr Fowzia Siddiqui, here Sunday.

She said we came here to attend hearing of Dr Aafia Siddiqui case, but it was cancelled as the honorable judge of Islamabad High Court (IHC) Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaque Khan was ill. She prayed for his early recovery. She said the court has played a due role in this case which is about the human rights of Dr Aafia Siddiqui. She said the holy month of Ramadan is about to come and she would appeal the whole nation to pray for the country, as well as, Dr Aafia Siddiqui.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Senator Mushtaq

Ahmed Khan on the occasion said that the role of the honorable court in this case is very positive. He said new parliament is about to be formed and he would appeal it to take meaningful steps for an early release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui. He also welcomed the lawyer of Aafia Siddiqui Clive Stafford Smith and said that his role in this case is very helpful and crucial. He said he is taking good efforts on this case. He appealed to the nation to support the noble cause of Dr Aafia Siddiqui. American lawyer of Aafia Siddiqui Clive Stafford Smith said that he has come here with a message of hope. He asked people to support and do everything they could do so that Aafia Siddiqui could be released from the US jail. He also stressed the role of the government of Pakistan in this regard.

Met office forecast another heavy rain, snowfall spell

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Meteorological Department Dr Sardar Sarfaraz has forecast another spell of rain, hailstorms and snow across the country from February 25 where Karachi city and Balochistan will also witness light showers along with thunderstorms.

Talking to a private news channel on Monday, Chief Meteorologist PMD, Dr Sardar Sarfaraz said that good rains, besides snowfall in the northern areas, were expected in the country from the next week under the influence of westerly waves. The Chief Meteorologist said that chilly embrace of winter tightened its hold on various parts of the country on Monday, as rain showers blanketed regions including Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Kashmir.

"We are expecting some good rains from Feb 25, which will continue till March or may even extend to April under the influence of westerly waves", adding that

snowfall on hills in the northern areas is also expected during this period, which would end fog and smog in the country," he added. Dr Sardar Sarfaraz said under this rain spell started on Sunday many parts of the country would witness partly cloudy skies along with drizzles and snow till Wednesday.

The wet spell brought the winter chill back to the region, and the maximum rainfall and snow were recorded in Rawlakot, Kalam, Malam Jabba, Swat, Gilyat and Murree.

Swat district also witnessed a drop in temperatures as rain fell in the plains and light snowfall on the mountaintops. He also advised the public to take necessary precautions during the expected weather conditions.

Replying to a question, the Chief Meteorologist said that Swat and Chitral have been attracting an influx of tourists and during this spell, these spots will witness heavy snowfall.

Dr Jamil appointed Executive Member of South Asian Chapter of Translators

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prof Dr. Jamil Asghar Jami, Dean of the Faculty of Languages at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), has been appointed as the first Pakistani Executive Member of the South Asian Chapter of Translators without Borders.

"It is a remarkable achievement for Pakistan. The appointment highlights Dr Jamil's exceptional contributions in the fields of translation and interpretation and symbolizes Pakistan's emerging presence in the global linguistic community," a NUML news release said on Monday. Dr Jamil holds a PhD in Linguistics and has been honoured with a prestigious research fellowship from the University of North Texas, United States.

His journey in language education is marked by significant roles, including establishing and leading the Department of Translation and Interpretation at NUML, reflecting his dedication to raising the standards of language translation and interpretation in the country.

CDA taking steps to ensure uninterrupted water supply in city

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is working on multiple projects to meet the acute shortage of water in the city of Islamabad in the summer.

The water supply department has started the annual cleaning work of Khanpur Canal which will be completed by the end of this month. Since water is supplied from Khanpur to the residents of Sectors G-10, G-11, F-10, F-11, and D-12 of Islamabad, and due to the annual cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal, the water supply should be reduced by 50 percent in these sectors.

The shortage of water in these sectors will be fulfilled by Sangjani Water Works including Simli Dam. However, to ensure an uninterrupted water supply to the residents before the arrival of summer, the cleaning work of the canal

will be completed by the end of this month. After which, water supply will be restored in the said sectors as per schedule.

It should be noted that due to the lack of sufficient rains in monsoon and winter, the water level in the dams has become very low. Due to the lack of required rains, the amount of water in Khanpur Dam has reduced to 21 percent and in Simli Dam to 50 percent. That is, 80 percent in Khanpur Dam and 50 percent in Simli Dam have been reduced.

The Water Supply Wing has reduced the supply of water from Khanpur Dam by 60 percent, which means that instead of 10 million gallons, only four million gallons of water is being received daily.

Moreover, during the cleaning campaign of Khanpur Canal, the tanker service was also alerted in

the said sectors so that timely solving of the received complaints is possible in all circumstances.

Residents of said sectors can also avail water tanker service by calling: (051)9106580. Similarly, in view of the facilities of the citizens, the Water Supply Wing has also issued a helpline number: 03357775444 so that all possible facilities can be provided to the citizens.

On this occasion, the administration CDA while appreciating the steps taken by the water supply department, has asked that the steps taken for uninterrupted supply of water in the city should be accelerated.

The Water Supply Department of the CDA has also appealed to the citizens to be careful in using water and avoid wastage of water so that maximum water can be used by the citizens.

Railways finalize plan to procure 230 passengers coaches

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways is finalizing a plan to procure 230 passenger coaches and 820 High Capacity Wagons under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) aiming help to improve the speed of the trains and ensure adherence to fixed timings. "Out of the total, around 46 Completely-Built-Up (CBU) passenger coaches have been procured up till now while the remaining 184 would be manufactured in the country and the coaches would be able to travel at the speed of 160km/h," said an official in the Ministry of Railways.

He said Pakistan Railways is putting maximum efforts to complete rehabilitation and reconstruction work on the railway track along with improving the speed of the locomotives to carry passengers to their respective destinations on time.

The infrastructure, including the track and signaling system from Karachi to Peshawar, Main Line-I (ML-I), and doubling of track from Lahore to Peshawar (462.20 Km) was also being revamped, he added. The official noted that the length of the track was 1,726 kilometers and the department has planned to improve speed up to 160 kilometers per hour in the project of up-gradation of ML-I under the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He said the rolling stock being procured under this project would be capable of running at a speed of 160 km/h whereas the department had a dedicated fleet of 55 diesel-electric locomotives of 4000-4500 HP for freight operation to cater maximum haulage at higher speed. "The Computer Based Interlocking (CBI) system is installed on 48 stations of ML-I, to improve signaling and interlocking for higher speed and safety of train operation," the official added.

To a question, he said Pakistan Railways was a big organization comprising around 63,000 employees, and its network was spread throughout the country.

The official said the employees were well cared for owing to having several welfare activities, including healthcare facilities through an intensive network of hospitals, dispensaries, and child healthcare units.

He said the provision of government accommodation according to entitlement and priority list, staff benevolent funds, benefits, and incentives provided through the Prime Minister's Family Assistance Package policy for deceased employees' families were part of these facilities.

He said the other facilities included benefits and incentives provided through policy for disabled employees' families, monthly grants to widows scale-wise, the establishment of primary and high schools, industrial schools to teach handicrafts, sports activities, pick and drop facility for schools/offices, installation of water filters plants, a special provision of five medical seats in Riphah Islamic Universities with the reduction of 50 percent in admission and tuition fees.



ISLAMABAD: A view of massive traffic jam at Islamabad Expressway during rain that experienced in the Federal Capital.

18,000 schools operating

KABUL (TOLNews): Ministry of Education said that 18,000 schools and over 17,000 madrasas are operating across the country. Officials at the ministry said that they are committed to providing balanced modern and religious education for people. "The leadership of ministry has always tried to concentrate on forgotten areas where people were deprived of their rights. We are committed to provided balanced educational services to deprived areas," official said.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 09, 1445 — Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Take pictures banned

KABUL (AFP): Authorities in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, ordered its officials not to take pictures or videos of "living things". In a letter addressed to civil and military officials, the provincial Department of Interior directed them "to refrain from taking pictures of living things in your formal and informal gatherings, because it causes more harm than good".

25 dead in mountain landslide, says report



NURISTAN (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Disaster Management in Afghanistan states that as a result of a mountain landslide in the Nurgaram province, 25 people have lost their lives while another 10 have been injured.

Mohammad Abdullah Jan, the head of Information and Communications at this ministry, stated in a recent message that the mountain's slide, caused by recent rains in the village of "Nakrah" in Nurgaram district, has resulted in both

human casualties and the complete or partial destruction of 15 to 20 residential houses.

He further adds that the recent rainfall has led to road blockages in the provinces of Nuristan, Kunar, and Panjshir.

According to the head of Information and Communications at the Ministry of Disaster Management, a snow avalanche has also occurred in Panjshir province, leading to the disappearance of five workers. However, local officials in Panjshir claim that two of

these miners have lost their lives.

The Ministry of Disaster Management states that efforts are underway to assist the affected individuals.

The recent natural disasters in various provinces of Afghanistan, including landslides and avalanches, have caused significant loss of life and property damage. The Taliban administration is actively involved in responding to these emergencies and providing support to affected communities.

‘There is no majority or minority in Islam’

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, has affirmed that the Islamic Emirate operates on the principle of no distinction between majority and minority, mirroring the tenets of Islam.

As per a statement from Arg, the Prime Minister's Palace, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir has held separate meetings with dignitaries, scholars, and representatives of Shia and Hindu communities. He also visited representatives from 22 districts of Kabul city and interacted with traders from Paktia province.

The participants in these meetings expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Islamic Emirate. They noted that since the Islamic Emirate's return to the country, Kabul has seen a significant decrease in oppression, theft, criminal activities, and land usurpation, leading to a safer environment for its citizens.

Representatives from various Kabul regions brought attention to the city's severe drinking water shortage. They stressed the need for development in Kabul, provision of drinking water, and increased collaboration between Kabul's residents and the Islamic Emirate.

Hindu and Sikh representatives raised concerns about their properties in Kabul being seized, demanding their return and calling for legal measures to address their rights.

In response, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir acknowledged Kabul's water crisis and assured that the Islamic Emirate is actively working to address it, including seeking assistance from other countries. He reiterated that the Islamic Emirate is committed to resolving the people's challenges, emphasizing that there is no concept

of majority and minority in Islam, a principle that guides the Islamic Emirate's actions.

He stated that Kabul requires substantial development and reform. He assured that all seized properties would be returned to their rightful owners and that the city's residents would receive standard services.

The Deputy Prime Minister also reassured that efforts are underway to address the issues faced by all Afghans, including Shia and Hindu believers.

It's noteworthy that during these meetings, tribal leaders and merchants from Paktia presented written accounts of the challenges faced by the people of Paktia to the Deputy Prime Minister. Mawlawi Abdul Kabir assured them that their requests and suggestions would be taken into consideration based on available resources.

WFP announces assistance

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Programme has announced that to reduce malnutrition in Afghanistan, they have distributed food to approximately 6 million women and children suffering from malnutrition.

The organization stated in a message on its social media platform X, on Sunday, February 18th, that these aids were distributed with the support of the CBPF institution.

Previously, the World Food Programme, a United Nations agency, had stated that they distributed specific malnutrition supplies to over 4 million women and children in Afghanistan.

This comes as the rates of malnutrition among women and children in Afghanistan have increased, becoming a serious concern.

Both the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have consistently warned about the high levels of malnutrition in Afghanistan.

According to OCHA's report, approximately 15.5 million people are facing acute food insecurity, with 2.7 million of them in emergencies.

The committee emphasizes that in the coming year, climate change, economic pressures, increased impunity, and reduced international support will accelerate humanitarian crises worldwide.

This comes as human rights organizations have consistently emphasized the need to address poverty and hunger among women and children in Afghanistan.

AFJC urges attention to mediamen

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) has urged addressing the concerns of journalists and media outlets in the second meeting of country representatives on Afghan affairs in Doha.

In a statement issued on Sunday, February 18th, the center emphasized giving priority to the worries of journalists and media in the Doha meeting. The statement mentioned that Lotfullah Najafzada, the chief editor of "Amu" TV, is representing Afghanistan's media community alongside three female members of the country's civil society in this session.

The Afghan Journalists Center calls for international solidarity and consensus to aid and strengthen free media, improve freedom of expression, and enhance public access to information in Afghanistan.

It's worth noting that the second meeting of country representatives on Afghan affairs, hosted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, began in Doha, the capital of Qatar, despite widespread criticism.

Country representatives in this session are also reviewing proposals from the "Afghanistan Independent Assessment" report and selecting a UN special representative for the country.

UN urged to take steps towards recognizing IEA



KABUL (Ariana News): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the administrative

deputy of the prime minister, said in a meeting with Kanni Wignaraja, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and Head of the Asia and Pacific Regional Office of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that the Islamic Emirate expects the United Nations to consider its achievements and take steps towards recognizing the IEA government.

At the meeting, Wignaraja expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and hospitality of the Afghan people and provided information regarding the plans and goals of her trip to Afghanistan.

Wignaraja also said the prevailing security situation in Afghanistan, coupled with cooperation of the IEA officials presents an opportunity to international organizations and institutions, especially the United Nations organizations, to continue their assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

She added that Asia-Pacific Regional Office of the UNDP is prepared to persist in providing assistance across various spheres, including environment, humanitarian affairs, and employment, infrastructure, and poverty

reduction in Afghanistan.

Hanafi meanwhile expressed appreciation for the activities and programs of the United Nations, particularly its development program aimed at poverty alleviation, provision of potable water, and infrastructural development in Afghanistan.

Hanafi emphasized the achievements of the Islamic Emirate in combating corruption, eradicating the cultivation, trafficking, and usage of drugs, establishing and maintaining peace and security, extending assistance to the underprivileged, addressing the concerns of individuals struggling with substance addic-

tion, and successfully facilitating the repatriation of over a million migrants to the country.

The administrative deputy of the prime minister, while referring to the issue of environment said: "Although Afghanistan has a minor effect on the production of greenhouse gasses and climate change, it is still one of the countries that has been severely affected by the phenomenon of climate change."

He further requested the United Nations to fight against the consequences of climate change and provide cooperation to Afghanistan in this regard.

Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum meets Russian investor

KABUL (Ariana News): Shahabuddin Delawar, Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, met with the Russian investor on Sunday in his office and discusses investment opportunities in Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum says that in this meeting, the Russian investor, while providing information about the company's work experience and activities, said: "Our company has 120 years of work experience in the countries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Tajikistan with advanced and modern equipment that we have, we are ready to cooperate and start work in Afghanistan."

In this meeting, he also talked about the production of 150 megawatts of electricity from garbage and said that our company is ready to cooperate and work on solving the problem of garbage and generating electricity from it.

The Russian company also gave information about their facilities and equipment in the oil and gas sector and electricity generation from gas, expressed their interest in investing in



the oil and gas sector of Afghanistan and requested the support and cooperation of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum.

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum stated that the acting minister welcomed their plans and ideas in the country's oil and gas sectors and electricity generation from waste, adding: "Afghanistan enjoys overall

security and there is a suitable environment for foreign businessmen to invest."

According to the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, businessmen can invest in a safe, transparent and corruption-free environment, and the leadership of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum is also ready to cooperate in this field.

Import, export volumes total \$7.5b in 1st 9 months of this solar year

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan's export and import volumes totaled \$7.5 billion in the first nine months of this solar year — 1402, the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) said on Monday.

NSIA said exports totaled \$1.35 billion while imports amounted to \$6.22 billion. Last solar year, 1401, saw exports total \$1.37 billion while imports totalled \$5.12 billion.

NSIA said most exports went to Pakistan (\$689.9 million), followed by India (\$463 million) and the UAE (\$32 million).

The most popular export item was dried fruit, which

totalled \$342.7 million. Medicinal plants, minerals and fresh fruit were second, third and fourth respectively. The authority stated that the most imported items in the first nine months of this solar year came from Iran and totaled \$1.31 billion.

Goods from Pakistan followed totaling \$1.15 billion and then China with goods worth \$1.14 billion.

Imports were dominated by fuel, petroleum and gas, at \$1.1 billion, followed by machinery, vehicles and spare parts which totaled \$691.9 million. Other high volume goods included textiles, metals and metal products.

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Afghan railway authority team heads to Uzbekistan

KABUL (Ariana News): The acting-head of Afghanistan Railway Authority (ARA) and his delegation traveled to Uzbekistan Monday to participate in the Afghan-Trans meeting.

Acting head of ARA, Bakhtur Rahman Sharafat, and his delegation traveled to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, where they will attend the meeting and hold bilateral talks to strengthen cooperation.

During this trip, Sharafat will also visit the Hiratan Administrative Building and Uzbekistan's Termez railway station which are under construction.



Nimroz rival families reconcile, end 3-year-old enmity

ZARANJ (Pajhwok): A three-year-old feud between two families in northwestern Nimroz province has ended as a result of mediation from local officials, tribal elders and religious scholars.

The enmity between cousins — Haji Wazir Khan and Haji Fazl Ahmad, residents of Rozi village of Khashrod district, began three years ago.

Both Wazir Khan and Fazl Ahmad lost their brothers in the feud.

Mediators: End of enmity is ultimately peace

The reconciliation efforts lasted 20 days and eventually the enmity came to an end thanks to mediation from religious scholars, tribal elders, influential figures and local officials.

Maulvi Asadullah Sahar,

administrative chief for Khashrod district, told Pajhwok Afghan News the two families had problems from the past.

"But three years ago, the enmity escalated when the body of Mohammad Reza, tabrother of Haji Wazir Khan, was found near mosque and Khan accused his cousin Ali Ahmad of the murder and got him imprisoned."

"Ali Ahmad, the brother of Fazl Ahmad was released from prison after spending two years and three months after his release, his body was also found near the village mosque and Khan also accused his cousins (Fazl Ahmad's family)."

According to Sahar, although the motive and nature of both murders is

still not known, both families became more hostile against each other.

He said after the murder of Mohammad Reza, local officials and tribal elders decided to mediate between the families.

He added: "The end of every enmity is ultimately peace because friendship brings peace and security and war and hatred offer losses, casualties and miseries that cause mental and physical injuries, so people should pay attention to the education of their children and future generations."

Meanwhile, Maulvi Mohammad Hussain Haqqani, a representative of the Nimroz Ulama Council and one of the mediators, said: "Following efforts of several days and nights, we managed to turn the enmity

between the two families into friendship today."

According to him, the Nimroz Ulama Council with the help of elders and ethnic influencers is trying to convert enmities into a culture of peace and friendship in the society, and people's cooperation is needed in this regard.

He added: "Islam is the religion of friendship and love, so it is necessary for all of us Muslims to forgive small mistakes so that these mistakes do not lead to big sins."

Also, Major General Mohammad Ayoubi, who played the role of a mediator in this case, says: "Today, fortunately, with the mediation of elders and efforts of the local administration, a great war and enmity between two families turned into peace. Their differences are resolved, and both families pledged in the presence of a large crowd not to harm each other in the future."

Maulvi Gul Ahmad Ahmadi, one of the influential people of Razi village, said: "We got a commitment from both sides that they will not be bloodthirsty and not fight each other in the future."

He added the two families were farmers in Khashrod district and were original residents of the area. Their enmity had demoralized the village residents.

He said: "In Afghanistan several decades of turmoil and conflict and he was willing to forgive the murder of his brother and pardon the other side."

He promised that they



officials have a greater role to play."

Haji Fazl Ahmad, the brother of Ali Ahmad, told Pajhwok war meant bloodshed and conflict and he was willing to forgive the murder of his brother and pardon the other side.

He promised that they

will live in an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood from now on.

Meanwhile, Haji Wazir Khan, the brother of Mohammad Reza, was happy that their enmity had been resolved.

In the reconciliation gathering, he pledged that

he would forgive the other party with sincerity and honesty and put this enmity to an end out of respect for the elders.

In a message, he asked families engaged in enmities to put aside their differences and live in an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood.

Taliban's conditions to attend meeting unacceptable: UN

NEW YORK: The Taliban has set unacceptable conditions for attending a United Nations-sponsored meeting about Afghanistan in the Qatari capital, Doha, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says. "I received a letter [from the Taliban] with a set of conditions to be present in this meeting that were not acceptable," Guterres said at a news conference on Monday.

"These conditions denied us the right to talk to other representatives of Afghan society and demanded a treatment that would, to a large extent, be similar to recognition," the UN chief added. The two-day meeting which ended on Monday in Doha brought together member states and international envoys to Afghanistan to discuss an array of issues facing the country. But the Taliban didn't attend because its demands were not met.

The Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021 after United States and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. However, no country recognises it as Afghanistan's government, and the UN has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place.

The biggest point of contention between the international community and the Taliban are the bans imposed on women and girls. Since it retook power, it has ordered women to cover up when leaving home, stopped girls and women from attending high school and university, and banned them from parks, gyms and public baths. The Taliban insists the bans are a domestic matter and reject criticism as outside interference.

Guterres said it was essential to revoke the restrictions. Taliban chief spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, said the UN pre-occupation with Afghan women was unwarranted and dismissed its concerns. "Afghan women wear hijab of their own accord," he said on X. "They don't need to be forced. The Vice and Virtue Ministry hasn't forced anyone [to wear hijab] either."

Another point of contention is the appointment of a UN special envoy in the country, which the Taliban opposes. On Monday, Guterres said there needed to be "clear consultations" with the Taliban to have clarification of the envoy's role and who it could be to "make it attractive" from the Taliban's point of view. He said it was in the Taliban's interests to be part of the consultations.

Many governments, international organisations and aid agencies have cut off or severely scaled back their funding for Afghanistan in response to the Taliban policies, causing a serious blow to the country's struggling economy. "One of our main objectives is to overcome this deadlock," Guterres said, explaining that a roadmap needed to be created in which "the concerns of the international community" and the concerns of the "de facto authorities of Afghanistan" are taken into account. Lotfullah Najafizada, CEO of Amu TV, an international media outlet, told Al Jazeera the Taliban made a strategic mistake by not attending the talks.

"I think it is very important also for the Taliban to understand where the world stands. At the moment the world has planned to go ahead without the Taliban, which is not something that they expected," he said. "I think it is very important for the international community to build consensus and deal with the Taliban with one voice." The meeting in Doha also aimed at a more coordinated response to tackle issues in Afghanistan.

Guterres said there had been discussion of a "contact group", with a "limited number of states able to have a more coordinated approach in the engagement with the de facto authorities". He said this could include permanent members of the UN Security Council, neighbouring countries and relevant donors but it would be "up to member states to decide how to create it". "I believe it would be a way to have coherence in the way the international community is engaging with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan," he said. — Aljazeera

CJP annoys over withdrawal of plea on polls annulment

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa on Monday ordered the officials to present the petitioner before the court after he sought to withdraw his plea through which he had demanded declaring the Feb 8 elections null and void and adjourned hearing till February 21.

The chief justice ordered the SHO concerned to trace Brig (r) Ali Khan and present him before the three-member bench which also comprises Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarrat Hilali.

Making it clear that the country's top court will hear the matter, Chief Justice Isa remarked whether such persons filed petition only to get instant fame.

While noting that Brig (r) Khan had requested to withdraw the petition on Feb 13, the very day it was filed, the court questioned as if publicity was the sole goal by resorting such tactics. The application was shared the entire world through media, the chief justice noted, adding that he should come and the court would hear the matter.

In a report, the apex

court was informed that the petitioner could neither be approached through the address given in the plea nor the WhatsApp service. Later, the three-member bench issued the necessary orders which read that they would not allow anyone to use the Supreme Court for ulterior motives and issued a notice to the petitioner through the defence ministry, while adjourning further hearing till Feb 21 (Wednesday). Brig (r) Khan had moved the Supreme Court to get orders for a probe into alleged rigging and holding the fresh elections.

Israeli strikes hit near south Lebanon city of Sidon

BEIRUT (AFP): At least two Israeli air strikes hit southern Lebanon on Monday near the coastal city of Sidon, state media and an AFP photographer said. Hamas ally Hezbollah and its arch-foe Israel have been exchanging near-daily fire across the border since the Israel-Hamas war broke out on October 7.

"Israeli warplanes carried out... strikes on the town of Ghaziyeh," the state-run National News Agency (NNA) said Monday, adding that a vehicle was targeted and ambulances rushed to the scene, without providing further details. While most the exchanges in recent months have been limited to areas near the frontier, Ghaziyeh is some 30 kilometers (around 20 miles) from the nearest Israeli frontier and less than five kilometers from the city of Sidon.

The AFP photographer

reported the sound of at least two successive strikes in Ghaziyeh, with dark smoke billowing across the area. One of the strikes appeared to have targeted a hangar close to the main coastal highway, the photographer added. The NNA had earlier in the afternoon reported an "enemy drone" at low altitude over the Sidon area.

Video circulating on social media showed large plumes of smoke arising from at least two strikes. The Israeli military last week said it killed a Hezbollah commander, his deputy and another fighter in a strike in the south Lebanon city of Nabatiyeh. The strike on a residential building also killed seven members of the same family, according to a security source, while another strike elsewhere killed a woman, her child and stepchild.

On Friday, Hezbollah

chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed that Israel would pay "with blood" for civilians it killed in Lebanon in recent days, warning the group had missiles that could reach anywhere in Israel. He warned that his Iran-backed movement has "precision-guided missiles that can reach... Eilat," on Israel's Red Sea coast, well beyond the northern towns it usually targets. The latest uptick in violence has caused international alarm, with fears growing of another full-blown war between Israel and Hezbollah like that of 2006.

Since October, cross-border exchanges have killed at least 269 people on the Lebanese side, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 40 civilians, according to an AFP tally. On the Israeli side, 10 soldiers and six civilians have been killed, according to the Israeli army.

Houthi claim they hit British ship, downed US drone over Yemen

SANAA: The Houthi group says it hit a British cargo ship that is believed to be significantly damaged and shot down a US drone over its territory as the Yemeni group continued to target ships in the Red Sea demanding an end to Israel's war on Gaza.

The Houthi claims of attacks come as the United States carried out five strikes in Yemen late on Saturday night as part of Washington's military campaign against Houthi targeting of Israeli-linked vessels disrupted global trade passing through the Red Sea. Houthis have now expanded their attacks to include US and UK ships after the two countries launched strikes on the war-torn Arab nation. The Rubymar cargo ship suffered "catastrophic dam-

ages and came to a complete halt" after being targeted in a military operation, said Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree in a televised address on Monday.

"As a result of the extensive damage the ship suffered, it is now at risk of potential sinking in the Gulf of Aden. During the operation, we made sure that the ship's crew exited safely," The British maritime security firm Ambrey confirmed that the Rubymar is a UK-registered, Belize-flagged and Lebanese-operated cargo ship that came under attack late on Sunday.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) also confirmed the incident – without naming the ship – and said it took place some 35 nautical miles (65km) south of al-

Makha (Mocha) in Yemen. "Military authorities report crew have abandoned the vessel. Vessel at anchor and all crew are safe," it said. "Military authorities remain on scene to provide assistance".

On Monday, Ambrey said another vessel, a US-owned and Greek-flagged bulk carrier had called for military assistance citing a "missile attack". The UKMTO also confirmed the incident 100 nautical miles (185km) off Yemen's Aden, with both sources reporting the vessel's crew are safe. The Houthi military also claimed to have downed a US-made MQ-9 Reaper attack drone over Yemen, which it said "was carrying out hostile missions against our country on behalf of the Zionist entity".

IMF asks Pakistan for transparency in PSDP projects

ISLAMABAD (INP): Raising 'concerns' on the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has asked Pakistan for transparency in the projects, well-placed sources said on Monday. The IMF has raised concerns on the report shared by Pakistan regarding PSDP projects by saying the complete details of investment are missing.

The international lender has urged Pakistan to make the budget documents 'effective' and include the location and development formats of the PSDP projects in it. The PSDP should be finalised by keeping the development projects in view in the upcoming budget, the IMF said as per sources.

Meanwhile, the sources within the Planning Commission said the finance and planning ministries will complete the paperwork in line with the IMF directions. On February 14 it emerged that Pakistan is likely to sign a fresh loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), after the completion of the current one.

As per details, Islamabad is expected to sign the Extended Fund Facility programme for three years and would share budget proposals for FY-2024-25 with the International Monetary Fund, the sources said. They further said the IMF would be given assurances of further jacking up electricity and gas prices and shunning subsidies burden on the economy, before signing the new loan programme.

Attack briefly halts repolling in DI Khan

F.P. Report

DI KHAN: Violence has erupted during the re-polling process at six polling stations in NA-43 Tank-cum-Dera Ismail Khan constituency, casting a shadow over the electoral proceedings and raising concerns about the safety of voters and election staff.

Police said that gunfire erupted outside the Kot Azam polling station, prompting a swift response from the authorities. Initial reports indicated that terrorists attacked both police personnel and civilians outside the polling station in an apparent bid to disrupt the democratic process.

Amidst the exchange of fire between the terrorists and the police, one attacker was reportedly killed in retaliatory action. However, the situation remained tense, with firing continuing outside the polling station, heightening fears of further violence and instability. Later, polling resumed at the Kot Azam polling station after a brief interruption.

Earlier in the day, as repolling in six polling stations of Dera Ismail Khan's NA-43 constituency began on Monday, voters could not cast their votes in five out of the six polling stations where the exercise was ordered by the election commission.

Even after the 8am scheduled time passed, the repolling could not commence at Attal Sharif (female and male), Kot Azam, Rorri, Looni (female and male) polling stations, as the police and election commission staff could not reach these five destinations. The polling exercise is supposed to continue till 5pm.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman's son and former federal minister Maulana Asad Mahmood had filed an application with the Election Commission of Pakistan that polling was not held in these constituencies. The ECP then ordered polling in these areas on February 19, which was earlier scheduled for February 17.

Engineer Dawar Khan Kundi, an independent candidate backed by the PTI, had defeated Maulana Asad Mahmood in the February 8 elections with 63,556 votes in a tough competition. JUI-F's Maulana Asad had bagged 62,730 votes, with the overall voter turnout being 43.32%. On February 8, the election staff, including policemen, were kidnapped by terrorists from the Rorri polling station, while the Attal Sharif polling station was also attacked by terrorists.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the 3rd edition of Hosting Business Net 2024, a platform to promote financial inclusion and digital transformation, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

PHC grants transit bail to PTI nominated KP Chief Minister

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan granted transit bail to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) nominated Chief Minister for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur on surety of Rs0.1 million, on Monday.

The counsel Syed Sikandar Shah, Shah Faisal Othmonkhel, Nauman ul Haq Kakakhel and Inam Yousafzai advocates argued that PTI nominated Chief Minister is nominated First Information Report (FIR) registered at Islamabad and requested for transit bail to Ali Amin Gandapur as to appear before concerned court.

In the meantime, Chief Justice PHC observed that it is an old FIR, however, the lawyer argued that the petitioner is aware recently and approached the court for transit bail to contest the charges at relevant forum.

Moreover, Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan further enquired regarding fate of bail pleas in other cases filed by PTI nominated Chief Minister for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur. The lawyers informed that the petitioner had obtained bail in 24 cases.

The chief justice granted transit bail to PTI nominated Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on surety of Rs1 lakh and ordered to appear before concerned court.

PHC's chief justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan also granted transit bail to PTI senior leader Faisal Javed. The counsel Shah Faisal advocate argued that PTI leader Faisal Javed

Faisal Javed appears in PHC, gets relief

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Senator Faisal Javed came out from hiding on Monday and secured transit bail from the Peshawar High Court (PHC).

PHC Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan approved the transit bail petition of the PTI leader, who had not been seen in public for a few months now. The court granted relief to Javed against bail bonds worth Rs100,000 and ordered the PTI senator to appear before the court concerned. Talking to journalists outside the court, he expressed joy over being granted bail and noted that "everyone is going through testing times. I hope that all oppressed return home".

is nominated in a FIR registered at Bani Gala police station, Islamabad and pleaded for transit bail for the petitioner appearance before concerned court.

Meanwhile, PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Waqar Ahmad extended protective bails of newly elected Members National Assembly named Atif Khan and Shahram Tarakai till 26th February.

PTI nominated Chief Minister for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur denied news regarding shortlisting of cabinet and claimed that the party's founder will decide it. He added that PTI government wouldn't comprise Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rights at constitutional forums.

This he said while addressing media personnel at PHC and added that his government will not tolerate delay in provision of electricity's royalty as well as National Financial Commission Award. He argued Supreme Court to initiate proceedings on Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) president Maulana

Fazal-ur-Rehman allegations against public servant for their involvement in toppling of PTI government through Vote of No Confidence.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa nominated Chief Minister demanded exemplary punishment for public servant as well as lawmakers for their unconstitutional deeds like rigging/stolen of public mandate. PTI legal team is working to secure reserved seats for the party at both national provincial assemblies, Ali Amin claimed.

Moreover, PTI backed newly elected MNA Atif Khan claimed that their freshly elected members will join two political parties to secure reserved seats in both provincial and national assemblies. He blamed Election Commission of Pakistan for partial attitude toward PTI.

The newly elected MNA Atif Khan appreciated PHC role during crackdown against PTI workers. He claimed that PHC's decisions had upheld supremacy of constitutional rights of political workers which had created hope regarding dissemination of justice in the country.

Probe into Chattha's charges underway: Solangi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said a high-level investigation committee was constituted to investigate the allegations leveled by former Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chattha regarding rigging in the general election.

Talking to media persons after attending the meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting, he urged patience as the legal process was currently underway. The people should have trust in institutions and the judicial process, he added. He remarked that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was currently investigating the allegations of rigging.

The minister stressed the significance of waiting for the results of the ongoing legal proceedings. The caretaker government, he said, had fulfilled its responsibility for conducting elections in free, fair and peaceful manner. Responding to a query, he explained that once the Election Commission released the final list of successful candidates, the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs would forward a summary to the concerned for convening the new session of the National Assembly.

Subsequently, a request would be made to the President to summon the session of the National Assembly, he added.

Earlier, during a briefing to the Senate Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting, chaired by Senator Fauzia Arshad, the minister stressed the importance of boosting PTV's presence on social media platforms to enhance viewership.

He noted that PTV had started sharing its top-quality programs on social media, recognizing the significant audience engagement on these platforms. Solangi underscored the necessity of improving the marketing of PTV products on social media.

The minister explained that the responsibility for appointing heads of certain institutions rested with the elected government. Due to the lengthy selection process, it was impractical to accomplish this task during the tenure of a caretaker government, he said, adding that therefore, it was preferable for the new parliament and government, upon assuming office, to exercise their authority in making these appointments.

Murtaza Solangi said that Radio Pakistan's primary mission was to provide information to the public. The minister told

the meeting that he had already met with the Secretary and Minister of Energy to address the issue of Radio Pakistan's electricity bills. The Ministry of Energy was urged to avoid imposing commercial electricity rates on Radio Pakistan, as it was not a commercial entity, he added.

Briefing the committee, Federal Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid provided an overview of PTV's financial strategy, adding the PTV currently employed approximately 4,100 individuals, with pension obligations representing a significant liability. The secretary said that PTV was a national broadcaster with nationwide viewership, extending its reach to remote areas of the country.

Shahera mentioned that the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting also served as a member of PTV's Board of Governors. She emphasized that any competent and suitable individual could be appointed as the head of a department following approval from the federal cabinet. Additionally, discussions were held with both current and former chairmen of the PCB regarding granting rights of sports coverage to PTV Sports, she said.

Audio leaks case: Hearing adjourned

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The senior officers couldn't appear in the audio leaks case before the court today despite the court order. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has summoned the directors general (DG) of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and FIA in connection with an audio leaks case but they couldn't present today.

Justice Babar Sattar of IHC heard the case of audio leaks. The court has also summoned the Chairman of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and representatives of telecom companies, they also remained absent. DG IB, FIA, chairman PTA, and chairman PEMRA couldn't present before the court in audio

leaks case, the court expressed resentment.

Justice Babar Sattar remarked on the absence of officers that how officer could decide themselves to remain absent from the case hearing, and also hint towards arrest warrants against the officers. The government lawyer stated that DG FIA couldn't present in the court due to illness, deputy director general has appeared in the court in the absence of DG IB.

Director Waqaruddin Syed appeared in the court representing the FIA. The court has adjourned the case hearing till two weeks. IHC has also ordered the representatives of Pakistan Federal Unit of Journalists (PFUJ) along with Council of

Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) to present before the court. The unlawfully recorded telephone conversation was disseminated through electronic media and covered in print media.

Justice Babar Sattar would also hear the pleas of former Chief Justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar's son Najam Saqib and Bushra Bibi. Alleged audio leaks of Najam Saqib with his accomplice Mian Uzair regarding the trade of PTI ticket had made waves on the social media. In the first audio talk, Mr Najam could be heard talking to Abuzar Chaddar, PTI candidate from PP-137, wherein he was instructing Mr Chaddar to call on his father Mr Nisar after getting the ticket.

Tariq's notification as MNA suspended

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday suspended the notification of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Tariq Fazal Chaudhry from NA-47. The Election Commission of Pakistan declared Tariq Fazal Chaudhry as the winner with 102,502 votes, while PTI-backed candidate Shoaib Shaheen got 86,396 votes. Shaheen challenged his defeat in the IHC.

Shaheen, in his respective petition, argued that according to Forms 45 of NA-47, he was leading with 53,000 votes. IHC Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb hearing Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed independent candidate Shoaib Shaheen's plea, passed the orders.

Separately, Shaheen also challenged his defeat in the Election Commission of Pakistan. Following the plea from the lawyer, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) penned down a letter to the District Returning Officer (DRO) and Returning Officer (RO) of NA-47 seeking the report regarding the allegation of change in result in their respective constituency.

The ECP officials in the letter sought an immediate report from the DRO and RO on the matter of alleged rigging in their constituency. But, just a day after noticing the RO and DRO of NA-47, the ECP issued a victory notification for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz candidate Tariq Fazal Chaudhry.

Saad Rafique calls for NA session

F.P. Report

LAHORE: PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique has said that a session of the National Assembly, which would be the first of the upcoming government, should be convened "as soon as possible".

In a post on X, he said, "Conducting the grand national dialogue is the prime responsibility of this assembly." Rafique further said that state institutions should also be involved in the dialogue to "give way to each other so that Pakistan gets way".