





# CM promises ensuring freedom of worship to minorities

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has emphasised the importance of ensuring freedom of worship and providing complete protection to all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs.

According to handout issued here on Sunday, she was addressing the Easter ceremony in Sheikhupura. The CM vowed to take a firm stand against any form of hate or prejudice directed towards minorities, affirming her commitment to safeguarding their rights. She extended heartfelt greetings to the entire Christian community on behalf of PML-N Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

The CM expressed pride in attending a convent school from the age of four until 10th grade. She attributed her personal growth

and development not only to her parents but also to the teachers and the staff at that school. Maryam Nawaz credited her achievement as the first female chief minister of any province in the nation's history to her teachers also. She highlighted the importance of discipline and cleanliness instilled in her by the school, stating that it played a pivotal role in her life after her parents.

She shared that her father, Nawaz Sharif, had always emphasized the importance of minority rights. She expressed appreciation for the first Sikh minister and congratulated him on his appointment. She lauded the achievements and contributions of the Christian community, as well as individuals like Justice Cornelius for promoting the rule of

law and fair justice, and Cecil Chaudhry for rendering invaluable services in the Pakistan Air Force.

The CM also visited the residential locality of the Christian community in the suburbs of Sheikhupura and presented Easter grant cheques to the Christian families. She also cut the Easter cake jointly with the Christian leaders.

Later, CM also visited the National Holy site located at Maryam Church, Maryamabad and distributed an Easter grant among the Christian families. Around 10,000 Christian families were granted Rs 5,000 Eidi per family across Punjab. She participated in the Easter prayer ceremony. The Father of Maryamabad Church Tariq George recited the Bible. The CM also planted a hover sapling in the corri-

dor of the church.

Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora, Provincial Minister for Human Rights Khalil Tahir Sindhu, Secretary Human Rights & Minority Affairs Ali Bahadur Qazi also addressed the ceremony. Archbishop Sebastian Francis Shaw and Emmanuel Ather also addressed the distinguished ceremony.

Federal Minister Rana Tanvir Hussain, Former Senator Pervaiz Rashid, Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Provincial Information Minister Azma Bokhari, Assembly Members, Bishop Irfan Jamil, Bishop Alexander John Malik, Bishop Nadeem Kamran Church of Pakistan, Majid Abel of Naulakha Church and Bishop Azad Marshall Church of Pakistan were also present.



LAHORE: A worker busy in coloring on the tomb of Masjid.

## State land worth Rs43m recovered

LAHORE (APP): Over 43 kanals of government land worth more than Rs43 million was recovered on the orders of Punjab Ombudsman Major Azam Suleman Khan (R).

Various complainants from across the province had lodged complaints with the Ombudsman about illegal farming and encroachment on government land. They urged the authorities to reclaim the land from the encroachers.

In this context, Punjab Ombudsman Major Azam Suleman Khan (R) issued orders to Assistant Commissioners, Chief Officers Municipal Committee of the province to recover the state land from illegal possession according to the rules of the provincial government.

In this regard, 43 kanals of government land has been acquired, the market value of which is more than 43 million rupees.

## Security for 622 Churches enhanced

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Police implemented top-notch security arrangements for 622 churches across the city on the occasion of Easter. Additionally, security was provided for recreational spots. This was stated by Lahore Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana in a statement issued on Sunday. He said that field officers remained present in the field for monitoring security at churches and recreational areas.

The CCPO Lahore underlined that effective measures were taken to ensure smooth traffic flow around churches and recreational venues. Dolphin Squad, Police Response Unit, and Elite Force teams continued effective patrolling around the churches. Bilal Siddique Kamyana highlighted that Lahore Police carried out patrolling and surveillance duties with a sense of duty to protect the lives and property of citizens on Easter. Nadeem Kamran, Bishop of Lahore, Church of Pakistan, appreciated the Lahore Police for performing their security duty with complete responsibility at Christian places of worship and other events.

## ‘Efforts on to ensure availability of quality food items at fixed rates’

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin has said that public representatives are in the field to ensure the availability of quality food items at low prices to people.

He said this while presiding over a meeting in the Punjab Assembly Committee Room on Sunday, said a handout. The meeting was briefed about food prices, supply chain, and actions taken against hoarders and adulteration across the province. The meeting was also briefed about the upcoming wheat

crop situation and the department's preparations.

The food minister said that there was a plenty of wheat in the market, so flour and bread should be available to the public at fixed rates. The minister directed the administration to ensure their presence in markets across the province to keep a close eye on demand and supply and ensure availability of high quality commodities.

Bilal Yasin said that providing all possible relief to the people was the first priority of the government. He

also visited different Ramazan bazaars in the provincial capital and reviewed the prices and quality of essential commodities.

He heard the problems of the people of the constituency and issued orders for immediate solution.

Later, Bilal Yasin reviewed the cleanliness campaign in different areas of the constituency. During a visit to shops, he asked the administration to improve the price control mechanism and asked that the price control magistrates should perform their duties honestly.

## Arrangements for Aitkaf in top 100 mosques

LAHORE (APP): Under the supervision of the Punjab Auqaf Department, arrangements for social seclusion (Aitkaf) are being made in the province's top 100 endowed mosques, including Jamia Masjid Data Darbar and historically significant mosques.

In Jamia Masjid Data Darbar, the city of seclusion has been divided into four sectors for over two thousand seclusion seekers. The process of setting up cabins named after Baba Ghousia, Baba Farid, Baba Bahoo, and Baba Ahmad Raza has begun in the designated sectors. More than 500 citizens will be secluding in the historical and globally renowned Badshahi Mosque. Special arrangements are being made for the security of those secluding at both

locations in Lahore.

Unauthorized individuals and personalities will not be allowed entry into the seclusion cabins, and legal action will be taken against violators. Around 2,000 individuals are like to be accommodated in the Data Darbar complex.

Administrator Data Darbar, Taqueer Mahmood Vattoo, along with Itikaf Committee Head and Manager Tahir Maqsood, and Haji Tabeer Mahmood Chishti, will welcome the attendees and assist them to their cabins in the Data Darbar complex.

Chairman of the Roet-e-Hilal Committee, Maulana Syed Abdul Kabir Azad, will welcome the congregants at Badshahi Mosque. Convenor Langar Committee, Mian Saeed, is responsible for providing

facilities including food for Sehri and Iftar to the congregants in the Data Darbar complex. They are being assisted by Administrator Taqueer Mahmood Vattoo, Executive Officer Nauman Saifi, Managers Sheikh Muhammad Jameel, Tahir Maqsood, Sheikh Asif Mansoor, along with Zahid Anwar Butt and Muhammad Hassan. Maulana Syed Abdul Kabir Azad, is overseeing arrangements for Sehri and Iftar, along with the congregants at Badshahi Mosque.

Under the guidance of Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Kabir Azad, Assistant Administrator Muhammad Ali Khan, along with Orangzeb and other staff members, will guide the congregants to their cabins.

## CCPO presides over meeting on security arrangements

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana presided over an important meeting regarding security arrangements for the Martyrdom Day of Hazrat Ali at his office. During the meeting, a comprehensive review of security measures, including peacekeeping efforts and security arrangements

was discussed. It was briefed that the central procession of Hazrat Ali's martyrdom day will commence from Mubarak Haveli to culminate at Karbala Gamay Shah.

Speaking at the meeting, the CCPO expressed determination to provide robust security for the events and processions of Youm-i-Ali.

Bilal Siddique Kamyana emphasized that Islam teaches religious harmony, unity, and brotherhood. He urged religious scholars to promote tolerance and understanding. He also stressed the need to effectively manage the checking of participants in processions through the cooperation of organizers.

The meeting highlighted that mourners will be allowed to join the procession after a thorough three-tier security check through walk-through gates and metal detectors. The CCPO directed strict monitoring of suspicious individuals, stuffs, and vehicles by police officers and personnel. Bilal Siddique Kamyana instructed supervisors to ensure the effective implementation of security checks on SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) during the processions of Youm-i-Ali.

He emphasized continuous coordination with religious scholars, organizers, and procession license holders.

Instructions were issued for the implementation of security, traffic, and parking arrangements for Youm-i-Ali.

It was further briefed that CCTV cameras will continuously monitor the mourning processions, and lady police officers will be deployed for the security and checking of female mourners. Bilal Siddique Kamyana instructed CTO Lahore to maintain smooth traffic flow during Youm-i-Ali according to a comprehensive operational plan. Dolphin Squad, Police Response Unit, and Elite Forces teams were tasked with ensuring effective patrolling around mourning processions, majalis, and imambargahs. He emphasized that maintaining law and order is the foremost responsibility of the Lahore Police and the Lahore Police is fully alert for the maintenance of law and order on Youm-i-Ali. DIG (Security) Kamran Adil, DIG (Operations) Syed Ali Naseer Rizvi, DIG (Organized Crime Unit) Imran Kishwar, Chief Traffic Police Officer Amara Athar, SSP (Operations) Syed Ali Nazir, SSP (Investigation) Anooch Masood Chaudhry, SP (Security) Abdul Wahab, and Divisional SPs (Operations) also attended the meeting.

## Naqvi felicitates Christian community on Easter

LAHORE (APP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has felicitated the Christian community on Easter.

In a message here on Sunday, he said Easter is a festival that teaches piety, repentance, purgation, purity, peace, love, reconciliation, and salvation, adding that it is more about mere rejoicing.

The Interior Minister said the Christian community is peace-loving and respectable for all of us. Naqvi said Christians played an important role in the Pakistan movement, and they also have a vital role in the development of the country.

"Christian community's patriotism and loyalty with the country are beyond doubt," he remarked.

He said father of the nation, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had had envisaged equal rights, freedom and protection of life and property for all minorities in Pakistan.

Mohsin Naqvi said it is the day to renew our pledge to spread the message of unity, brotherhood, and love in the country.

## ‘Bhutto death anniversary public meeting after Eid’

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan People's Party Sindh has announced that Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's death anniversary will be observed at district and Taluka level due to the Holy month of Ramazan while public meeting will be organized at Garhi Khuda Bux after Eid-ul-Fitr.

The provincial president of Pakistan People's Party Nisar Ahmed Khuhro said in a statement that the public meeting in connection with ZA Bhutto's martyrdom day will be held at Garhi Khuda Bux on April 14 after Eid.

He asked the party's district and Taluka organizations to organize Quran Khwani and prayer ceremonies in respective areas on April 4 due to the Holy month of Ramazan.

PPP workers and leaders will pay tribute to their party's founder chairman and former Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and other martyrs on April 4 but the major public meeting will be organized on April 14 at Garhi Khuda Bux after the fasting month of Ramazan is over, Nisar Khuhro said.

## 13 dead, 1308 injured in 1207 road accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least thirteen persons were killed and 1308 injured in 1207 Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours. Out of these, 577 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 731 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams thus reducing the burden of Hospitals.

Furthermore, the analysis showed those 698 drivers, 42 underage drivers, 164 pedestrians, and 459 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics show that 287 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 336 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by Faisalabad 86 in with 99 victims and at third Gujranwala with 82 RTCs and 75 victims.

## PPP leader calls for electoral reforms

LAHORE (APP): Syed Hasan Murtaza, the General Secretary of Pakistan People's Party Central Punjab, urged all political parties to prioritize electoral reforms, citing recurring allegations of election rigging leading to the emergence of "puppet" leaders every decade.

In a press conference held on Sunday, he emphasized the need to block all avenues of election fraud to uphold the integrity of the electoral process. Addressing concerns over corruption in judicial matters, he demanded the formation of a parliamentary commission to prevent interference, asserting that such actions are essential to silence voices of electoral theft and uphold democratic principles.

Regarding recent electoral setbacks, Murtaza announced the formation of a fact-finding committee to

investigate the defeat in NA-127, promising to publish a white paper on the 2024 elections. He expressed optimism about the party's increased vote bank and discussed various party matters, extending congratulations to President Asif Ali Zardari on his re-election and Easter greetings to the Christian community.

Furthermore, Murtaza highlighted the PPP's concerns over terrorism and economic challenges, condemning extremist acts and advocating for peace. He called for relief measures for farmers and increased assistance for students and youth, emphasizing the party's commitment to fulfilling its manifesto promises.

Responding to media inquiries, Murtaza welcomed the Ramazan package but raised reservations about the distribution process, stressing the

importance of impartiality and transparency in aid distribution. He reaffirmed the party's stance on Senate elections, vowing to support party candidates and secure a fair representation in the Senate.

He also hinted at organizational changes in Punjab, indicating possible appointments of Jiyala governors and the construction of a new stadium in the name of Bhutto. He concluded by reaffirming the party's dedication to political struggle and the legacy of its respected martyrs.

The press conference was attended by several party members including Usman Malik, Rana Irfan, Mian Ayub, Rai Shahjahan Bhatti, Chaudhry Akhtar Ali, Asan Rizvi, Dr. Khayyam Hafiz, and Khawar Naheed, underscoring the party's collective commitment to reform and progress.

## 'Suthra Punjab' programme to be accomplished in phases: Minister

LAHORE (APP): Local Government Minister Punjab Zeeshan Rafique has said Chief Minister's 'Suthra Punjab' programme will be carried forward and accomplished in a phased manner.

"After outsourcing the sanitation system of both villages and cities, we will in the next step to make the solid waste our source by making it usable," he said and added that the Punjab government was going to introduce a model of recycling the bulk of waste by ensuring its segregation.

He was addressing a press conference regarding 'Suthra Punjab' programme at DGPR here on Sunday. He said that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif announced the biggest cleaning programme in the history of the province soon after taking oath of her office. "Despite holy month of Ramazan, the government machinery honestly tried to implement the Chief Minister's vision. This programme was just a start and the first phase of a comprehensive sanitation plan," he

added. The Local Government minister said the 'Suthra Punjab' programme was quite successful, but we will learn lessons from the challenges faced during the cleaning campaign and move forward. "Punjab's population of more than 127 million creates 57,500 tonnes of waste every day. We are able to dispose of only eighteen thousand 438 tons of garbage. This means that the load of forty-nine thousand tons of waste is increasing every day," he pointed out.

Moreover, the minister told the media that tonnes of waste was disposed of in Lahore during the last 30 days. Zeeshan Rafique resolved that with the support of political determination, media and people, the government would be successful, God willing. "At present, 229 municipal institutions of Punjab are providing services to 19.5 million people annually, while eight waste management companies are reaching out to about 26 million people. Time has come for all stakeholders to step

forward to make Punjab a clean province and Pakistan a beautiful country", he said. The minister, while pointing out that municipal services fees are charged worldwide, stressed that outsourcing cleaning services will help in achieving cleaning goals.

He said that more than garbage collection, its safe dumping and treatment of sewage water is the real challenge. We are going to introduce modern and world class technology for proper dumping. Minister of Local Government said that segregation of waste is necessary before dumping it and for this purpose the location of 66 transfer stations has been identified in Punjab.

On a question, Zeeshan Rafique said that Muslim League-N believes in conducting local body elections. Punjab government is working in this regard.

During the press conference, he also extended Easter greetings to the Christian community, particularly Christian staff of the Local Gov't Department.

## Iftar dinner for orphan, special children held at Turkish Consulate

KARACHI (APP): Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency TIKA organized an Iftar dinner with 159 orphans and disabled children here at Turkish Consulate General with the participation of nearly 20 NGOs.

According to a press release, Eid git sets were distributed among orphan and special children in the program attended by Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori and the Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

The Consul General of Turkiye in Karachi Cemal Songu and TIKAs Karachi Coordinator Hilil Ibrahim Basaran and other NGO representatives were also present on the occasion.

Speaking in the occasion, Governor Kamran Tessori emphasised the importance of taking care of orphans and special

children and congratulated the NGOs operating in this regard and thanked Turkiye for bringing together Pakistan's special children at the Iftar program.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah expressed his great honor to participate in the program and thanked the organizers of the program.

Turkish Consul General Cenal Sangu said he was very pleased to host the Iftar program held with most beautiful children of Karachi. This sacred month challenges us to live by the highest moral standards and extend compassion, love, tolerance and help to those in need, he added.

TIKA coordinator Halil Ibrahim Basaran stated that NGOs have an important place in social development and that would be

incomplete without NGOs and thanked them for participating in the program.

The iftar program ended with the distribution of Eid gift sets by the Sindh Chief Minister and the Sindh Governor.

Iftar programs were organized for a total of 500 orphans and special children in Islamabad and Sindh province. Eid sets were also gifted to 500 children who attended the Iftar programs, bringing smiles to the faces of the beautiful children.

TIKA served Ramazan tables by providing food aid to a total of 2000 families in the cities of Islamabad, Muzaffarabad, Rawalpindi, Kotli, Karachi and Dadu. In Karachi, with the cooperation of Pakistan Baitulmal, TIKa organized an Iftar dinner for approximately 1000 people in need.

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# Governor invited eunuchs to Governor’s House

PESHAWAR (APP): For the first time in the history, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali Sunday invited transgender women to Governor House and handed over Ramadan Ration packages to more than three transgender women.

It is for the first time that the Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali invited us and given hospitality to us, the lower classes of the province and city, a Transgender told media men, soon after visited the Governor House.

Governor Haji Ghulam Ali welcomed hundreds of eunuchs from across the city to the Governor House. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali have given Ramadan ration packages to more than three hundred transgender women on this occasion.

## Governor congratulate Christians on Easter

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali Sunday congratulates the Christian community across the country, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on the festival of Easter here.

Easter is the name of the spirit of love and mutual respect, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said in a message issued on Sunday. The Christian community has an important role in the development and prosperity of the country, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali added.

The services of the Christian community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in all sectors including the education sector are commendable, Haji Ghulam Ali said. According to the constitution of Pakistan, the personal and religious rights of all minorities, including the Christian community, are fully protected, Haji Ghulam Ali said.

“We all have to make Pakistan a cradle of peace and stand among developed countries,” Haji Ghulam Ali said. A prosperous and developed Pakistan is the guarantor of our best future, Haji Ghulam Ali said, adding, for a bright, better and prosperous future, we have to move forward unitedly.

## MNA demands elimination loadshedding

PESHAWAR (APP): Member of National Assembly NA-32 Peshawar Asif Khan on Sunday demanded elimination of power and sui gas loadshedding from his constituency.

In a statement issued here, MNA Asif Khan said that despite paying bills the people of his constituency were facing long hours loadshedding.

He said that torrential rains and hailstorm has damaged the old transformers and infrastructure.

## Govt contacted Chairman FBR

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Adviser Muzamil Aslam Sunday contacted Chairman FBR on telephone to discuss arrears of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority here.

Telephonic conversation has been made for arrears of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority, Muzamil Aslam said.

A delegation meeting with FBR on understanding of cross input tax adjustment would be made soon,

The three groups of eunuchs headed by eunuchs Arezo, Farzana and Subia are present in the Governor House. Ramadan ration package worth thousands of rupees per person is being distributed to more than three hundred transgender women.

Transgender chant long live Governor and Mayor Peshawar while receiving the ration packages. It is for the first time in the history, the governor’s house was given such honor by being summoned, Khaja Sira Arzoo told media men. “No one has done what Governor and Mayor Peshawar have done for transgender women,” said Farzana.

No one has done the employment projects proposed by Governor Haji Ghulam Ali, including health and education, Khawaj Sara Subiya said. “Our aim is to make this down-trodden section of the society feel a sense of belonging,” Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali said. Eunuchs are also human beings, creatures of Allah, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said.

“I will be a voice in the departments responsible for transgender,” Governor said on this occasion. There

## Wave of inflation continues in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): The waves of inflation continued in Peshawar during the Holy Month of Ramadan as the price of Onion, Tomato, Garlic and Ginger increased in the vegetable Market and the Vander and shopkeeper did not follow the price list issued by the district administration.

During a visit, the price of Onion increased to Rs 250, Tomato Rs 180, Garlic reached all time high and now being sold at Rs 700 and the rate of Ginger also reached to Rs 540 per kg.

Likewise, an increase is also witnessed in their vegetables including Potato 140, Kachalu 260, Green pepper 150, Capsicum 210, Eggplant 120, Cauliflower 110, Okra 260 are being sold per kg.

The rates of the fruits in the fruits market also increased and now the Apple is being sold 410 per kg likewise, Pomegranate Rs. 540, Malta Rs. 370, Stoberry Rs. 240, Amardo Rs. 280 while bananas are being sold at Rs. 200 per dozen. The price of live chicken is Rs 480 per kg, witnessing a 20 rupees increase while the price of eggs per dozen remains at Rs 330.



PESHAWAR: Public Relations Manager of BRT Daewoo Fahad Cheema meeting Advisor to Chief Minister on Tourism, Culture and Archeology Zahid Chanzeb.

# Minister takes notice of spreading of measles in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Poliomyelitis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Hepatitis B, Haemophilus Influenzae Type b, Pneumonia, Measles.

Measles has become an epidemic in our society, the Health Minister said. People should get their children vaccinated as soon as possible, said the Health Minister. Measures will be taken on an emergency basis to control measles, said the Minister Health. He also issued orders to establish isolation wards in MTIs as soon as possible. The working hours of vaccine centers should be increased to prevent measles, said the Health Minister.

He also directed the con-

cerned quarters to remove the vaccinators from MSK disposal and place them under DHO. The Health Minister issued instructions to form an immediate provincial breakout committee with Director EPI Dr. Arif along with the relevant officials giving an emergency briefing to the Health Minister about measles.

Under the Bird Dose Initiative, vaccine centers have been established in hospitals along with the labor room and more than 100,000 newborns have been vaccinated in these centers which are open 26 hours a day, Director EPI said while briefing the

Minister.

Director EPI said that 3889 suspected cases of measles while 1445 confirmed cases have been registered in the province so far. Measles has been confirmed in 13 of the 22 deaths so far, Director EPI said. Children aged two to five years are the most affected, Director EPI said. He said the outbreak response is ongoing in 118 union councils of 24 districts of the province to control measles. Among these districts, Dera Ismail Khan is on top with 185, Peshawar 147, Charsadda 113, Swabi 92 and Dir Lower 83 cases, Director EPI disclosed.

# BRT to give role in promoting tourism by KP govt, says Advisor

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to give role to the Peshawar Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) to promote tourism as well, wherein the task is being assigned to the KP Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) in this regard. Similarly BRT service is being seriously considered to be expanded to the divisional headquarters and major cities of the province, including Abbottabad and Dera Ismail Khan. This modern urban transport system will have certain new features too. The huge resources thus required for this purpose will be arranged through the sponsors so that there is no burden on the provincial exchequer or the public and no extra taxes

has to be levied.

This was revealed by Zahid Chanzeb, the Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture and Archeology, while meeting Fahad Cheema, Public Relations Manager of BRT Daewoo who Sunday called on him in Peshawar.

Zahid Chanzeb said that BRT is the flagship project of the previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led KP govt which has received great popularity in very short span of time and apart from public convenience, it has become a stable and profitable institution. This modern transport system, he said, has not only been liked by the local population but also won awards at the global level due to its excellent quality at a time when our staunch opponent

# Metric scholarship announced

PESHAWAR (APP): International volunteer organization “Volunteer Service Overseas” and Participatory Rural Development Society (PRDS) announced scholarship for those female students leaving their school prematurely without completing their education, due to poverty, lack of access, cultural barriers and other issues. Through this initiative scholarship will be awarded to the girls aged 13 to 17 years in selected districts of the province, so as they may complete their metric education.

In this regard, an agreement has also been reached between VSO, Allama

Iqbal Open University and PRDS. According to the Program Manager MYRP KP, Tariq Hayat Yousafzai the dropped out or those girls who had left their education due to certain impeding factors can apply for free admission in Metric program. Interested girls students can submit their applications till 20th April 2024 in AIOU regional campus Peshawar.

According to the agreement, 1200 female students in three districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda will be offered free admission in the two-year matriculation course through the distance learning system of AIOU during this year.

He told the media persons in Peshawar that the aim of this initiative is to encourage those female students, who couldn’t continue their studies due to poverty, lack of access to schools, cultural barriers and other reasons. Under the ECW Multi-Year Resilience Program, free textbooks will also be distributed among the students besides giving them free admission.

The students of these three selected districts can get the admission form and prospectus from the nearest regional offices of Allama Iqbal Open University.

While the applications along with form B can be submitted till April 20.

The admission form can also be submitted through online website of the university. After proper scrutiny of the documents of the students and short listing, the eligible students will be given scholarship for a period of two years so that they could complete their matriculation.

Program Manager, Tariq Hayat further said that the objective of this initiative is to promote female’s education in these districts and encourage the girls to continue their education activities, so as they may have a better future.

# Delay in ETEA scholarship test depriving students from education

Mir Afzal Khan Turi

In the heart of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a significant issue is gripping the educational landscape: the delay in the advertisement of the ETEA Scholarship Test. For thousands of students, this test represents more than just an examination; it symbolizes hope, opportunity, and the chance to shape a brighter future. However, the recent disruption in its administration has left students in a state of uncertainty and anxiety, demanding immediate action from the authorities to rectify this pressing issue.

The ETEA Scholarship Test has long been recognized as a gateway to educational excellence for deserving and talented students across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the erstwhile FATA districts. Since its inception in 2007, it has served as a beacon of equal opportunity, annually nurturing the aspirations of 253 students. Yet, the traditional timeline for this vital examination has been disrupted this year, primarily due to the aftermath of the general elections, leading to unforeseen delays that have profound consequences for the students.

Beyond mere administrative inconvenience, the delay in the ETEA Scholarship Test announcement poses a significant setback for students diligently preparing for this opportunity. With each passing day, their hopes wane, and the narrow window of opportunity diminishes, casting shadows over their immediate educational prospects and long-term aspirations. The complex selection process, designed to ensure transparency and fairness, relies on timely implementation to prevent unnecessary delays. However, the current situation jeopardizes the integrity of this process and undermines the rights of deserving students.

An urgent appeal to the Chief Minister, Education Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Directorate of Secondary Education is not merely a plea for expediency; it is a demand to uphold the fundamental rights and aspirations of these deserving students.

The delay in the advertisement of the scholarship test not only hampers individual academic pursuits but also threatens the broader commitment to educational equity and social justice in the region.

The impact of the ETEA Scholarship Scheme extends far beyond individual students; it embodies a commitment to nurture talent and promote inclusivity in education. By providing equal opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds, irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status, this initiative underscores the principles of equity and fairness. Therefore, addressing the delay in the advertisement of the scholarship test is not just a matter of administrative urgency but a moral imperative to ensure that no deserving student is left behind.

As stakeholders in the education sector, we cannot afford to overlook the urgency of this matter. The future of our youth and, consequently, the future of our society hinge upon the opportunities we afford them today. By heeding this

urgent appeal and expediting the advertisement of the ETEA Scholarship Test, we can reaffirm our commitment to academic excellence and equitable access to education.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those involved in facilitating this crucial process. Your immediate action and support are indispensable in addressing the concerns of students and restoring their confidence in the promise of education.

Through the ETEA Scholarship Scheme, students can access free quality education up to class VII through F.Sc., paving the way for a future where every child can realize their full potential without bureaucratic impediments.

In conclusion, let us join hands to overcome administrative hurdles and ensure that the flame of educational opportunity continues to illuminate the path for the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Together, we can build a future where every student’s dreams are within reach, and no aspiration is left unfulfilled due to delays in administrative processes.

# Pakistanis - a tolerant, compassionate nation

PESHAWAR (APP): Despite engineered waves of extremism or sectarian and communal divides maliciously propagated by its arch enemies, Pakistanis still adhere to its noble norms creating a society living in different regions and speaking different languages.

From the shores of Karachi and Gwadar to plains in Punjab and Sindh and hilly terrains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistanis are woven into congenial brotherhood despite a few trying to malign the motherland through planted extremism.

The holy month of Ramadan is a true manifestation of this sentiment wherein people like Iqbal Khan, a 28-year-old electrician, with a smile and exudes the high spirit of sharing edibles is seen seeking solace by dolling out dates and pakora among fasting Muslims as well as non-Muslims before Aftar at Peshawar cantonment.

In traditional Peshawari attire, the motivated electrician has been distributing packets of dates, chicken pakora, rice and other edibles among fasting Muslims as well as Sikhs, Christians and others coming his way.

Demonstration of this act of generosity, love and affection for people is seen all around Pakistan during this sacred month as thousands of Pakistanis enjoy inner satisfaction from this act like Iqbal Khan.

“The soothing moment of distributing Aftar items reminds me of my late father like whom I also enjoy this practice like a true Muslim and Pakistani,” remarked Iqbal

Khan. “I strongly believe in brotherhood, interfaith harmony and tolerance in society.” “This act of winning others’ hearts and minds brings us closer and develops a tolerant society based on warmth, empathy and mutual coexistence,” he added.

Professor Dr Abdul Ghafour, former Director Sheikh Zayad Islamic Centre Peshawar sees this coherence as a fruit of religion Islam that laid great emphasis on peace, tolerance and interfaith harmony in the Charter of Madina.

“This historic charter provides religious freedom to Muslims and followers of other religions for creating a progressive, prosperous and tolerant society,” he stated.

He said Father of the Nation, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s

historic address on August 11, 1947 to members of the Constituent Assembly and our 1973 Constitution also enshrine tolerance, unity and mutual coexistence.

“The Quaid had envisioned a country where people irrespective of their religion, caste, creed and ethnicity could live freely with dignity in an environment of mutual coexistence and peace,” he said.

He said a tolerant society ensures social inclusion besides providing all citizens equal opportunities to grow in line with Paigham-e-Pakistan’s Fatwa signed by religious scholars of all schools of thought.

“This fatwa provides an umbrella to protect the country from all forms of terrorism, extremism, hatred and violence against fellow Pakistanis,” he said.

“This is our national

narrative and also rules out self-proclaimed acts of violent extremism in the name of religion as such nefarious acts are prohibited by our Shariah and weaken our country.”

Former Chairman Political Science Department, Peshawar University, Dr A H Hilali explained there is misconception in some circles about our society as many of our critics misconceive ideological differences and religious extremism.

“This misconception occasionally tarnishes our image although Pakistanis being a responsible and peace loving nation had shown great maturity, acumen and tolerance even after the Army Public School’s horrific attack on December 16, 2014,” Hilali said.

He also mentioned different terrorist attacks on

our security forces and said, Pakistan has been successfully fighting a war against terrorism for over two decades and its nation had rendered matchless sacrifices in this fight.

He said Pakistan always desired cordial relations with its neighbors but both its Eastern and western neighbors had been hostile perpetrating extremist acts against its solidarity and sovereignty.

Haroon Sarbdayal, the founding member of the Pakistan Council of World Religion said that all prophets had promoted tolerance, forgiveness and peace in their teachings, actions and deeds.

He said the opening of Kartarpur corridor by Pakistan’s Government was a historic development signifying that Pakistan was a peace loving and tolerant country where non-

Muslims including Sikh and Hindus were enjoying complete religious freedom.

He said Kartapur corridor, was first proposed in early 1999 by then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. However, it was completed in 2019, enabling Sikh pilgrims to celebrate 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Sahib.

“This initiative not only connected the Sikh community on both sides of the border but also opened a new chapter of peace, tolerance and religious freedom,” he said.

“What we need is to promote both acceptance and tolerance as it could be more effective in nailing enemies’ propaganda for falsely highlighting Pakistan as an intolerant nation.”

Sarbdayal pleaded that the misconception of an intolerant society could also be reversed by enhancing interaction, debate and dialogue among religious leaders in media and social circles besides the establishment of interfaith harmony desks at universities and colleges to equip our youth to thwart this malicious campaign.

Pakistanis are a tolerant society but unfortunately, this message could not be properly conveyed the world over to discourage elements from spreading chaos and hatred.

Therefore a holistic approach including meaningful dialogue among different stakeholders, a positive approach of media, revisiting educational curricula and speedy justice were imperative to nail the propaganda against Pakistan.





## In brief

### Women killed in Charsada

CHARSADA (INP): Firing of a young boy in joy of passing the exam has claimed life of his mother in Charsada. According to the police, 10-year-old Waleed was firing in the air after passing the exam while a bullet hit his mother accidentally who died on the spot. However, the police registered a case against the boy on the complaint of his father.

### Body found from canal

SIALKOT (APP): Rescuers recovered the body of a youth in the canal near Malkhanwala Bridge, Sambrial, here on Sunday. According to a Rescue 1122 spokesperson, the body of 24-year-old Shoaib was found by a passer-by and he informed them. Rescue 1122 pulled out the body and handed it over to the local police station.

### Four outlaws arrested

SARGODHA (APP): Police on Sunday arrested four ac-cused and recovered nar-cotics and weapons from their possession. Teams of different police stations conducted raids and ar-rested Zafar, Arshad, Hussain and Asif and recov-ered two pistols, a gun and 20 liters of liquor from them. Cases have been registered against them.

### Syed posted as MD

B A H A W A L P U R (APP): The Government of Punjab has notified the posting of senior official, Naeem Iqbal Syed as Managing Director, Cholistan Development Authority (CDA). According to official sources at the CDA, the Government of Punjab has notified the posting of Naeem Iqbal Syed as Managing Director, Cholistan Development Authority with immediate effect and until further orders. It is recalled here that Syed had also performed his duties as MD, CDA few years back. He also performed service as Secretary, Transport Department of the Government of Punjab.

### Woman hit to death

FAISALABAD (APP): A woman was hit to death in Thikriwala police limits. A Rescue 1122 spokesman said here on Sunday that 40-year-old Rukhsana Kausar, wife of Tariq Mehmood of Chak No.67-JB Sadhar, was riding a motorcycle when she fell down on the road near Merry Petrol Pump Mandi Mor on Bypass Road. In the meantime, a speedy dumper coming from the rear hit her, resulting in her instant death. Rescue 1122 handed over the body to the family for burial after completing formalities.

### UAD announces 12 holidays

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): University of Agriculture Dera Ismail Khan (UAD) on Sunday announced 12-day holidays on account of spring break and Eid-ul-Fitr. According to a notification issued here, the Spring vacations will begin on April 1 and end on April 8, 2024 and all departments will remain closed during this period. However, the holidays will be for students and Faculty only while the administrative staff will perform their routine duties during the spring vacations. Furthermore, the university will remain closed for all employees and students from April 9 to April 12, 2024 on account of Eid-ul-Fitr. The university will be reopened on April 15 as April 13 and 14 will fall on Saturday and Sunday which are off days.

# ‘Positive criticism brings better results’

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Station Commander Dera Brigadier Amir Hayat has said the establishment of peace was a must for the country's development and the menace of terrorism would be eradicated through collective efforts of the nation.

During a meeting with local journalists here, he said the achievements regarding peace in Dera Ismail Khan came after rendering great sacrifices that would be maintained at any cost.

He said that journalists have a key role in the establishment of peace in any area, adding, the journalists must play their role for peace and highlighting other regional issues through positive reporting.

He was of the view that the positive criticism brings better results. The Pakistan Army will continue to fulfill its responsibilities for the establishment of peace, he added.

During the meeting, the

media representatives paid tribute to the sacrifices of the Pakistan Army for the establishment of peace, and also assured their cooperation to maintain the atmosphere of peace through their pen.

On this occasion, Deputy Station Commander Colonel Muhammad Adeel was also present.

The station commander said that journalists should use their pen to awaken the community to maintain the atmosphere of peace in the current situation besides highlighting the importance of peace among the people.

He said the Pakistan Army, other security agencies and civil society will together thwart the ambitions of terrorists.

**Security arrangements reviewed at police stations**

Deputy Superintendent Police (DSP) Security Dera Sardar Alamgir Khan has visited various police stations to inspect the security

arrangements.

According to police spokesman, the DSP paid a visit to various police stations including Cantt and Kirri Khaisour following the directions of District Police Officer (DPO) Nasir Mehmood.

During the visit, the DSP was briefed about the security arrangements by the Station House Officer (SHO) concerned.

The SP checked the weapons and alertness of the on-duty personnel. He also issued security advisory to the Moharars of police stations.

He warned that no negligence would be tolerated regarding security matters. He also directed the SHOs to enhance the security arrangements of their respective police stations and important places.

He directed the on-duty personnel to ensure the use of bullet-proof jackets and helmets while performing their duties.

## New DPO Mansehra hosts *Khuli Kutchery*

MANSEHRA (APP): District Police Officer (DPO) Mansehra Shafiullah Gandapur on Sunday conducted a Khuli Kutchery on his third day after assuming charge of Mansehra Police, aiming to address public grievances and foster their resolution.

While speaking on the occasion, DPO Mansehra emphasized the Khuli Kutchery 's purpose to promptly resolve issues raised by the public. He asserted that addressing public concerns in a timely manner is his foremost pri-

ority, pledging full efforts to facilitate the community.

Throughout the session, attendees voiced their concerns and personal matters to DPO Mansehra. Expressing gratitude for their input, DIG Mansehra commended their efforts in shedding light on prevalent issues. He stressed the importance of community collaboration in tackling societal challenges like drug trafficking and substance abuse.

Shafiullah Gandpur issued directives to Circle ASPs and SHOs to take

decisive action against drug traffickers and handle all inquiries with professionalism and ethical integrity. He urged officers to prioritize the resolution of inquiries based on their merit.

Assuring participants, DPO Mansehra expressed confidence in promptly addressing their issues and assured them of open access to his and other officers' offices for addressing public complaints. He reaffirmed his commitment to upholding the rule of law impartially and without bias.

## Sarfraz Bugti extends greetings to Christians

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti extended his greetings to the Christian community on Easter and reaffirmed commitment to work for the social uplift and welfare of all our minorities.

In his message, the chief minister on occasion of Easter said we all equally share in the happiness of the Christian community.

He added that Easter festival is an expression of promoting brotherhood, peace and love.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti said the role of the Christian community in the creation of Pakistan and in the nation's progress and stability is remarkable.

He said the constitution of Pakistan guarantees religious freedom to all minorities and gives them

equal rights as the country is a beautiful bouquet of different religions and heritages.

Like other parts of the country, the Balochistan government guarantees freedom of belief and practices of religion, rule of law and equal protection to all minorities, including the Christian community, the chief minister said.

## Sardar Hashmat group wins DBA Dera elections

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Sardar Hashmat ur Rehman and Sardar Qaizar Khan Miankhal group won the District Bar Association (DBA) Dera elections-2024-25 with huge margin.

According to details, the elections were held under the supervision of Election Commissioner Shahaab Khan. As many as 11 votes were rejected out of total 537 cast votes.

President Rana Nadeem, Vice President Usman Ali and Librarian Qaiser were

already elected unopposed in the elections while Adnan Sadozai of Sardar Hashmat group was elected on General Secretary seat by getting 421 votes against his opponent Bilal Alizai who got 105 votes.

At the slot of joint secretary, Sheikh Mehmood ul Hasan of same group remained the winner by getting 316 votes against his opponent Chaudhry Asad, who got 216 votes.

On this occasion, the lawyers congratulated Sardar Hashmat ur

Rehman Advocate, Sardar Qaizar Khan Miankhal and all the successful candidates on their great success.

Speaking on this occasion, Sardar Qaizar Khan lauded the efforts of Election Commissioner Shahab Khan for conducting free and fair elections of DBA Dera.

He demanded of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur to announce a residential colony for lawyers community.

## Research essential to improve productivity

MULTAN (APP): Promotion of agriculture research in hill torrents of Koh-e-Suleman is of paramount importance that can help in sustaining farming by counter impacts of climate changes.

Most the farmers are hill torrent employing traditional methods of farming that fall short of maximizing the area's production potential. Climate Change is a serious challenge which poses a real threat to the country's farming.

This was stated by known agriculture expert Dr Khurram Mubeen who had been conducting research activities in hill torrents for many years.

He stated that the local people were following traditional style farming. Majority of the farmers are using old seed varieties which are also affecting the enhanced production, said Dr Khurram Mubeen.

Dr Khurram suggested a number of measures to improve farming in the area to improve productivity.

There are two types of soil in the hill torrent, hard soil and sandy soil. He proposed deep ploughing at hard soil as it would help save crops from excessive water in case of heavy rains. It will also improve soil fertility and ground water level, which is essential to promote agriculture in the region. Use of Chisel plough is good for hard soil, he hinted. There is also an impression that deep ploughing can cause soil erosion. He however rejected and stated that such field should not be irrigated directly but secondary sources.

Secondly, there should be an early warning system to impart timely information to farmers and other residents about sud-

den climatic change as heavy rain. The liaison among people of different areas in hill torrent is also essential in this regard, Khurram proposed. The farmers should do cross-ploughing.

A number of crops are being sown in the area. However, there is immense potential for pulses.

Government should also construct ponds to save water for agriculture purpose, added Dr Khurram.

He suggested farmers to grow new varieties as it would help improve production remarkably.

Dr Khurram also hinted about new soil layers of two to three feet, due to recent floods. It will also be a challenging situation. He however suggested maximum research activities in the hill torrent to enhance agriculture production and strengthen farmers economically.



HYDERABAD: A view of people preparing to commence Itikhaf inside Faizan-e-Madina during holy month of Ramazan.

### SP visits Lachi Police Station

KOHAT (APP): SP Sadar Division Tariq Khan Sunday morning visited the remote Lachi Police Station here and reviewed the security arrangements and inspected the documentary records.

SP Sadar Division also visited Muslimabad Check Post on Indus Highway and reviewed the Police checking procedure. SP Sadar met the Police personnel and inquired about their problems.

SP Sadar Division Tariq Khan urged the Police personnel to remain alert at all times and strictly follow the security SOPs.

SP Operations Sadar Division directed the police personnel to desist from any actions that would question their professional character.

### Foolproof security ensured

KHANEWAL (APP): District Police Officer (DPO) Rana Omer Farooq said that foolproof security arrangements have been made during Easter to provide a sense of security to the Christian community.

In a statement issued on Sunday, the DPO said that it was the top responsibility of the police department to protect the lives and properties of the masses.

He said that foolproof security arrangements have been made at 105 churches in the district including one of Category A, 15 of Category B, and 89 of Category C.

He said that four SDPOs, four inspectors, 30 sub-inspectors, 50 assistant sub-inspectors, and 287 constables have been deployed on security duty.

Rana Omer Farooq maintained that 176 volunteers were also performing security duties at churches.

He said that comprehensive checking of vehicles was being ensured at entry and exit points of the district while the elite force would continue patrolling around the churches.

### Police finalize security plan

MULTAN (INP): District Police have finalized security plan for Youm-e-Ali (A.S) on 21st Ramadan to maintain the law and order situation in the city.

According to City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali Dogar, a total of 12 mourning processions would be taken out in the city out of which two have been declared sensitive while 15 Majalis including two of Category A would be organized in the city. He said that more than 1850 police officials would be deployed on security duty to ensure foolproof arrangements.

He said that police reserves would remain alert to deal with any emergency like situation while CCTV cameras would be installed at Majalis and mourning procession routes. He said that a control has been set up at the police line for tight monitoring of the security arrangements.

The CPO added that drone cameras would also be used at sensitive mourning processions and Majalis. He said that he would monitor the security measures while all divisional Superintendent of Police have been made incharge of the security.

## 4 outlaws held, arms and drugs recovered

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district police have arrested four outlaws recovering illegal arms and drugs from their possession during different operations, said police spokesman on Sunday.

He said that the police was taking indiscriminate actions against all crimes on the instructions of District Police Officer (DPO) Nasir Mehmood.

As part of such actions, a team of Kirri Khaisour police station led by Paharpur Circle Syed Sagheer Abbas Gilani along

with SHO Faheem Abbas Khan arrested two suspects during a search and strike operation.

During the operation, the police checked 30 houses, 70 vehicles and bikes and 10 sensitive places.

During the checking, the police arrested one Abdul Sattar son of Ameer Umar, a resident of Chashma Pakka and recovered a single shot 12-bore rifle along with 12 cartridges.

Another accused named Mutti Ullah son of Muhammad Ashraf, a resident of Kacha Malli Khel

was arrested with a 12-bore gun along with 15 cartridges.

Meanwhile, a team of Saddar police station led by SHO Malik Sajid arrested absconder thief Zafar alias Manchara, who was wanted to police in three different theft cases.

Likewise, the Darazinda police arrested accused drug dealer recovering 530 grams of hashish and 60 grams of Ice drug from his possession.

The police registered separate cases against the arrested accused.

## QMC faces acute shortage of machinery

QUETTA (APP): Quetta Metropolitan Corporation (QMC) is facing an acute shortage of machinery and tools as the authority has not purchased new machinery and vehicles for the last thirty years.

The QMC could not collect the total waste produced per day by the city due to a shortage of staff and equipment. The total of 800 sanitary workers were carrying out cleanliness work in the city of four million people.

QMC seeking waste lifting machinery from the Provincial Disaster Management Authority as the corporation lacks of machinery and tools to launch a cleanliness drive in the city.

Talking to APP, Administrator Quetta Muhammad Hamza Shafqaat said the QMC authority had not purchased new machinery and vehicles since 1994.

He said an operation would be launched to clean the water courses and nullahs for efficient working of the sewerage system so that the rain and waste water could not cause inconvenience to the public.

Under the supervision of Administrator Quetta Muhammad Hamza Shafqaat, the corporation has collected over 10000 tons of trash from the city in a short period of 12 days.

Muhammad Hamza Shafqaat said the authority is all set to collect door-to-door garbage to make

Quetta the cleanest city within two weeks.

The commissioner said the government had made efforts to increase the waste collecting capacity of QMC by 500 tons to 1600 tons daily by outsourcing the Quetta solid waste management.

Hamza said the plan is in the pipeline to operate the solid waste management in Quetta on public private partnership basis to improve the sewage system.

He said the cleanliness drives were being carried out in every area of the city on a regular basis and the QMC was ensuring the collection and disposal of garbage in every area of the provincial capital city including Sariyab to Nawan Killi.

## Excise dept seals 1500 properties of defaulters

MULTAN (APP): The excise department started sealing of properties of defaulters and around 1500 properties were sealed for not paying pending dues during March.

Senior Taxation Officer/Admin, Khalid Hussain Qasoori, talking to APP here on Sunday said that the final warning notices were served to the defaulters first and then the sealing of properties was started to ensure collection of pending dues from them.

He said that the warning notices were served to about 17000 domestic and commercial property tax defaulters.

Qasoori stated that they had collected Rs 40 million during the month of March as the domestic and commercial units of the district had to pay Rs 200 million in property tax.

He warned that the defaulters could also face arrest warrants and confiscation of properties over not paying the pending dues.

Emphasizing on business community, commercial markets and plazas owners for ensuring payment of taxes, he said that 70 percent of the money received from property tax was spent on local development projects.

He urged them to pay the property tax immediately as responsible citizens for ensuring the uplift and basic amenities of the city and region and avert themselves from facing any legal action.

**District admin cracks down on profiteers, imposes Rs 4.4 million fines**

After the imposition of a fine amounting Rs 4.4 million on profiteers, the dis-

trict administration decided to expedite the process of raids further to discourage artificial inflation, especially in the last 10 days of Ramzan ul Mubarak.

During the ongoing month, the special price control magistrates managed to ensure the arrest of 263 shopkeepers involved in extracting undue profit by violating the price lists. Deputy Commissioner Rizwan Qadeer ordered the officers to keep checking markets on a daily basis.

He added that price lists were being made following consultation with the traders and other stakeholders. Nobody will be allowed to exploit the masses, he stated.

The persons who would be found exploiting masses would mark Eid in lock ups or jails, said official sources.

## USC achieves 80pc sale target across region

MULTAN (APP): Utility Stores Corporation (USC) achieved about 80 percent sale target so far across the region under Prime Minister Ramadan Relief Package.

Regional Manager USC Multan Region, Chaudhary Sajjad Hussain, while talking to APP here on Sunday said that the Prime Minister Ramadan Relief package 2024 was underway successfully across the region as 2,58,247 customers visited the USC stores so far to avail the government subsidy during holy month.

He said that the incumbent government was providing targeted subsidy on various commodities to masses to alleviate the financial burden of the one million people across the region. He informed that they had collected Rs 680 million out of Rs 820 million total sale target set for Multan region.

He said that flour was available at six mobile stores, seven static stores and 72 regular stores across the region to facilitate the citizens. Mr Sajjad informed that the maximum people were taking benefit from the PM

Ramadan Relief package as incumbent government enhanced PMT score upto 60. Mr Sajjad said that subsidy was being offered on 19 essential items including flour, sugar, ghee, cooking oil, rice, pulses, tea leaves, beverages and various other items. He maintained that monitoring of all subsidized items were being ensured through latest technology in order to ensure transparency.

USC RM urged the citizens to dial toll free helpline number 0800-05590 for quick redressal of the grievances.





## ‘7 tangible, 3 intangible cultural properties to UNESCO’s heritage listing’

CAMBODIA (Xinhua/APP): Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet on Sunday announced plans to nominate seven tangible and three intangible cultural properties for inscription on the UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List.

The seven properties aimed for tangible cultural heritage status include the former M-13 prison, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, Banteay Chhmar Temple, the site of Angkor Borei and Phnom Da, Preah Reach Troap Mountain historical site, Preah Khan Kampong Svay Temple, Beng Mealea Temple, and Kulen Mountain historical resort, he said.

The three properties planned for intangible cultural heritage of humanity list are Cambodian Songkran, traditional woven scarf Krama, and Khmer wedding tradition, he added.

"We will nominate these for the UNESCO world heritage listing, so our ancestors' cultural properties will be internationally recognized and preserved," Hun Manet said in a speech during the inauguration of achievements at a Buddhist pagoda in northwestern Pursat province.

He said that usually, it takes almost two years to have a property to be inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage list and a country can add only one property to the list a year.

According to the prime minister, Cambodia will submit documents to



register the Cambodian Songkran on UNESCO's list of intangible heritage in 2025 and is expected to be officially inscribed in 2026.

Songkran is a Sanskrit-derived term for the traditional New Year of the Buddhist calendar, which is celebrated in several Buddhist countries in Asia, including Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar.

Hun Manet said to date, the Southeast Asian country has four tangible cultural properties and six intangible cultural heritages listed on the

UNESCO's world heritage list. The listed tangible cultural properties include the Angkor Archaeological Park, the Preah Vihear Temple, the Temple Zone of Sambor Prei Kuk, and the Koh Ker archaeological site, he said. While the listed intangible cultural heritages are the Royal Ballet; Shbek Thom or Khmer Shadow Puppetry; tug-of-war game; Chapei Dang Veng, a long-necked, two-stringed lute; Lkhon Khol Wat Svay Andet, a dance drama at the theatre; and traditional martial art Kun Lbokator, he added.

## Catholics gather to hear Pope Francis give Easter Mass

VATICAN CITY (AFP/APP): Tens of thousands of Catholics will gather Sunday at Saint Peter's Square in Vatican City to hear Pope Francis give Easter Mass and a traditional blessing.

The 87-year-old pontiff will preside over the mass from 10:00 am (0800 GMT), pronouncing the "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) blessing at midday, with the events broadcast live around the world. Easter Sunday marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is the culmination of Holy Week, a major part of the Catholic calendar followed by 1.3 billion people.

The pope on Saturday presided over the Easter Vigil at the Vatican in front of some 6,000 people from around the world, a day

after his last-minute cancellation at a major Good Friday procession revived questions about his health.

He delivered a 10-minute homily in Italian, speaking without any undue difficulty and condemning "the walls of selfishness and indifference" in the world. At the end of the two-and-a-half-hour service he showed little sign of fatigue, taking time to greet and bless some of the worshippers. In a brief statement Friday, the Vatican had said that "to preserve his health ahead of tomorrow's vigil and the Easter Sunday mass, Pope Francis will this evening follow the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum from the Santa Marta Residence", where he lives.

The last-minute decision raised questions

about how long Francis can continue to lead the Catholic Church.

A Vatican source told AFP on Friday that there was "no particular concern" about his health, and that the decision to pull out had been "simply a measure of caution".

The Argentinian Jesuit had also cancelled his participation in the "Via Crucis" in 2023, but that followed a three-day hospital stay for bronchitis, and was announced well ahead of time. Weeks later, he underwent a hernia operation. Up until Friday, the pope had attended his various engagements throughout the week, but he recently appeared tired and has sometimes delegated speaking roles to colleagues.

Francis, who never takes

holidays, made his last trip in September, to the southern French city of Marseille. In December, he cancelled a much-anticipated attendance at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

His next scheduled trip is to Venice on April 28. The Vatican has not yet confirmed a planned trip to Asia and Pacific Ocean nations for this summer.

Francis has previously left the door open to stepping down if he can no longer do the job. That would follow the example of his immediate predecessor, Benedict XVI, who in 2013 became the first pope since the Middle Ages to voluntarily step aside. But in a memoir published this month, Francis wrote that he did "not have any cause serious enough to make me think of resigning".

## Istanbul top prize as Turkey votes in local polls

ISTANBUL (AFP/APP): Turkish voters went to the polls on Sunday in municipal elections, with all eyes on Istanbul, the national "jewel" that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hopes to pry away from the opposition.

Erdogan's road to power in Turkey began in Istanbul when he was elected mayor of the mythic city straddling Europe and Asia in 1994. His allies held the city until Ekrem Imamoglu of the secular Republican People's Party (CHP) wrested control five years ago.

As soon as he clinched re-election as president last May -- he has been head of state since 2014 -- Erdogan launched the campaign to reclaim the city of 16 million people. "Istanbul is the jewel, the treasure and the apple of our country's eye," the 70-year-old leader said at a rally in the city recently.

"Whoever wins Istanbul, wins Turkey," Erman Bakirci, a pollster

from Konda Research and Consultancy, recalled Erdogan once saying.

The Turkish president has named former environment minister Murat Kurum as his candidate.

The latest polls show that Imamoglu -- who edged out an Erdogan ally in the 2019 election that gained international headlines -- has a slight lead.

But analysts caution that opinion polls in Turkey have been wrong before and that the outcome is far from certain.

The 2019 vote was controversially annulled, but Imamoglu won the re-run vote by an even greater margin, which turned him into an instant hero for Turkey's notoriously fractured opposition and a formidable foe for Erdogan.

Observers say that if Imamoglu manages to retain the Istanbul mayor's seat, he'll be the main chal-

lenger to the ruling party in the next presidential elections, set for 2028.

Erdogan has thrown all his energy into campaigning for his candidate. The city has been plastered with posters showing Erdogan and Kurum together.

On Saturday, Erdogan appeared at three campaign rallies in the city, pressing his message that Imamoglu, whose name he never mentions, is a "part-time mayor" consumed by his presidential ambitions. "Istanbul has been left to its own devices these past five years. We hope to save it from disaster," he said before heading to prayer at the famed Hagia Sophia mosque.

Imamoglu has focused his campaign on local issues and defended his achievements in office.

"Every vote you give to the CHP will mean more metros, creches, green spaces, social benefits and investment," he has promised.

## President of Peru slams raids in luxury watch investigation

LIMA (AFP/APP): Peruvian President Dina Boluarte slammed raids on her home and office Saturday after authorities carried out overnight searches in a corruption probe centered on Rolex watches she has been wearing publicly.

Television footage showed agents with a metal bar breaking down the door of Boluarte's home in a dramatic twist to a case that erupted several weeks ago amid questions over whether she has enriched herself illegally while serving in the government.

The very unpopular Boluarte, in power since December 2022, has not explained how she got the watches, saying only that were the fruit of hard work.

"The measure taken early this morning is arbitrary, disproportionate and abusive," a defiant Boluarte, who was at the presidential palace as agents raided her home, said in an address to the nation.

A lawyer for Boluarte said police found watches in her office at the government palace.

"They did not take them away. They were noted and photographed. There were around 10, and among them were some nice ones but I cannot say if they were Rolex," attorney Mateo Castaneda told radio station RPP. Boluarte has said she will not address the issue publicly until she has given a sworn statement to prosecutors on April 5.

Authorities launched an investigation this month after news program La Encerrona drew attention to pictures of Boluarte sporting luxury watches at public events while serving as vice president under then-president Pedro Castillo and as development minister in 2021.

The program said it examined a period that ended in December 2022 when Castillo was impeached and arrested and Boluarte took power.

Saturday's raid, a joint operation between the police and the prosecutor's office, was broadcast on local television channel Latina.

Government agents could be seen surrounding the house in the Surquillo

District of Lima while officers blocked oncoming traffic. The raid was requested by the public prosecutor and authorized by the Supreme Court of Preparatory Investigation.

It came after prosecutors refused Boluarte's request for more time to respond to a subpoena demanding she furnish proof of purchase for her watches.

Prosecutors also want to know if she has reported the Rolex watches on her income statements.

Already facing declining approval ratings -- currently around 10 percent -- Boluarte was plunged into a fresh political crisis by the probe into whether she has illegally enriched herself while in office.

If she is indicted in the case, a trial could not take place until after her term ends in July 2026 or she is impeached, according to the constitution.

Congress potentially could seek her dismissal on grounds of "moral incapacity," but that would require the unlikely cooperation of the right-leaning groups that control the parliament -- and are Boluarte's main

support -- with their left-wing rivals.

The government comptroller has announced it would review Boluarte's asset declarations from the past two years to search for any irregularities.

Boluarte has staunchly defended herself.

"I entered the Government Palace with clean hands, and I will leave it with clean hands," she said last week.

Responding to questions about how she could afford such expensive timepieces on a public salary, the former lawyer said they were a product of working hard since she was 18 years old.

Boluarte became Peru's first woman president after leftist leader Castillo tried to dissolve Congress and rule by decree, leading to his quick ouster and arrest.

Violent protests demanding Boluarte step down and fresh elections be held followed, with almost 50 people killed in the ensuing crackdown. Prosecutors are investigating her on charges that security forces used excessive and lethal force.

## Mexican police arrest three after girl's murder sparks lynching

MEXICO CITY (AFP/APP): Mexican authorities have arrested three suspects in the murder of an eight-year-old girl, after an outraged mob in the tourist town of Taxco lynched a woman accused in the crime.

A man and a minor were arrested on Saturday "for the crime of femicide", Guerrero state prosecutors said in a press statement, along with another man the day before on similar charges.

The girl's family had received anonymous telephone calls demanding a ransom after she disappeared on Wednesday, Mexican media reported, quoting a relative.

Residents on Thursday blocked one of the main streets of Taxco, which has been plagued by organized crime, after the child's body was found on a highway.

Security camera footage had circulated earlier showing suspects allegedly putting a black bag in the trunk of a car, prompting suspicions that it contained the girl's body.

A mob gathered outside a house where a woman

and two men were located, demanding justice.

They dragged out the trio, doused them in gasoline, and beat them with sticks.

The woman died and the two men were hospitalized.

The prosecutor's office did not clarify whether the men attacked by the angry mob were among those arrested.

"My solidarity is with the family (of the minor), the future is not understood without justice," the governor of Guerrero, Evelyn Salgado, said Friday on X, formerly Twitter.

Worsening crime in Taxco led the United States in January to ban its government employees from visiting the city, located about 170 kilometers (105 miles) from Mexico City.

Kidnappings and murders are daily occurrences in Mexico, although adult men are the most common victims, making the young girl's death particularly shocking.

There are regular lynchings of alleged criminals, which experts link to the widespread perception of impunity in the crime-ravaged country.

## NY 'trash revolution' targets overflowing waste, and the rats feasting on it

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): New York City is iconic for its yellow taxis, pizza slices, bright lights on Broadway and its rats.

Mountains of black garbage bags line cramped city sidewalks, a feast for the millions of rodents who call New York home.

But such unsanitary eyesores could soon be a remnant of the city's past, with local authorities launching a "trash revolution" to clean up the streets. Since the beginning of March more than 200,000 food-selling businesses have been required to use hard-lidded bins to store the millions of tons of garbage they produce annually. By 2026 residential buildings will also be required to use such containers, a plan inspired by the approach used in cities including Barcelona, Madrid and Buenos Aires.

A pilot program is underway in Manhattan's northern Harlem neighborhood. The city will eventually lose some 150,000 parking spaces -- an eternal sore spot for many New Yorkers -- as a result of the new container rollout, but advocates say any protest

might be diluted by the pleasing results of the clean-up. "It's a change for me," said Ron James, a Harlem resident. "I come in at night, and a lot of times I have to walk in the streets to avoid the rats walking on the sidewalk. Now, he added, "I'm barely seeing rats on the streets."

Another resident, Maxwell Rodriguez, said he's grateful his community has stopped getting fined when garbage bags end up in the street.

The hard-lidded containers should also dissuade human scavengers, who often rip open plastic bags while searching for bottles or cans to sell for cash.

The city of 8.5 million people and the millions of tourists who visit each year produce some 20 million tons of trash a day, more than half of it from businesses, according to City Council figures.

If a day's trash bags were lined up, they would reach 27 miles (43 kilometers), five miles more than the perimeter of Manhattan island, the council said.

Businesses use a private waste-collection system,

while the nearly 10,000 employees of the city's sanitation department deal with trash from residences, schools and hospitals.

New York is one of the most densely occupied cities on the planet -- particularly Manhattan, whose 1.7 million inhabitants mostly live in high-rise buildings with no space in between. Finding room for large containers that can accommodate the buying habits of a consumption-crazed society, accustomed to using and then quickly discarding what they buy, is a complex challenge.

It is a "big problem," said Steven Cohen, a professor of environmental and public affairs at Columbia University. Practically, the only place containers can be placed is on sidewalks, intruding on the space used by pedestrians, or in streets, further complicating traffic.

In some blocks, the containers will take up a full one-fourth of sidewalk space, experts estimate.

The city will have to introduce specially adapted trucks to lift and remove the new containers. At present, that work is done by

hand, one bag at a time -- a demanding physical job that takes a toll on sanitation workers.

These workers "deserve a solution that protects their bodies," said city sanitation commissioner Jessica Tisch, just as "every New Yorker deserves a solution that cleans their streets."

Since the closure of the world's largest landfill -- in the New York borough of Staten Island, in 2001 -- the city's trash has ended up in a network of waste-to-energy facilities or landfills in other states as far distant as South Carolina, more than 700 miles away.

"Nobody likes to be near a waste transfer station," said Columbia's Cohen, a specialist in sustainability. But he sees hope in the mountains of trash. He believes a paradigm shift, aided by artificial intelligence, can turn waste into a major new energy source. At present, he adds, less than 10 percent of all trash is recycled. With less than three percent of organic waste currently being recycled, the city has begun a plan to provide special compost containers -- which will become mandatory starting next year.

## Bodies of eight Chinese migrants found on beach in Mexico

OAXACA (AFP/APP): The bodies of eight Chinese migrants were found on a beach in southern Mexico after the boat they were traveling in capsized, officials said Saturday.

The seven women and a man were aboard a boat operated by a Mexican that left Tapachula in Chiapas state, on the border with Guatemala, on

Thursday, the prosecutor's office added.

The shore where the bodies were discovered on Friday in the state of Oaxaca sits along a route frequently used by people trying to reach the United States. Another migrant survived the ordeal. There was no word on what happened to the Mexican driving the boat. Thousands of undocumented

migrants -- often fleeing violence and poverty in their home countries -- transit through Mexico each year trying to reach the US border. Many are from Central America.

According to official data, migrants apprehended last year while crossing Mexico also included citizens of China, India and Uzbekistan and other

countries far from the Americas.

The rising numbers of migrants have overwhelmed Mexican immigration facilities and shelters, while the government has come under increased pressure from the United States to fight the flow as illegal immigration takes center stage in the US presidential election campaign.

## Romania centre explores world's most powerful laser

MAGURELE, Romania (AFP/APP): "Ready? Signal sent!"

In the control room of a research centre in Romania, engineer Antonia Toma activates the world's most powerful laser, which promises revolutionary advances in everything from the health sector to space. The laser at the centre, near the Romanian capital Bucharest, is operated by French company Thales, using Nobel prize-winning inventions.

France's Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland of Canada won the 2018 Nobel Physics Prize for harnessing the power of lasers for advanced precision instruments in corrective eye surgery and in industry. "The sharp beams of laser light have given us new opportunities for deepening our knowledge about the world and shaping it," said the Nobel Academy's citation. At the centre, in front of a wall of screens displaying light beams, Toma checks a series of indicators before starting the count-down. On the other side of the glass, long rows of

red and black boxes house two laser systems. "I will not lie. From time to time, things can get a little stressful," 29-year-old Toma told AFP during a recent on-site press visit. "But it's also very joyful to work here. And we are very happy that we have results" as teams of international researchers come to the centre, she added.

Nobel prize winner Mourou confessed he was "very moved" by his "incredible odyssey" -- from the United States where he spent 30 years, to bringing this project to fruition in Europe.

It was born in the 2000s out of the European Union's Infrastructure ELI project.

"We start from a small luminous seed with very, very little energy, which will be amplified millions and millions of times," said Mourou, 79, trying to give a sense of the "huge step taken", the "phenomenal powers" achieved.

Scientists have always pushed to create more powerful lasers. By the mid-1980s however, they

had hit a wall, as they could not increase the power without destroying what was amplifying the beam.

That was when Mourou and his then-student Strickland invented a technique called Chirped-Pulse Amplification (CPA), which managed to boost power while keeping the intensity safe.

It works by stretching an ultra-short laser pulse in time, amplifying it, and squeezing it together again, creating the shortest and most intense laser pulses the world has ever seen.

Already it has been applied in corrective eye surgery, but it has also opened the way for scientists to continue pushing the boundaries of laser power.

"We will use these ultra-intense pulses to produce much more compact and less expensive particle accelerators" to destroy cancer cells, said Mourou.

Other possible applications include treating nuclear waste by reducing the duration of its radioactivity, or cleaning up the debris accumulat-

ing out in space, he added. For Mourou, just as the last century was that of the electron, the 21st century will be that of the laser.

The scale of the operation at the research centre is dizzying.

The system is capable of reaching a peak of 10 petawatts (10 to the power of 15 watts) for an ultra-short time, in the order of a femtosecond (one millionth of a billionth of a second).

It took "450 tons of equipment" -- carefully installed -- to get an "exceptional level of performance", said Franck Leibreich, laser solution managing director at Thales.

The high-tech building housing the centre cost 320 million euros (\$350 million), mainly financed by the EU.

Thales bills it as the largest investment ever made in scientific research in Romania.

Meanwhile, countries including France, China and the United States are already advancing their own projects to manufacture even more powerful lasers.



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Gaza War and US's Dual Diplomacy

The US in recent days authorized the transfer of billions of dollars of modern bombs and fighter jets to Israel to fuel ongoing conflict in Gaza. The decision on weapons sales follows a visit by the Israeli Defense Minister to Washington this week during which he discussed Israel's weapons requirements with his US counterpart. The new arms packages include more than 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs and 500 MK82 500-pound bombs, primarily used to destroy ground targets such as enemy bankers, arms storages, and ammunition dumps. In contrast, in the Gaza case, this lethal ammunition is being used by the Israeli military to target residential complexes, hospitals, shelter homes, food, and water resources to kill common Palestinians through direct assaults together with starvation and famine. According to a Washington Post report, the US government provides \$ 3.8 billion in annual military assistance to Israel which performs the duties of a regional policeman and a strong US military outpost in the Middle East. The Defense analysts view this latest arms sale as vital for an anticipated Israeli onslaught in Rafah. Israel's ruthless offensive and pre-planned genocide of Palestinians continued over the past five months and a half which not only turned the Gaza enclave into a leap of rubble but flared up an acute famine in the territory. Israeli bombardment and inhumane atrocities against innocent Gazans resulted in nearly 33,000 deaths, and more than 77,000 wounded in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched an invasion against Hamas on October 8, last year. Israel- Hamas clash has created a humanitarian crisis throughout the enclave with little aid entering. Several Western nations including the US, the UK, Germany, and Jordan launched an airstop campaign to provide essential food items to bereaved Palestinians. Still, those efforts remained short of satisfying the urgent needs of over 2 million people currently incarcerated in an open prison in Gaza. Blocked by the Israeli troops from all directions without entering a drop of water, a food grain, a fever or pain relief tablet for wounded, elderly persons, or children. Extreme levels of hunger and severe malnutrition are widespread in Gaza, where about 2.2 million Palestinians are embattled with a rouge Army and famine simultaneously. Washington's Middle East policy particularly the US strategy concerning the Palestine dispute had always contradicted Americans' claims relating to high moral and human rights, wherein the United States had been advocating for democracy, international justice, religious freedom, and civil liberties for all including foreign nations and marginalized societies across the world. Strangely, the White House defends civil rights and promotes freedom movements in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Afghanistan, Iran, Cuba, Russia, Belarus, Myanmar, and several other destinations around the globe, but behaves all out opposite to its stated policies and resolutely stood beside with the occupying forces and assists oppressor with massive arms and ammunition to fuel their killing spree of oppressed societies whom's right to self-determination is categorically acknowledged by the United Nations and widely accepted by the global community. Unfortunately, the Biden administration has played the role of a witch hunt and massively contributed to Israel's apartheid, war crimes, and inhuman atrocities against innocent Palestinians by sabotaging peace efforts at the UN and fueling ruthlessness bombardment in Gaza. The United States has been rushing air defenses and munitions to Israel, despite criticism at home and abroad which provided Israel with a sense of impunity and fearlessness. Amid such a high level of strategic alignment and political affiliation with Tel Aviv, the US's airstop operation over Gaza and lobbying for a temporary truce seem to be no more than deceptive techniques and outright propaganda to tag high morality and motivate Arab allies about US's neutrality in Palestine dispute. Although, a months-long war has destroyed the Gaza Strip and brought endless miseries to the Palestinians yet this conflict has brought the worst impact on Israel's economy, society, and relations with other nations that singled out the Jewish state in the comity of the nations due to its ongoing barbarism against innocent civilians. The so-called victims of the holocaust currently waging a genocide on an oppressed nation which rendered them void of their Semitism and the true spirit of Judaism. The Gaza conflict will end soon but it has exposed the draconian faces of the so-called great civilizations to the world.

Fake Medicines and DRAP's Dogma

The major operations of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Peshawar Zone are currently underway against the fake drug manufacturers and sellers as six inquiries have been registered against the elements involved in the sale of fake medicines. According to the agency's spokesman, the raids were conducted by Composite Circle Mardan and Abbottabad, at various medical stores located in Thakot, Battagram, Abbottabad, Topi, and Swabi. The authorities recovered a large number of fake and unregistered medicines during the raids, while the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) authorities sealed fake and unregistered medicines on the spot and sent them to the laboratory. Meanwhile, several medical stores were also sealed and inquiries have been registered against the accused. As claimed, special raiding teams have been constituted by the FIA in all circles to launch a nationwide crackdown against the sale of fake and unregistered medicines in all parts of the country. Like all other sectors of our national economy, the health sector, and the pharmaceutical industry have been struck into professional theft, dishonesty, mingling, and impurification of the products in greed for money and rush to be rich in a short period. Unfortunately, human life has become one of the cheapest things in today's Pakistan, wherein outdated items and fake medicines are being supplied in replace of precious life-saving drugs to heart, and diabetes patients, and sick persons on death beds embattled with cancer, kidney dialysis, and other chronic diseases. Although, such social evils are common in other societies but the matter becomes worse when our LEAs and concerned departments fail to implement government policies and court orders relating to governance, regulation, and writ of the law/ government in the country. A similar campaign was launched by the DRAP in collaboration with the Police and the FIA in September 2022, during which several dozen culprits were arrested, numerous shops were sealed, and heavy fines were imposed on miscreants. Unfortunately, crimes have grown many folds and the current situation is worse than ever before, which shows a weakness on the part of the government, impunity of the criminals, and malignance of our national institutions which always failed in fulfillment of their primary responsibility throughout history. Substandard medicines, hoarding, smuggling, price hikes, black marketing of life-saving drugs, and nonavailability of essential medicines are common practices in the pharmaceutical industry and medicine suppliers in all parts of the country. There is an urgent need for concerted efforts to safeguard public health by ensuring that only genuine and registered medications reach the population. The concerned authorities must escape the first crime last policy and no miscreants ever escape strong punishments from the government which is the essence of successful regulation and a guarantee for no crime in the society.

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The urgent need for water diplomacy amid a decline in global water security

Hafed Al-Ghwel

March 22 was World Water Day. The theme this year was “Water for Peace,” emphasizing the critically important role of water diplomacy in efforts to foster cooperation and avert conflicts related to the intensifying hydro-politics of our planet.

The dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam serves as a pertinent case study for understanding the ever-evolving dynamics of hydro-diplomacy during mediation processes, and promoting the sustainable management of trans-boundary water resources.

The prolonged back and forth between Cairo and Addis Ababa is not simply an isolated squabble in a rather restless part of the world. At its core, the dispute over the dam encapsulates a complex interplay between the urgency of developmental aspirations and the imperative of water security.

The dam project represents a watershed moment, no pun intended, for Ethiopia and potentially the entire Nile Basin. As the country grapples with the imperative need to foster development amid the recurring specter of severe drought, the dam represents a centerpiece of its strategy to harness the resources within its borders to help uplift the nation.

More than 85 percent of the Nile's waters originate from the Ethiopian highlands, and the nation's desire to capitalize on this resource reveals a broader regional narrative: the right to development balanced against the imperative of equitable water utilization.

From Ethiopia's perspective, the dam is not merely an infrastructure project, it is a national endeavor that embodies the country's aspirations for economic development. The project promises to double the nation's capacity to generate electricity, while providing a significant boost to the economy and substantially reducing poverty rates.

It has galvanized Ethiopians at home and abroad, fostering a sense of national unity of purpose in efforts to finance its construction. Beyond the provision of electric power, the dam is envisaged as a mechanism for better management of Nile waters, offering potential benefits such as drought mitigation and reduced salinity for countries within the river's basin.

The implications of the project extend far beyond the borders of Ethiopia, however, inspiring other Nile Basin countries to contemplate similar initiatives.

The construction of the dam provides a blueprint for harnessing river resources for developmental purposes, which stands in stark contrast to the situation in previous decades when diplomatic and legal hindrances, rooted in colonial-era agreements, stifled such ambitions. Countries upstream of the Nile, which historically have been sidelined from utilizing the river's resources as a result of geopolitical constraints, might view Ethiopia's endeavors as a precedent for championing their own hydroelectric projects.

Nevertheless, the trajec-

tory of the dam project underscores a critical need for a new paradigm in Nile Basin cooperation. The concerns over the effect of the dam on water flow into Egypt, a country almost entirely dependent on the Nile for its water supply, highlights the complex nature of transboundary water management in a region where historical rights, developmental needs, and climate change intersect.

One does owe it to Cairo to lend an empathetic ear to its protests. The upstream location of the dam presents a rather complex dilemma because the Nile is not merely a river for Egypt, it represents the very sinew of Egyptian civilization, supporting the agricultural and economic activities of a country in

balancing act between Ethiopia's legitimate aspirations to utilize its own natural resources to help combat widespread poverty and stimulate economic growth, and Egypt's critical need to ensure its access to Nile waters remains unimpeded.

Ethiopia's stance, fueled by a desire to improve the living standards of its people through the hydroelectric power provided by the dam, stands in marked contrast to Egypt's sense of apprehension that the dam will significantly affect a water supply upon which it depends heavily for household and commercial uses.

The effective application of water diplomacy is therefore imperative for fostering regional stability, trust, cooperation, and sustainable development

**The essence of the dispute hinges on the tricky balancing act between Ethiopia's legitimate aspirations to utilize its own natural resources to help combat widespread poverty and stimulate economic growth, and Egypt's critical need to ensure its access to Nile waters remains unimpeded. Ethiopia's stance, fueled by a desire to improve the living standards of its people through the hydroelectric power provided by the dam, stands in marked contrast to Egypt's sense of apprehension that the dam will significantly affect a water supply upon which it depends heavily for household and commercial uses.**

**The effective application of water diplomacy is therefore imperative for fostering regional stability, trust, cooperation, and sustainable development across Africa's second-largest hydrographic basin, which is home to nearly 600 million people and which generates a combined gross domestic product of \$985 billion. Such diplomacy, grounded in the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization that causes no significant harm to any party, emerges as the most viable path for resolving this dilemma. After all, the very essence of water diplomacy lies in its ability to recognize and acknowledge the entwined fates of riparian states bound by a shared, critical resource, and to capitalize on them. It thrives on the principle that cooperative engagement and mutual understanding can open the sluices in channels for the de-escalation and resolution of disputes.**

which rainfall is rare. The construction and filling of the dam by authorities in Ethiopia have therefore stirred deep-rooted fears within Egypt, which is the 10th-most water-stressed country in the world. Given its almost total reliance on the Nile for water, any disruption or alteration to the flow of the river is perceived as a direct threat to its national security, by potentially exacerbating an already precarious water-scarcity situation.

The essence of the dispute hinges on the tricky

riparian states bound by a shared, critical resource, and to capitalize on them. It thrives on the principle that cooperative engagement and mutual understanding can open the sluices in channels for the de-escalation and resolution of disputes.

However, it requires a shift from zero-sum perceptions toward a more cooperative, basin-wide management approach that recognizes both the developmental imperatives of upstream countries, such as Ethiopia, and the water-security concerns of downstream nations, such as Egypt.

A cooperative approach, underpinned by a clearly defined legal framework for the management of the Nile, can provide a pathway to address the competing interests of Egypt and Ethiopia, and ensure the sustainable utilization of shared water resources while promoting regional stability.

Such a framework could include mechanisms for the regular exchange of hydrological data between Ethiopia and Egypt, assurances about minimum flows of water during periods of drought, and a collaborative decision-making process governing the operation of the dam.

Furthermore, such constructive engagement could also explore other related mutual benefits beyond operation of the dam itself, such as joint investments in water efficiency, renewable energy, and climate-adaptation projects across the Nile basin.

It should be emphasized that water diplomacy does not merely imply negotiations about the technicalities of dam operations or water allocations, but also encompasses efforts to reconcile the identities that upstream and downstream countries have crafted around a shared water resource.

Used effectively, hydro-diplomacy will provide the bridge between Egypt's legitimate concerns about its hydro-political stability in a water-stressed region, and Ethiopia's sovereign right to pursue national development, given the prevailing socioeconomic problems it faces.

Beyond those two countries, clever diplomacy will also afford all Nile Basin countries the opportunity to transcend a zero-sum game by forging a narrative of shared benefits and collective security against the backdrop of the intensifying effects of climate change.

By facilitating inclusive dialogue, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting equitable sharing of benefits, hydro-diplomacy can become a linchpin in efforts to mitigate enduring tensions by steering disputes toward sustainable solutions before it is too late.

The increasing incidence of droughts and unprecedented flooding as a result of climate change further complicates disputes related to transboundary water resources. As climate- and water-related challenges grow, the imperative need for proactive, strategic water diplomacy to address the multifaceted effects of an increasingly variable climate on shared resources becomes apparent.

At last, a UN Security Council Resolution over Gaza, but what's next?

Yossi Mekelberg

There was something beyond infuriating about the slowness, and even more so the cynical manner, with which discussions about a UN Security Council resolution calling for a truce in the war in Gaza were conducted.

It took five attempts before a draft resolution was passed, after four were vetoed, three of them by the US and one by Russia and China. Meanwhile, the direct victims of this big-power game were the entire Palestinian population of Gaza and the Israeli hostages still held by Hamas.

This situation made a mockery of the Security Council, a body that is assigned the task of maintaining international peace and security but which over the years has repeatedly failed to achieve this objective. Instead it has turned into a talking shop in which its five permanent members — the US, the UK, Russia, China and France — goad and cancel each other through endless rhetoric and their power to veto any decision.

Last Monday, a resolution finally passed, thanks to the US abstaining from the vote, that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during the month of Ramadan that is “respect- ed by all parties, leading to a sustainable, lasting ceasefire.” It also demanded “the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.”

Yet the fighting continues to rage. The path to reach this resolution was excruciating but the bigger question remains how to make it count. In other words, is it enforceable?

Regardless of how one reads the text of the resolution, it could and should have been agreed and adopted weeks, if not months, ago.

In the end, it might have helped that the successful resolution was drafted by the 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council; at least it saved the blushes of China, Russia, and the US for their prior failures to reach an agreement on a resolution.

From the outset, there was no draft resolution that could possibly satisfy the requirements of the main antagonists in this war, Israel and Hamas, or the three major powers. Russia and China insisted on a resolution that demanded a permanent ceasefire, while the US was determined to include explicit condemnation of Hamas.

The priority should always have been a focus on saving lives, ending the misery of those held captive by Hamas and its allies, and rescuing the entire population of Gaza from the brutality of the war.

Civilians should never be mere pawns caught in the crossfire between warring sides. When innocent people in their thousands are losing their lives, when hospitals and schools are becoming battlefields, when millions are facing famine with no adequate medical help available, a call for an immediate ceasefire is a moral imperative, as is the demand to free all hostages who are going through hell at the hands of their captors.

It is the duty of the international community, led by the Security Council, to ensure that a truce is called, hostages are returned home, and sufficient humanitarian aid gets through to those who need it so desperately, even before the pursuit of accountability for the ongoing killings and destruction.

A permanent ceasefire, and beyond that a horizon for lasting peace, should remain the ultimate target, one that ensures the atrocities of Oct. 7 and the disproportionate response by the Israeli army will never happen again.

Admittedly, this will require a gradual deescalation of the present situation, starting with the injection of some rational

behavior after nearly six months during which death and destruction have reigned supreme.

Israel's rejection of the resolution and Hamas' support for it were diametrically opposed but neither reaction offered any sign they have eventual peace in their hearts.

On top of this, the US immediately described the resolution as “nonbinding,” which implied that there was no legal obligation to abide by it, thereby undermining the efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement.

Nevertheless, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directed his rage at Washington anyway for abstaining from the vote, thereby allowing the resolution to pass.

He canceled a planned visit by a senior delegation to the White House to discuss Israel's plan to launch a ground assault on the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, which the Biden administration strongly opposes, especially in the absence of any viable proposal for the evacuation of civilians sheltering there.

Pulling the plug on discussions with the US over Rafah might have been a convenient way for Netanyahu to use the US abstention from the Security Council vote to avoid difficult conversations in Washington about the planned military incursion in Rafah. Yet it was a clear case of “cutting off your nose to spite your face,” because Israeli authorities desperately need the support of Washington as they become increasingly isolated in the international arena.

Despite Netanyahu subsequently rowing back on his decision to cancel the visit by the delegation, it was a clear indication of his incoherent state of mind, and the fact that his own domestic political calculations take precedence over Israel's national interests, including efforts to bring home the hostages.

Hamas, meanwhile, is keen on a ceasefire but wants a permanent one. It is under severe military pressure and the support it has among Palestinians is on the decline compared with where it stood at the beginning of the war. However, some of its leaders are fully aware that a ceasefire will not be their savior, not politically and perhaps not militarily either.

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 this week was a small step forward, then, even if it was too little and, for many people who have lost their lives or loved ones, too late.

Moreover, even if both sides fully comply with the requirements of the resolution, the month of Ramadan is more than halfway through. This means that at best it would be a two-week truce, and unless negotiations that are taking place outside of the United Nations system are successful, we will be back to square one, with the danger that Israel might feel it needs to rush to “finish the job.”

The resolution should therefore serve more as a springboard for accelerating negotiations on a longer-term truce that also includes agreements to exchange Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons, to allow a massive increase in deliveries of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and to create the momentum needed for a transition to a permanent ceasefire, followed by the reconstruction of Gaza.

It is left for those with influence on either or both of the combatants to apply pressure on them to comply with the Security Council resolution. In the final analysis, a worse outcome than no resolution at all would be to have one that is ignored — something that this international body is not without previous experience of.



# The shifting contours of a multipolar Middle East

Consensus is not always the natural outcome in discourse related to the Middle East. However, most theorists agree that the end of the Cold War profoundly reshaped the region's geopolitics.

The transition reflected the broader global shift from a bipolar world during the Cold War to a more fragmented and diversified geopolitical landscape. This change left a vacuum that allowed the US to become the predominant power and set the stage for other nations to make their presence felt.

Around this time, countries in the Middle East began to assert more significant influence over regional politics, economies, and security matters. Their ambitions and actions contributed to a multipolar dynamic, in which several states wielded considerable power and pursued their interests, often independently or in competition.

Moreover, emerging global players, particularly China and Russia, contributed to what academic Patricia Karam calls "a burgeoning multipolar order in the Middle East." Fluctuations in US foreign policy, including moments of retreat or strategic "pivots" away from the Middle East, created opportunities for other powers to fill the gaps.

While there are counter-arguments to this premise, the increasing US focus on the Asia-Pacific region and Washington's adoption of a more isolationist stance under certain administrations have fueled this perception by reducing the American footprint in the Middle East and allowing other powers to step in.

Rapid economic and social changes within the region have also played a role. The push for economic diversification, techno-

logical advancement, and social reform in some countries has shifted internal dynamics and external relationships, influencing the region's multipolar nature.

Many Middle Eastern countries are making significant efforts to diversify their economies beyond a reliance on oil, thereby altering the region's internal dynamics and external economic relationships, and contributing to this multipolar landscape.

It is apparent, then, that this transition to a multipolar

***Rapid economic and social changes within the region have also played a role. The push for economic diversification, technological advancement, and social reform in some countries has shifted internal dynamics and external relationships, influencing the region's multipolar nature. Many Middle Eastern countries are making significant efforts to diversify their economies beyond a reliance on oil, thereby altering the region's internal dynamics and external economic relationships, and contributing to this multipolar landscape. It is apparent, then, that this transition to a multipolar region is the result of internal developments and broader global geopolitical shifts. The region is characterized by a complex web of security pacts and military alliances that often cross traditional lines of alliance. Moreover, sociopolitical movements and changes, from the Arab Spring to the ongoing reforms across the region, are also reshaping the internal dynamics of Middle Eastern states.***

lar region is the result of internal developments and broader global geopolitical shifts. The region is characterized by a complex web of security pacts and military alliances that often cross traditional lines of alliance.

Moreover, sociopolitical movements and changes, from the Arab Spring to the ongoing reforms across the region, are also reshaping the internal dynamics of Middle Eastern states. These movements can alter the power balance within and between

Ehtesham Shahid

countries, influencing the multipolar structure of the region.

A recent paper published by the Foreign Policy Research Institute posited that certain situations have persisted in the region even amid these transformations. As a result, the US and regional actors have continued to doggedly pursue their interests, often at the expense of their rivals.

This paper suggests that the Chinese doctrine of a

tionships. However, multipolarity is neither exclusive nor new to the Middle East.

In contemporary geopolitics, identifying a strictly unipolar region, where a single state exercises dominant influence over all aspects of power (military, economic, and cultural) without any significant challenge from any other state, is increasingly rare, as a result of globalization, interdependence, and the rise of regional powers. Certain regions do however exhibit unipolar tendencies

each of these periods turned the region into a theater for competition to expand control and influence over strategic territories, resources, and trade routes. The resulting rivalries shaped the political, cultural, and religious landscapes in the Middle East.

Following the First World War, the region experienced a new form of multipolarity through the establishment of mandates under British and French control, and the rise of independent states. The Second World War intensified the strategic importance of the Middle East due to its oil resources and strategic location.

Throughout these periods, the Middle East was rarely dominated by a single power; instead, it often found itself at the intersection of competing interests and influences, both from within and outside the region.

This historical context underscores its long-standing multipolar characteristics, which have continued to evolve to the present day. Multipolarity perhaps suits the requirements of a region as complex as the Middle East, as middle and smaller powers can have significant influence in a multipolar world.

Bulgarian politician and diplomat Nickolay Mladenov appropriately describes middle powers as "the lynchpins of cooperation in the intricate tapestry of international relations, wielding their influence to build bridges, foster peace, and drive progress."

He says they bring "diplomatic finesse and adaptability" to the fore. In the Middle East, this can be easier said than done. In these torrid times, however, a multipolar region would probably perform better in building bridges, fostering peace, and driving progress.

# Is collective defense doomed eventually to descend into all-out global conflict?

Khaled Abou Zahr

Germany's lead. Bulgaria followed suit in 1915. As we know, it was the entry of the US into the war in 1917 that eventually brought it to an end.

In the aftermath of the war, most countries rejected defense alliances because they considered them the catalyst that had forced so many nations to enter the conflict instead of mitigating the risks.

This is partly true, yet the Second World War broke out just two decades later despite this. As we all know, the horrors and the violent expansionist policy of the Nazi regime pushed the world into war and, once again, it was to a great extent the US entry into the war that eventually ended it, along with the Soviet Union squeezing Germany on the Eastern Front.

And so, Europe to this day is still under the protection of the US. It remains

an additional burden on the US and its military forces.

In short, we are at risk of seeing the stability the world has known since the end of the Second World War come to an end.

As the debates in the US continue about the country's role in a changing world, we need to acknowledge that this role of protector has encouraged unilateral decision-making in Washington when it comes to strategic geopolitical issues.

This is why it is important for the US to develop better regional partnerships in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and Asia with what analysts like to describe as "middle powers." I prefer the term "supra-regional powers."

This transition will not be an easy one because of the differences between the US and its allies in terms of sheer military power. But the right degree of balance between the US and its

***Italy, which was initially aligned with the Triple Alliance, opted to remain neutral at the outset of the war. However, it joined the Triple Entente in 1915, enticed by territorial promises. The Ottoman Empire entered the war in October 1914 on the side of the Central Powers, following Germany's lead. Bulgaria followed suit in 1915. As we know, it was the entry of the US into the war in 1917 that eventually brought it to an end. In the aftermath of the war, most countries rejected defense alliances because they considered them the catalyst that had forced so many nations to enter the conflict instead of mitigating the risks. This is partly true, yet the Second World War broke out just two decades later despite this. As we all know, the horrors and the violent expansionist policy of the Nazi regime pushed the world into war and, once again, it was to a great extent the US entry into the war that eventually ended it, along with the Soviet Union squeezing Germany on the Eastern Front. And so, Europe to this day is still under the protection of the US. It remains dependent on***  
***Washington for its defense, and it is this American backing and support for NATO that has ensured the alliance serves as a true deterrent.***

dependent on Washington for its defense, and it is this American backing and support for NATO that has ensured the alliance serves as a true deterrent.

This superior level of power, along with the sacrifices made by the American military for the sake of European stability, has undoubtedly put the US in a position where it believes unilateral decision-making has become the easiest way to go.

Risks of greater conflicts are increasing around the globe but we notice, strangely, that once again, as in previous global conflicts, the epicenter is Europe rather than any other regions that are considered much more unstable and violent. This places

partners is required to help find solutions that can avoid conflicts and war.

Moreover, there is a need for more stable and consistent US interactions that strike a balance between the extremes of unilateral, over-muscular decision-making, and yielding to regional bullies, which encourages their bad behavior.

Consistent and true engagement by the US with its partners will provide support through deterrence and help keep regional bad actors under control.

This in turn will require regional powers to make a strong commitment to shouldering more of the burden of their own security and defense. This is the only true deterrent.

# We must take heed of the air war in Ukraine and prepare for the future of warfare

More than two years into the war in Ukraine, the front lines are mostly static, at least for now. Russian and Ukrainian forces have both built elaborate defensive lines consisting of complex systems of trenches that would not have looked out of place on the Western Front during the First World War.

While these fortifications have not prevented either side from trying to attack, the few minor territorial gains have come at a high cost to life and equipment. But while on the ground the system of trenches and vast fortifications might seem like they are from a previous century, in the skies above the battlefield the future nature of warfare is rapidly evolving.

Given the difficulties in making progress on the ground, both sides have taken to the air. Over the past couple of weeks, Russia has launched hundreds of suicide drones (meaning the drone does not return to base after its mission and instead flies directly into the intended target), cruise missiles and ballistic missiles against Ukrainian targets. Targets have included civilian apartment blocks, electrical power plants and substations, and even a major dam.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has

launched a steady wave of domestically produced suicide drones that have been able to strike targets deep inside the Russian Federation.

It is too early to say which side will gain the upper hand in this air war. So far, Russia has fired more than 7,000 missiles of all kinds at Ukraine. The world has not seen airstrikes at this level and intensity for decades.

In February 2022, when Russia launched its initial missile salvos against Ukrainian targets, few could have guessed that more than two years later, Russian forces would still be burning through its stockpiles at such a rate.

It has taken the Russian defense industry months to try to meet this new demand. Even so, it is estimated that Russia can only build between 115 and 130 longer-range missiles a month. In the past 10 days alone, Russian forces have fired about 120 missiles. Clearly the recent tempo of missile strikes is not sustainable for a long period of time. However, even a few dozen missiles a month can have a major impact in the absence of adequate air defenses.

While Russia might be burning through its missile inventory, its allies have been willing to help fill the gaps. There is evidence that

Luke Coffey

North Korean missiles are being used to hit targets in Ukraine, for example.

There is also extensive cooperation between Moscow and Tehran when it comes to drones. Thousands of Iranian-produced Shahed suicide drones have been supplied to Russia for use in Ukraine since the war started. Last year, ground was broken on a new factory in Russia's Tatarstan region that is expected to be producing thousands of Shahed drones by 2025.

As for Ukraine, creativity, ingenuity, boldness and, above all, survival instincts have allowed it to counter Russia's air threat fairly successfully. Ukrainians have surprised the world with the rapid development of its own drone fleet, which is able to strike targets deep inside Russia. While the exact details are not publicly known, it is thought that Ukraine has produced at least 15 different types of drones since February 2022.

Last week, the world saw firsthand the effectiveness of Ukraine's home-made drones when they struck several Russian oil refineries. At least 13 refineries have been hit by Ukrainian drones so far this year, with the most distant target located in the Samara

Oblast, about 800 kilometers from Ukraine.

The ability to hit such targets is important to Ukraine because Western sanctions have been weak in terms of cracking down on Russian oil exports. Moscow depends on oil revenue to generate income for its war chest.

Instead of relying on watered-down Western sanctions, Ukrainians have therefore taken matters into their own hands. The results of the drone strikes have already been felt inside Russia: it is estimated that 12 percent of Russian oil-refinery capacity has been put out of commission. Consequently, all Russian exports of gasoline to global markets have been halted until further notice.

Even with Ukraine's recent successes with its drone program, however, Kyiv remains on the defensive when it comes to the air war.

The Ukrainians have done a good job of using air defense systems provided by the West, such as the patriot missile system, to counter the Russian missile threat. However, delays by the US Congress in authorizing additional aid for Ukraine mean that stocks of the interceptors needed for these systems are starting to run low. This probably explains why more Russian missiles have been hitting

their targets in recent weeks.

Additionally, Ukraine has only been provided with enough advanced air defense systems to protect major cities, such as Kyiv and Odesa. Other population centers lack comprehensive air defense coverage, and soldiers serving on the front lines are suffering, too.

This year will be a race, therefore, between Ukraine's allies to provide advanced air defense systems, and Russia's allies to provide more ballistic missiles and drones.

At the same time, Ukraine will be working overtime to expand its indigenous drone program in an effort to keep pace with Russia's domestic missile production. While the conflict seems to be slow-going on the ground, the ongoing barrage of missiles and drones launched by both sides serves as a reminder that it will not end any time soon.

The war in Ukraine might seem to be thousands of kilometers away from most people, but it should serve as a wake-up call for everyone. The use of drones and advanced missiles in conflicts will only increase. Policymakers must learn the lessons now to better prepare for the future.

# EU seeks to set global rules on sustainability for businesses

Andrew Hammond

In recent years, international awareness of, and interest in, issues related to sustainability have surged, helping to drive a new wave of economic value creation. However, regulation of this has been largely stuck on the political back burner. That might now be changing.

This is underlined by the journey the 27 members of the EU have been on with the development of their proposed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. It is expected to secure final political ratification by the European Parliament on April 24, after about four years of consideration by Brussels.

The proposed directive would place an obligation on European businesses to provide documentation that confirms the products they import are in compliance with human rights

and environmental standards, including those governing child and forced labor. It will also codify in EU law, for the first time, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The obligation to prevent, end or mitigate harms to human rights and the environment, such as child labor or loss of biodiversity, will also apply to a company's so-called "upstream" partners in the design and manufacturing processes, as well as "downstream" partners who transport, store or distribute their products. That said, firms in the financial sector will only have to focus on upstream partners as part of their due diligence.

Businesses will also have to prepare plans setting out how they intend to transition to a low-carbon economy, including dead-

lines for hitting climate targets and the key actions and investments required to deliver on their commitments.

Authorities in Brussels say that one of the big advantages of the new directive is that it will avoid international companies having to navigate a plethora of national, potentially incompatible rules within the 27-member single market. It will apply to all firms operating in the bloc that have more than 1,000 employees and net global turnover of more than 450 million (\$485 million). Fines for failing to comply with the new rules could be as high as 5 percent of net global turnover.

While the measures have been welcomed by some political stakeholders, numerous business-lobby groups have criticized them. Markus

Beyrer, the director general of BusinessEurope, for example, said the directive would add "unparalleled obligations, set harsh sanctions with potentially existential implications for companies, and unilaterally expose them to litigation from all parts of the world."

He adds: "European companies with global operations, some with millions of indirect relationships, will be put at a disadvantage compared to their global competitors."

On the other side of the ledger, some nongovernmental organizations have criticized what they describe as messy "end game" compromises in recent weeks, which they say significantly undermine the likely effects of the directive.

Earlier drafts, for exam-

ple, sought to target firms with more than 500 employees and turnover of 150 million, which would have thrown a significantly larger net over firms operating within the EU. The German and Italian governments lobbied against this, fearing it would hit their economies harder than most because of the relatively high numbers of small and medium-sized businesses they host.

Moreover, the latest draft of the directive removed civil liability provisions that potentially would have permitted trade unions to sue non-compliant firms. This provision was opposed by several countries, including Finland.

There was also a significant compromise in the form of a staged approach to the introduction of the

new rules over a period of three-to-five years, depending on the size of businesses. This will mean a multi-year transition phase stretching into the second half of the decade.

For all the compromises and criticisms of the directive, however, its likely approval points to the continuing ambition of the EU to entrench itself as a global regulatory superpower. With this latest mechanism, the bloc clearly seeks to help set the "rules of the road" for the global corporate sustainability agenda. In so doing, it is likely to influence equivalent regulatory frameworks in other nations worldwide. This is what scholars, such as Anu Bradford, a legal expert in the US, have termed the "Brussels effect."

By developing far-reaching regulations that have significant bearing on

the global business environment outside the 27 EU member states, the Brussels-based club is trying to ensure that European values shape international policy in a wide spectrum of policy areas. This includes not only aspects such as sustainability and the environment, but also antitrust, data privacy, and consumer health and safety, as a growing number of global firms adopt EU standards as global standards.

In recent weeks, for instance, the EU hit the headlines for being a "first mover" in another key policy area, thanks to its adoption of the world's first comprehensive legislation on artificial intelligence, after a breakthrough deal was negotiated after many months of consideration. This new regulatory framework, which once again was criticized by

some business groups, represents the strictest set of rules yet, anywhere in the world, governing the emerging technology.

To many observers of global affairs, this shows that the EU has a legitimate claim to be a genuine global power. This is despite its traditional lack of hard power, or military might, compared with nations such as the US, China, and Russia.

The new EU sustainability directive is therefore only the latest example of the bloc's attempts to set the global regulatory agenda by taking key actions in a growing range of policy areas.

And although it has been criticized by some campaigners for not going far enough, the directive is nonetheless a first for any major, global power and its ambitions might yet be scaled up over time.





# Kyrgyzstan keen on joint ventures with Pak traders

LAHORE (APP): Kyrgyzstan has offered a basket of incentives to fully facilitate Pakistani entrepreneurs and investors in joint ventures.

Ms Asel Begmatova, Head of External Relations Department of Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy and Commerce, presented these offers to Pak trade delegation led by Meher Kashif Younis, honorary Consul of Kyrgyzstan in Pakistan. The delegation is on a two-week visit to Kyrgyzstan to study the scope of further strengthening bilateral trade and promotion of exports.

Kyrgyzstan Trade House (KTH) President Dr Shahid Hassan was also present, according to Meher's spokesman here Sunday.

Briefing the Pakistani delegation, Ms Begmatova said that joint ventures would not only cater to Kyrgyz needs but also generate profits of investors with sovereign guarantees.

She added, "Our welcoming stance towards Pakistani entrepreneurs and investors signifies a mutual desire to strengthen economic ties and foster bilateral cooperation by providing ample support and assistance. Kyrgyzstan aims to create an environment conducive to investment and business collaboration."

The emphasis on joint ventures underscores the importance of partnerships that leverage the strengths and resources of both nations, she remarked, citing that collaborative efforts between Pakistani and Kyrgyz businesses hold the potential to tap into diverse markets, capitalize on comparative advantages, and drive economic growth.

"Our assurance of facilitating investments in areas of choice reflects Kyrgyzstan's recognition of the importance of encouraging investors especially

from Pakistan to take full advantage of ample opportunities that align with their interests and expertise," she maintained. By offering flexibility and support, Kyrgyzstan seeks to attract diverse investments that contribute to the country's development while also benefiting investors, she added.

Ms Begmatova said the emphasis on garnering profits underscores the pragmatic approach to attract investments that yield tangible returns. By prioritizing profitability, Kyrgyzstan aims to create sustainable partnerships that endure beyond short-term gains and foster long-term economic prosperity.

Other Kyrgyz officials Takirov Urmat, Director Centre for Development and Promotion of Exports, Ministry of Economy and Commerce, Tilek Zhumaliyev, Head of the Export Promotion Department, Export Center

Asel Turgunbaeva, an expert of the department of international cooperation Ministry of Economy and Commerce also gave comprehensive presentations on various future projects and discussed in detail the prospects of several proposals.

Leader of Pak trade delegation Meher Kashif Younis who is also President of Kyrgyzstan Trade House in Lahore, welcomed the goodwill gesture and said it underscores Kyrgyzstan's commitment to foster a conducive environment for investment and business collaboration with Pakistan.

Through open dialogue, support mechanisms, and a focus on mutual benefits, he said, both the countries stand to capitalize on the opportunities by joint ventures, thereby contributing to economic growth, job creation, and enhanced bilateral relations.



THAILAND: Visitors keen interest in MG cars during 45th Bangkok International Motor Show.

## 'Seed mafia a formidable threat to agriculture'

LAHORE (APP): The seed mafia selling substandard wheat and cotton seeds has emerged as a formidable threat to the agricultural sector particularly in areas reliant on this staple crops.

Pakistan Hitech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) Chairman Shahzad Ali Malik stated this while talking to a farmers' delegation led by Muhammad Hussain Dohla here Sunday.

Malik added, "These nefarious actors exploit the vulnerability of farmers by peddling inferior quality seeds masquerading as genuine agricultural inputs. With deceptive tactics, they undermine the integrity of the agricultural supply chain, wreaking havoc on crop yields and causing substantial financial losses estimated in billions of rupees."

He was of the view that in order to combat this menace and revitalize the agricultural sector, concerted efforts are imperative to stamp out the seed mafia and promote the adoption of high-quality, certified seeds for all crops.

Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing seed certification processes, and enforcing stringent penalties for fraudulent practices are crucial steps in safeguarding farmers' interests and bolstering agricultural production, he suggested.

By prioritizing the use of certified and approved seeds, he said, the policy-makers and stakeholders could empower farmers with the tools necessary to increase productivity, enhance resilience to environmental challenges, and foster sustainable agricultural growth.

Shahzad Ali Malik said detrimental impact of the seed mafia extends beyond economic losses, as it undermines food security and agricultural sustainability. Poor-quality seeds not only compromise crop yields but also jeopardize the genetic diversity and resilience of agricultural ecosystems. Inadequate yields perpetuate food insecurity, exacerbating poverty and hindering rural development efforts.

Concurrently, cotton ginners capitalize on the demand for cotton seed by selling substandard varieties, often mislabeling low-grade Benola as premium seed.

## SNGPL's gas theft crackdown: 182 connections disconnected

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 182 connections and imposed fine of Rs.10.7 million.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while another 3 connections on use of compressor.

In Multan 4 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 9 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine

of Rs.0.316 million against gas pilfers.

In Rawalpindi, the regional team disconnected 4 connections on illegal use of gas. The team also imposed fine of Rs.0.14 million against gas pilfers.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 123 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs.8.9 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal one connection was disconnected on illegal use of gas.

In Gujrat, the team disconnected 4 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Faisalabad the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas while imposing fine of Rs.0.0320 have been booked against gas pilfers.

The regional team of Bahawalpur disconnected 9 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Mardan 20 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while imposing fine of Rs.1.305 against gas theft cases.

In Gujranwala, the regional team disconnected 02 connections on illegal use of gas. The team also imposed fine of Rs.0.08 million against gas pilfers.

## GDP drops to 1% as LSM shows -0.52% growth in Q2

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has pointed out that the GDP growth has stood at one percent in the second quarter of the current fiscal year, as the LSM has registered a negative 0.52 percent growth, leading to drop in overall the GDP growth of the country.

PIAF Chairman Faheem Rehman Saigol said that the decline in LSM may have been due to a massive slash in the credit to the private sector, as the credit to the private sector during July-Jan 2024 plummeted 41 percent to Rs180.7 billion from Rs393.6 billion for the same period a year before mainly due to high markup rate.

The PIAF chairman said that business friendly policies must be adopted as other neighboring countries of the region are giving to trade and industry. The amount specified in trade policy should be utilised for the promotion of exports by giving incentives to the trade and industry and by exploring new markets, he suggested. He said that the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for Pakistan's industry, discouraging investment both in capacity and capability, calling for lessening the burden of heavy taxes on the power sector.

Additionally, a continuous decline in remittance indicates that the government may not be able to stem the decline. Remittance declined by 1.2 percent during July-February 2024 to \$18.1 billion from \$18.3 billion in the same period a year before. Foreign direct investment (FDI) witnessed month-on-month an increase of 15.7 percent of \$131.2 million in February 2024 as against an outflow of \$173 million in the last month.

He said that sustainable economic recovery is contingent to the continuation of fiscal consolidation and prudent policy stance, timely and adequate financial inflows to meet gross financing needs and external sector stability.

He said that the agriculture outlook is promising as in Rabi season 2023-24, the wheat sowing has surpassed the target of 8,998 million hectares. However, LSM, the performance of auto sector remained subdued due to massive increases in inputs prices, and tightening auto finance during July-February 2024 in the car production and sale decreased by 40.8 percent and 40.9 percent, while trucks and buses production and sale decreased by 50.6 percent and 48.7 percent, respectively.

Domestic dispatches during this period were

26,059 million tons against 27,207 million tons last year showing a reduction of 4.2 percent while export dispatches showed a healthy increase of 73.10 percent as the volumes increased to 4,496 million tons compared to 2,597 million ton exports of last fiscal year.

He said that the trade and industry has to be kept solvent and protected from default for which prudent measures would have to be taken to help stabilize the local currency, as the country's total liquid foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank have been plunging.

He said that constant hike in power tariff on the plea of fuel adjustment has pushed the electricity prices higher and added to the already soaring cost of trade and industry. Seeking the same competitive energy tariffs for domestic industries to capture the global market, he said that due to the high rates of electricity, power theft became rampant as the tariff was not affordable for the consumers.

He urged the power ministry to identify system constraints and communicate targets to all the concerned departments to initiate upgradation of transmission system on war footing. He called for completing all ongoing power projects well before time.

## BMP asks DISCOs to address electricity theft, line losses issue

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Emphasizing the urgent need to address line losses and electricity theft, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has cited its detrimental effects on the national economy and stressed the need for overhauling the power sector through some drastic measures as the total cost of inefficiencies in the power sector is constantly escalating.

The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar encouraged the Discos to leverage technology and innovation in their efforts to eradicate power theft, as the objective should be to curtail indiscriminate power outages, especially to consumers who diligently pay their bills. He asked the government that that all obstacles hindering efforts to prevent electricity theft must be removed, warning that employees and officers involved in such illegal activities should be dealt with firmly and decisively.

He also demanded that there should be no political interference in the campaign against electricity theft. He stressed that decisions should be made based on merit, ensuring a transparent and impartial approach.

Mian Anjum Nisar stated that the circular debt crossed Rs4 trillion after an addition of Rs400 billion during the current fiscal year. In the present scenario, energy efficiency and conservation are the key measures taken by countries across the globe to mitigate the associated risks. However, in the case of Pakistan, both energy efficiency and conservation are generally treated as alien concepts," he stated.

The BMP Chairman stated that the circular debt stock has crossed Rs4 trillion after Rs400 billion were added to it during the current fiscal year.

He said that in present scenario the energy efficiency and conservation are

key measures used by countries across the globe to mitigate associated risks. However, in the case of Pakistan, both energy efficiency and conservation were generally treated as alien concepts.

He noted that there was an urgent need for up-gradation of energy efficiency and conservation standards and strict enforcement, besides replacement of inefficient appliances and consumer awareness for responsible use of energy were other key areas which should be identified for action as a national priority. He estimated that a dollar outflow of around \$1.25 billion could be potentially saved annually through implementation of efficiency and conservation measures.

The Chairman said that the government is not ready yet to undertake structural reforms related to circular debt and management of state owned enterprises. Moreover, reliance on indirect taxes for meeting revenue goals is also a major issue meaning thereby that government should improve its taxation system if it wants to create a business friendly environment.

Since 2013, we have been adding capacity by persuading companies that they will get payments against capacity addition regardless of whether the electricity is sold or not. This condition may have been the ground reality of that time when the country needed more capacity and this was the only way of gaining investors' confidence but now the policy should be revisited. Capacity payment is fixed while the energy price varies. Imported fuel is another reason for the circular debt. Besides, all payments including the capacity payments are linked to the US dollar. As a result, when the rupee loses value, the burden of circular debt rises.

Besides, transmission losses and bill recovery failure are contributing to the liability as the GDP rate decreases with the increase in cost of electricity. Anjum Nisar pointed out some key areas that should be taken up for action as a national priority. These include up-gradation of energy efficiency and conservation standards, replacement of inefficient appliances and consumer awareness for responsible use of energy.

He estimated that dollar outflow of around \$1.25 billion could be potentially saved annually through the implementation of efficiency and conservation measures. He emphasized that theft and line losses should be addressed through advanced metering and cabling, citing that line losses ran as high as 9% over and above the percentage allowed by the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority.

Pakistan's economy has been affected by external conditions like spill-over of the Ukraine war, domestic challenges and accommodative policies that resulted in uneven and unbalanced growth. Steadfast implementation of corrective policies and reforms remain essential to regain macroeconomic stability, address imbalances and lay the foundation for inclusive and sustainable growth, chairman recommended. The sector needs to be deregulated, as nothing can work unless DISCOs are truly empowered, he suggested. He asked the government to shut down all expensive oil-based power plants to ensure availability of cheaper energy for consumers.

## PFC for interest-free loans to furniture manufacturers

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq has demanded the government to provide interest-free loans to furniture manufacturers for five years.

He added that this initiative would enable them to import new technology for improving overall infrastructure of the industry.

Talking to a delegation of furniture producers led by Mian Faryad Ahmad Raza here Sunday he said the government needs to streamline existing markets and identify new potential markets for 'Made-in-Pakistan' products in Far-East, Central Asian Republics, Latin America

and Russia.

"Marketing Intelligence Cell" at the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) must be providing assistance to furniture manufacturers and exporters in obtaining information pertaining to international demands for furniture, competitive price index, expanding markets and other essential trends.

He also urged the businessmen to work extensively to promote the local furniture industry.

"Pakistan is blessed with abundant resources and our people are equipped with the best skills that can help develop the country on modern lines," he added.

He further said that public and private joint efforts have to be made on modern lines to gain optimum access to international markets for locally manufactured furniture and accessories.

He said the potential of the Pak furniture industry was enormous and that within two to three years, it could even be double if the government patronizes this industry.

Mian Kashif said the government should also support the furniture business in terms of simple and easily obtainable grants for exhibiting and traveling to trade shows and promoting Pak export as a success globally.

## Pakistan, Canada pledge to explore economic prospects, skillful manpower



### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan and Canada have reaffirmed their commitment to remain constructively engaged to further reinforce bilateral relations,

as there were a number of sectors that had a huge potential for cooperation, especially the export of skillful manpower to improve the national economy.

These views were dis-

cussed in a tripartite meeting of the All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF), Punjab Board of Investment & Trade (PBIT) and Member Parliament of the House of Commons of Canada Ms. Salma Zahid,

held here on Sunday, to discuss various trade opportunities between Pakistan and Canada with major focus on export of skilled labour force from Pakistan.

Salma Zahid, who is also the Member Standing Committee of Immigration and Citizenship of Canada, has recently been awarded with the Pakistan civil award of 'Sitara-e-Quaid-e-Azam' for her remarkable services to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries.

The Member Parliament of the Canadian House of Commons emphasized Pakistan's deep appreciation for its relationship with Canada and its commitment to fostering enduring and multifaceted bilateral relations. She stressed the importance of increasing trade between the two nations and called for closer collaboration among business communities. Promoting bilateral cooper-

ation across public, commercial, and parliamentary spheres was highlighted as pivotal to strengthening the Pakistan-Canada partnership.

Ms. Salma Zahid expressed gratitude to APBF and PBIT for inviting her and said that Canada and Pakistan have all the resources for business collaboration and export of skilled workforce. She pledged to return with different new ideas of JVs, collaborations and export of demand base skilled workforce to boost the bilateral trade ties.

APBF President Maaz Mahmood added that business community of both the countries should collaborate with each other to force joint ventures in view of increasing bilateral trade and exploring new business opportunities. "We can start it through segment wise and APBF have all the resources to initiate it

because we contain diverse kinds of members from different business sectors."

He said that Pakistan is the 5th largest country of the world in terms of population with a large pool of human resource, pledging to equip its manpower with the latest skills and knowledge to improve their prospects of their export to potential markets.

Maaz Mahmood called for harnessing the potential of a substantial Pakistani workforce to realize the goal of fast economic revival.

He proposed the Canadian government to employ a substantial number of Pakistani workers, as it has the ability to export one million workers every year to various potential markets and all possible efforts should be made to realize this goal to strengthen the economy.

The PBIT CEO Jalal Hassan, on this occasion,

pointed out various trade opportunities which exist between Pakistan and Canada, asking the APBF to take lead from private sector, as it has huge membership from diverse sectors.

He also asked the private sector and the government of Canada to engage with Pakistan to find the ways to increase the export of skilled workforce to Canada.

Calling for easing visa process for Pakistani students and business community, he said that Pakistan markets are competitive and, we have great potential for collaboration in all sectors especially textile, auto parts, skilled labor and manpower export etc.

He said that the government has making strong efforts to explore new markets for increasing the export of manpower across the globe that would help improve the foreign

exchange and the overall economy.

APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi, expressed his best wishes, commenting that there is a huge opportunity between Canada and Pakistan which can be materialized through regular interaction and collaboration from both sides. He said that many countries, including Canada, are in high demand of skilled labor and the government would provide the demand-driven skills to its workforce that would increase their export and strengthen the economy.

APBF President, in the end, appreciated APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi and CPBC President Samir Dossal for their great work to keep both the countries engaged in all kinds of cooperation.

The meeting was also attended by APBF board member Amir Munir and senior officials of PBIT.





In brief

Shahid Afridi ‘surprised’

K A R A C H I (Monitoring Desk): Former captain of Pakistan cricket team Shahid Afridi has called for appointing batter Muhammad Rizwan as the captain of the national side following the sacking of Shaheen Afridi. “I am surprised by the decision by very experienced cricketers in the selection committee. I still believe that if change was necessary than Rizwan was the best choice!,” said Afridi in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. However, he said, that he extended full support to Babar Azam after his reappointment as the white-ball captain. “Since now the decision has been made I offer my full support and best wishes to team Pakistan and Babar Azam,” Shahid Afridi added. Earlier today, the star batter was reappointed as Pakistan captain in the white ball cricket ahead of the upcoming T20I series against New Zealand on home soil. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) took to X and announced that “following unanimous recommendation from the PCB’s selection committee, Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi has appointed Babar Azam as white-ball (ODI and T20I) captain of the Pakistan men’s cricket team.” The PCB revealed that the decision to remove Shaheen Shah Afridi from the captaincy role was driven by their commitment to effectively manage player workloads, thereby sustaining peak performance levels. “While Shaheen Afridi has undeniably proven himself as a star fast bowler, leading Pakistan’s pace attack over the years, the board recognises the importance of rotation and rest to maintain his peak performance,” it said. Afridi took over the captaincy of the T20I team after Babar Azam resigned from his role as all-format captain following the national team’s dismal performance in the ODI World Cup in India last year.

Suarez bagged his fifth goal

FORT LAUDERDALE (Agencies): Luis Suarez bagged his fifth goal of the season as Inter Miami were held to a 1-1 draw against New York City FC in Major League Soccer on Saturday. Former Barcelona and Liverpool star Suarez glanced in a Julian Gressel free kick in the 15th minute to fire Miami into the lead at the Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale. But Miami’s hopes of securing all three points were thwarted by a dogged New York performance, which got its reward when Costa Rica international Alonso Martinez equalised on 34 minutes. Miami, thrashed 4-0 against New York Red Bulls in their last outing, created a string of clear chances after the City leveller, but were frustrated by a superb performance from goalkeeper Matthew Freese. Freese pulled off several fine saves, including a brilliant one-handed block from Suarez in the 80th minute as Miami pressed for an equaliser. Miami, once again without the injured Lionel Messi, remained in second place in the Eastern Conference following the draw, one point behind leaders Cincinnati. Miami coach Gerardo Martino – who had lambasted his team after last week’s drubbing by the New York Red Bulls – praised his side’s performance. “In nine months here, I’ve never been disappointed in a game like I was last Saturday,” Martino said. “Today, what the team did was very commendable.

# Babar Azam appointed T20I, ODI skipper

LAHORE (APP): Stylish batsman Babar Azam returned as skipper of the national T20I and ODI teams after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) selection committee unanimously picked him for the job on Sunday. In a post on social media platform X (known as Tweeter), PCB announced that Babar Azam has been appointed as white ball captain. Babar Azam was unceremoniously stripped of the captaincy role in November last year after

team’s poor show at the ICC ODI World Cup in India, and he was replaced by fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi as T20I captain by the then Chairman Zaka Ashraf. Opening batter Shah Masood was handed reins of the test side after Babar decided to step down as red-ball captain as well. Babar’s removal as captain had received flak from the cricketing circles then and the PCB chairman’s powers to appoint a captain also came under the scanner.

In a revolutionary decision, PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi had announced in March to do away with his powers to appoint a captain and handed the power to the five member selection committee comprising former test cricketers- Mohammad Yousaf, Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq, Asad Shafiq and data analyst Bilal Afzal. Babar Azam was first appointed captain of the national T20I side in 2019 and assigned the ODI and red ball captaincy role in 2020.

## Sri Lanka dominate Bangladesh but Mendis misses rare feat

C H I T T A G O N G (Agencies): Sri Lanka made a record 531 runs in their first innings of the second Test against Bangladesh Sunday but Kamindu Mendis narrowly missed scoring a third century in consecutive Test innings. Sri Lanka’s total on the second day in Chittagong was the highest scored in Tests without any batsman reaching a century – improving on India’s 524-9 against New Zealand at Kanpur in 1976. Bangladesh reached 55-1 at stumps, trailing Sri Lanka by 476 runs. Opener Zakir Hasan was unbeaten on 28 alongside nightwatchman Tajul Islam after Lahiru Kumara bowled Mahmudul Hasan Joy for 21. Sri Lanka dominated the day. Mendis was 92 not out when last man Asitha Fernando was run out for a duck, eight runs short of what would have made him only the fourth Sri Lankan

to score three centuries in consecutive innings. The right-hander, who scored 102 and 164 in the first Test, struck Tajul for two sixes in an over to come close to the feat. However, Fernando fell short of his crease in a desperate attempt to change the strike. Apart from Mendis, who was playing only his third Test, five other Sri Lanka batsmen passed the half-century mark: Dhananjaya de Silva (70), Dinesh Chandimal (59), Kusal Mendis (93), Dimuth Karunaratne (86) and Nishan Madhushka (57). Shakib Al Hasan finished with 3-110 as Sri Lanka made Bangladesh toil for nearly two days after electing to bat first. Sri Lanka began the second day on 314-4. De Silva, who scored 102 and 108 in the first Test, also raised the prospect of scoring three centuries on the trot before he was dismissed

in the post-lunch session. Chandimal was the only batsman to be dismissed in the first session, edging Shakib behind the stumps after making 59 runs. Khaled Ahmed then trapped de Silva leg before in the first over after the lunch break. The right-arm medium-pacer could have taken another wicket in his next over if Prabath Jayasuriya was not comically dropped by three slip fielders on six. Mendis was declared caught behind on 35 off Mehidy Hasan Miraz but the decision was reversed after review. Shakib hit Jayasuriya plumb in front to end his 65-run seventh wicket stand with Mendis, who was dropped by Hasan Mahmud on 60 at deep square leg. Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series to Bangladesh, won the first Test in Sylhet by 328 runs.



OUDENAARDE: Mathieu van der Poel celebrates after crossing the finish line at the Tour of Flanders.

## Van der Poel wins Tour of Flanders for third time

OUDENAARDE (AFP): Mathieu van der Poel rode through the Belgian rain and into history on Sunday as he joined the elite group who have won the Tour of Flanders three times. The 29-year-old Dutch rider finished just over a minute ahead of the chasing pack as he became the sixth rider in the 111-year history of the race to claim three victories. Italian Luca Mozzato grabbed second, one minute and two seconds back, outpacing Australian Michael Matthews to the line. But Matthews was then penalised for dangerous sprinting and German Nils Politt awarded third. “Winning the Tour of Flanders with the world champion’s rainbow jersey on your back is a dream come true,” said Van der Poel. “I’ve already had a successful season. “It was one of the hardest races of my life. I was dead in the last few kilometres, but I closed my eyes and kept pressing on the pedals.” No one has won cycling’s oldest ‘monument’ four times. The last

man to complete a hat-trick was Swiss Fabian Cancellara in 2014. Van der Poel’s previous triumphs were in 2020 and 2022. His two most powerful one-day rivals were absent. Wout Van Aert broke a collarbone and a rib in Around Flanders four days earlier, and defending Flanders champion, Tadej Pogacar, is skipping the spring classics as he targets a Giro d’Italia-Tour de France double. In their absence Van der Poel, who won two of cycling’s five super-long monuments and the road-race world title last season, started as overwhelming favourite and the number one target for his rivals. He rose to the challenge. Sunday’s slog through the second and most sacred ‘monument’ took riders over 270.2 kilometres and up 18 nasty climbs, under grey Belgian skies and through persistent rain that made the cobbled sections slippery. Van der Poel, of the Alpecin-Deceuninck team, spent most of the first 220 kilometres stalking break-aways.

Mads Pedersen, who edged Van der Poel in last week’s Gent-Wevelgem, launched a long-range attack. Van der Poel caught the Dane on the Oude Kwaremont climb with 55km kilometres to go and put in an acceleration that shattered the pack, leaving a reduced group at the front. Ivan Garcia escaped, built a lead of 10 seconds, but slipped out of his pedals trying to find the power to climb the cobbled Kloppenberg. Van der Poel passed the Spaniard, who was pushing his bike up the hill, and cut loose with 44 km to go. American Matteo Jorgenson, winner of Around Flanders, briefly gave chase. Van der Poel, a six time cyclo cross world champion at ease in miserable weather and on treacherous surfaces, gambled away. With 30km left, he led by 1 minute and 25 seconds from a seven-rider chasing group that had begun to argue among themselves. The Dutch rider nursed that advantage to the line.



LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah of Liverpool scores his team's second goal during the Premier League match between Liverpool FC and Brighton & Hove Albion at Anfield.

### Collins beats Rybakina to win Miami Open



MIAMI (AFP): American Danielle Collins upset the odds to win the Miami Open title on Saturday, beating Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan 7-5, 6-3 to claim her first WTA 1000 title in her final season on the tour. The 30-year-old Collins, number 53 in the world, is the lowest-ranked woman ever to win the tournament, clinching her biggest career title in a two-hour triumph. Collins announced in January that she will be retiring from the sport at the end of this year and her unexpected run to the final and victory over the world number four delighted the home crowd. “I couldn’t think of a better way to win my first 1000 title. It means the world to me,” Collins said. “The encouragement and support that I got, it was hard to hide the emotion because I think these are the moments that we live for and we don’t always get to have them. It was really special,” she said. While she insists that her recent run of form won’t lead her to reconsider her departure from the sport, Collins will rise to 22 in Monday’s WTA rankings. It was a disappointing second straight loss in a Miami final for Rybakina, who missed out to Petra Kvitova last year. Both players looked strong on their serve in the early exchanges but Floridan Collins had to work hardest to hold her serve. She saved four break points as she hung on for 4-3 and showed resistance again to deny a break point at 5-5 with a brilliant backhand winner after a long rally. Collins broke at the end of the first set, capitalizing on a third break point to win the set when Rybakina went long. Then the momentum shifted heavily in Collins’s direction when she broke Rybakina’s first service game of the second set. The 24-year-old Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, responded, breaking back at the first opportunity. Neither player was able to truly dominate, but Collins struck the decisive blow when she broke to go 5-3 up as Rybakina at full stretch on the baseline went long. The American had not defeated a top five player since a win over then world number two Paula Badosa at San Diego in October of 2022. Perhaps it was inevitable then that Collins showed nerves at the end as she struggled to serve out, denying two break points and finally clinching on her fourth championship point. Hanging in there “It’s hard,” Collins said. “You’ve got the crowd supporting you and pushing you to close it out and they wanted me to win so bad. It was like playing in front of my best friends and I didn’t want to let the crowd down and it was tough. “Elena does not give up and she just kept slinging those shots right and left, I just had to hang in there.” Rybakina had missed out on Indian Wells due to a gastrointestinal illness and said that with four of her five matches in Miami en route to the final having gone to three sets, she was not in peak condition.

## Salah caps fightback as Liverpool go top

LIVERPOOL (AFP): Mohamed Salah fired Liverpool to the top of the Premier League as the Egypt star’s clinical finish capped a stirring fightback to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp’s side were rocked by Danny Welbeck’s blistering strike after just 85 seconds at Anfield. Luis Diaz restored order with an equaliser later in the first half, before Salah netted after the interval to seal a vital victory. Salah’s third goal in his last three games was his 22nd in all competitions this term. Unbeaten in their last six league matches, Liverpool sit three points clear of second-placed Arsenal, who face third-placed Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium later on Sunday. An Arsenal victory would take them above Liverpool on goal difference. Any other result would keep Liverpool in pole position. For the first time in 10 years, the Premier League’s top three were separated by only one point after 28 games prior to this weekend’s matches. Thanks to Salah, treble-chasing Liverpool remain firmly in the hunt for a record-equalling 20th English title in Klopp’s final season. Unbeaten in their last 27 home league games, Liverpool are back in

action at Anfield against lowly Sheffield United on Thursday. After former Liverpool star Xabi Alonso confirmed he intends to stay at Bayer Leverkusen, Brighton boss Roberto De Zerbi is a reported candidate to replace Klopp when the German steps down at the end of this term. Klopp is a big fan of De Zerbi’s attacking philosophy and praised him as a “top coach” this week. Playing for the first time since their painful FA Cup quarter-final defeat at Manchester United before an international break, Liverpool had a shocking taste of De Zerbi’s enterprising tactics after just two minutes. Salah strikes Brighton’s Simon Adingra broke quickly in a devastating counter-attack that caught Liverpool right-back Conor Bradley out of position. When Virgil van Dijk’s scuffed clearance rolled to Welbeck just inside the penalty area, the Brighton forward lashed a strike into the top corner to leave Klopp shaking his head. Salah was making his first league start since New Year’s Day after an injury-plagued beginning to 2024. Looking to make up for lost time, Salah nearly grabbed the equaliser with a curler

that whistled just wide. The Egypt forward threatened again from Bradley’s cross, but he couldn’t keep his shot on target from a good position 10 yards out. Liverpool’s dominance was rewarded in the 27th minute when Brighton failed to clear Salah’s header from a corner and Diaz volleyed home from close-range. Darwin Nunez’s agile effort from flat on the turf was saved by Bart Verbruggen just before the break. Liverpool midfielder Alexis Max Allister squandered a chance against his former club with a header that flashed narrowly wide early in the second half. Dominik Szoboszlai fired past the far post from 20 yards, while Nunez was denied by Verbruggen at the near post. Wave after wave of Liverpool pressure crashed against Brighton’s defensive wall before De Zerbi’s men cracked in the 65th minute. Mac Allister was catalyst with a perfectly-weighted pass that picked out Salah’s run into the area and the forward dispatched a composed low finish past Verbruggen. In a tense finale, former Liverpool midfielder Adam Lallana should have punished his old team, but he rolled his shot wide to Klopp’s immense relief.

## NBA-best Celtics beat Pelicans to snap skid, Bucks win

WASHINGTON (AFP): Jayson Tatum scored 23 points to lead a balanced Boston attack in a 104-92 victory at New Orleans on Saturday, snapping a two-game losing skid for the NBA-best Celtics. Latvian forward Kristaps Porzingis contributed 19 points, 10 rebounds, four blocked shots, three assists and two steals while Jaylen Brown added 17 points for the Celtics. Jrue Holiday had 13 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for Boston, which avoided a first three-game losing streak this season after back-to-back losses in Atlanta. “We want to be a hungry team no matter what,” Porzingis said. “We haven’t done anything and back-to-back losses to Atlanta is not in our DNA. It just didn’t sit right with us, so we came out here tonight and got us a W.” The Celtics, who have clinched the Eastern Conference crown, improved to 58-16, moving closer to securing a home-court edge throughout the NBA playoffs.

New Orleans, fifth in the Western Conference, fell to 45-29, a half-game ahead of Dallas and two atop Phoenix in a fight for the last two guaranteed West playoff spots. “We just knew we couldn’t be in cruise control,” Porzingis said. “These teams are hungry. They need these wins. Maybe we at this point of the season don’t need them as much, but still we want to come out here and compete at a high level every night.” Porzingis was unhappy at shooting only 6-of-14 from the floor, and just 1-of-6 from 3-point range but pleased with his all-around effort. “There are so many ways we can impact a game if things are not going perfect for us,” Porzingis said. “That’s what I did tonight. I turned up another notch and that’s what we’re going to need the rest of this regular season and then even more in the post-season.” Boston began the third quarter on a 15-7 run to open a 74-64 advantage on the way to an 83-68 lead entering the fourth quarter and the Celtics kept the

Pelicans at bay over the final minutes. “Once we hit another gear, the game just flipped,” Porzingis said. Derrick White, who scored 15 points, sank a 3-pointer at the second quarter buzzer to cap an 8-1 Celtics run for a 59-57 half-time Boston lead. Tatum had 13 first-half points for Boston while Brown and Porzingis each scored 11. Zion Williamson led New Orleans with a game-high 25 points, 12 in the first quarter, and nine rebounds while CJ McCollum added 24 points for the Pelicans. Big night for Giannis Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 36 points, grabbed 16 rebounds and added seven assists, three steals and a blocked shot to spark the Bucks to a 122-113 victory in Atlanta. The Bucks snapped the Hawks’ four-game win streak -- which included two wins over the Celtics -- and improved to 47-27, stretching their lead over Cleveland for second in the East to two games.



Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum shoots between New Orleans Pelicans forward Herbert Jones (5) and guard Trey Murphy III in the second half of an NBA basketball game.





## In brief

### Police arrest 606 drug dealers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police had arrested 606 drug dealers and recovered over 326 kg hashish, five kg heroin, 1480 grams Ice and more than 3000 liters alcohol, said a police spokesman. He informed that police had accelerated their ongoing operation against drug peddlers and raids were being conducted to send them behind the bars as per vision of Chief Minister Punjab. This year, more than 600 drug dealers were arrested and over 326 kg hashish, five kg heroin, 1480 grams Ice and more than 3000 liters of alcohol were recovered from their possession. About 2400 suspects were arrested during the ongoing special campaign launched last year by Rawalpindi district police against the drug dealers. About 45 tons hashish, more than 24 kg heroin and 1480 grams Ice were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused. In the ongoing crackdown against drugs, 17 hot spots were also cleared, he informed. The CPO Syed Khalid Hamdani said that crackdown against the drug peddlers would continue to end the drug menace. On the directives of the Chief Minister Punjab, strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the drug dealers, Khalid Hamdani added.

### IRSA releases 127,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 127,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 156,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1415.67 feet and was 17.67 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 35,100 cusecs and 27,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1076.60 feet, which was 26.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 46,100 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 70,000, 36,800, 27,100 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 52,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 16,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Rainfall sweeps across country

ISLAMABAD (APP): New spell of rain has swept across different parts of the country on Sunday, with further rain expected in some regions. As per the meteorological office, the twin cities and Lahore were expected to witness heavy winds and thunder-showers throughout the day, reported a private news channel. Additionally, more rain and snowfall are foretasted for various parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Cloud cover has descended over cities like Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Faisalabad. Peshawar experienced heavy rain and hailstorms, resulting in flooding on several roads. In Azad Kashmir, particularly in Neelum valley, heavy rainfall occurred overnight. Snowfall persisted in tourist destinations such as Upper Neelum, Luvat, Sharda, and Arang Kel. Due to the inclement weather, landslides have led to the closure of the Neelum highway at multiple locations.



ISLAMABAD: People arriving with their luggage for Itikaf at Faisal Masjid.

## Ayaz, Mustafa Shah extend warm felicitation to Christian community on Easter

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah have extended warm felicitations to the Christian Members of the Parliament and the Christian community on the occasion of Easter.

The Speaker said that the role of non-Muslim communities in the development of Pakistan is an irrefutable reality. Ayaz Sadiq also said that the constitution imparts provision of all basic rights to minorities. Speaker in his message on the eve of Easter urged the parliamentarians and citizens to proactively play their part in peace-keeping and in promotion of inter-faith harmony, as these are the prerequisites for socio-economic prosperity and a progressive society.

In addition, he reaffirmed that the rights and privileges of all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs, are guaranteed and safe-guarded by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Moreover, the Speaker stressed on the need for engaging in legislation aimed at enhancing inter-faith harmony, while adopting a non-partisan approach and working beyond party lines for the betterment of all the non-Muslim communities of Pakistan.

Furthermore, he praised the Christian community while acknowledging their valuable contributions towards socio-economic

progress, since the creation of Pakistan and reaffirmed the notion of equality, stressed by the Founder of Pakistan, Q u a i d - e - A z a m Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Ghulam Mustafa extended hearty felicitations and stated that all non-Muslim communities of Pakistan are provided with the rights & privileges to practice their religion freely according to the constitution and also as per the vision of Q u a i d - e - A z a m, Muhammad Ali Jinnah all citizens must play their part in promotion of inter-faith harmony and peace.

He further praised minorities for their loyalty towards Pakistan & for their services rendered for the betterment and progress of Pakistan.

### 1008 flats and 500 houses ready for workers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Workers Welfare Fund (WWF) is an attached department of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development has completed labor complex at Zone-V including 1008 flats and 500 houses ready for registered workers of twin cities. An official source told APP that they are trying day and night to solve all the problems of the workers. Labor complexes in Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad are the link of this chain. It may be noted that Workers Welfare Labor Colony Phase-I consists of 1476 kanals of land including 1008 flats and 500 houses all the flats and houses will be allotted to industrial workers.

## Millions of faithful to observe Itikaaf from today

ISLAMABAD (APP): Millions of devout Muslims will go into seclusion called 'Itikaaf' after Asr prayer on Sunday.

Itikaaf is observed in the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan to pray in seclusion for the blessings of Almighty Allah and following the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). From the 21st of Ramadan, men will restrict themselves to mosques, while women separate themselves from others within their homes to devote themselves to prayers.

Itikaaf means "devotion to a thing and

sticking to it".

Mosques have made special arrangements to accommodate men for Itikaaf across the country. Special arrangements were also made by the administration of some mosques and philanthropists to provide Sehri and Iftar for those observing Itikaaf. This year, at least 300 people will observe Itikaaf in the iconic contemporary mosque of Faisal Masjid Islamabad, while in Lahore, hundreds of people will observe Itikaaf in Data Sahib Mosque, Badshahi Mosque and Minhajul Quran Mosque.

## Mega projects underway to tackle city's water supply problems: MD WASA

RAWALPINDI (APP): Managing Director (MD), Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Rawalpindi, Muhammad Saleem Ashraf has said that mega projects were underway to tackle city's water supply problems. The MD said that in order to save and prevent wastage of water, WASA was taking measures day and night to eliminate the leakages of underground water pipes, which would not only save water but help control dengue.

WASA Rawalpindi would make efforts to repair and renovate mini-filtration plants across the city, he said adding, chlorine would be added to improve water quality and filters would be replaced at water filtration plants.

The MD further said that ongoing efforts being made in this regard would be intensified. It was need of the hour to make every citizen aware of the importance of water, he added.

WASA Rawalpindi was trying to provide clean drinking water to the citizens, he informed. He urged the citizens to cooperate with WASA and pay their water and sewerage bills on time.

Work had been started on mega projects including supply of 12 million gallons of water per day from Chahan Dam, additional five million gallons of water per day from Rawal Dam and uninterrupted supply of water to six union councils of Khayaban Sir Syed, he said.

Asian Development Bank was providing funds for these projects, he said and informed that along with this, rain harvesting system was being installed on 30 different buildings of the city with the support of UN-HABITAT to secure the rain water. Under the project, the rain water would be collected from the roofs in the underground tanks and this water would be used for horticulture.

The step would help save clean drinking water, he added.

He asked the officials to further improve the service delivery so as to enable uninterrupted water supply to the citizens particularly during Ramadan.

The MD said that the supply of clean drinking water to the citizens was being ensured from the mini-filtration plants during Sehri and Iftar in Ramadan.

## Undeterred resolve – only way to end economic woes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Given its location, landscape, environment, weather, shores and fertile land, Pakistan had always been the most potential and business-friendly destination offering volumes of dividends to investors and businessmen.

Although fluctuating policies of the past landed this potential state into serious economic crunch with putting it back on track becoming a gigantic task, yet it can be vibrant again if consistent, holistic and result oriented approach is adopted.

Even today, the numbers of brotherly countries are waiting for a nod to invest billions of dollars in different sectors of Pakistan economy and the newly formed government has already tightened belts for a tough ride ahead. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team is also aware that they would be confronting a myriad of daunting economic hurdles, ranging from soaring inflationary pressures and staggering external debt burden to diminished exchange reserves and fluctuating currency values. As the economic panorama, shrouded in uncertainty and volatility, necessitates adept navigation and resolute action to guide nation towards stability, the government diligently articulated its resolve to fight out this challenge. At the head PML-N led new coalition government, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif soon after assuming office, issued directives to pertinent authorities for formulating proposals to reduce government expenditures and undertaking a comprehensive overhaul of country's economic framework.

Responding to this exigency, the new government employs immediate measures for bolstering revenues and curbing escalating fiscal deficit with the Prime Minister also mandating commencement of digitization and automation process within the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

"Reducing inflationary burden on people is one of the most pressing challenges for the government. It would have to go for immediate solutions to ease inflationary burden," said Dr Usman Chohan, Advisor on Economic Affairs at Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS). He said the situation would be more exigent in an environment where on one hand the people would be expecting to bring down inflation while International Monetary Fund (IMF), in a likely follow-up program, pressurizing the government to extract more from public in terms of revenue collecting and electricity price initiatives.

Identifying global economic slowdown as a significant contributor to Pakistan's financial woes, with inflation, energy costs and purchasing power constraints exacerbating the situation, Dr Usman proposes a roadmap for economic recovery.

"Mobilization of government-to-government (G2G) investments from friendly nations through the Strategic Investment Facilitation Cell (SIFC) can be very important," he pleaded and underscored the inevitability of domestic stability, particularly in monetary affairs, to reignite local investment. "Then, we must provide overseas Pakistanis a conducive and secure investment climate, thereby stimulating economic activity," he further commented. Given the situation on ground, economic experts stress urgency of implementing concrete measures to foster a business-friendly environment conducive to economic growth and job creation.

"There would be need for a GDP growth rate of 7 to 8 percent to generate approximately three million jobs annually," said Nadeem-ul-Haq, Vice Chancellor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). "The daunting figures of excessive debt, coupled with stagnant industrial

development and low GDP, accentuate the complexity of challenges at hand." In a Podcast he emphasized the imperative of nurturing an environment conducive to corporate growth that in turn, catalyzes economic expansion.

In this scenario, what direly needed is foreign investment as well as expansion in local investment base to put economy back on track to achieve desired growth rate, employment generation, boosting exports and earning foreign exchange.

Fully cognizant of the challenges and potential opportunities Pakistan can offer to investors, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb has also outlined key priorities for revitalizing the economy.

Emphasizing significance of digital transformation and documentation, he stressed the need for modernizing tax system to ensure transparency and efficiency. This involves also digitizing Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to streamline tax collection processes. Additionally, plans are underway to expand the tax base by incorporating sectors such as wholesale/retail, real estate and agriculture. Aurangzeb highlighted that digitalization is not an end in itself but a means to foster economic growth and equitable tax systems.

While the road ahead may be arduous, concerted efforts to harness the economic potential of Pakistanis, both domestically and abroad, alongside fresh agreement with International Monetary Fund and the support of friendly nations, offer a glimmer of hope in navigating through these turbulent economic waters. As the country also suffered a lot in recent past due to rumors of default and anti-state politicking, there is also need for curbing the menaces like rumor mongering, malicious propaganda against state as well as bring anti-sate actors to justice.

## Police accelerate operation against kite flyers, sellers: CPO

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police had accelerated their ongoing operation against kite flyers and sellers, said City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani.

He informed that Rawalpindi district police were making all-out efforts to control kite flying. He said that over 1000 kite flying ban violators were sent behind the bars this year.

The ongoing crackdown against kite flying and aerial firing would further be accelerated as per the vision

of Chief Minister Punjab, the CPO said. Police spokesman said that this year, over 80,000 kites and more than 1400 string rolls were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused. 21 suspects allegedly involved in aerial firing were also arrested and weapons were recovered from their possession.

Under the supervision of the senior officers, safety wires were also being installed on motorcycles to avoid the damage of kite flying and strings, he said adding, senior officers were

also giving awareness lectures to students in schools and colleges to discourage kite flying.

Police were taking actions against those who sell kites online, he informed. Senior police officers were personally monitoring the ongoing crackdown on kite flying and aerial firing. Rawalpindi district police were taking action in accordance with the law against Kite flyers and sellers without any discrimination on the directives of the Punjab government, he added.

## CTP issue 11,419 challan tickets to parking rules violators

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi had issued 11,419 challan tickets to parking rules violators, said City Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan.

He informed that City Traffic Police (CTP) had accelerated their ongoing operation against encroachments and illegal parking in city markets.

Taimoor Khan said, this year, 11,419 challan tickets were issued for wrong parking while 42 cases were also registered for disrupting the flow of traffic on city roads.

The CTO said, CTP was conducting a grand operation across the district against illegal parking and encroachment mafia to further improve the flow of traffic.

He informed that warnings were issued

to the shopkeepers and plaza owners before launching the operation.

Strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against those who did not remove encroachments. Cases were also being registered against those found involved in obstructing the flow of traffic, the CTO said. Illegal parking and encroachments on the roads cause traffic jams and also create problems for other road users, Taimoor Khan said adding, solid steps taken by the CTP would not only help restore the beauty of the city, but the citizens would also see a clear improvement in the flow of traffic. The CTO further informed that special tasks had been given to the in-charge education wing to educate the citizens particularly students about parking and other traffic rules.

## RDA authorities directed to take strict action against illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI (APP): Director General (DG), Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza has directed the authorities concerned to take strict action in accordance with the law against illegal housing schemes.

Talking to APP, the RDA spokesman informed that the Directorate concerned on the special instructions of the DG had accelerated its ongoing operation against the rules violators and lodged FIRs against 12 illegal housing schemes. He informed that

the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate RDA lodged First Information Reports (FIRs) against Sheikh Iftikhar, Sheikh Sarosh, Sheikh Imtiaz, Nayyar Raza, Muhammad Rizwan, Abdul Majeed, Tahir Parvez, Fazal Dad, Muhammad Parvez, Abrar Rashid, Mohsin Ali, Ishaq Malik, Muhammad Aslam, Chaudhry Zafar Ali, Chaudhry Muhammad Iftikhar, Muhammad Ahsan Sardar, Sardar Muhammad Jawad Khan, Sardar

Muhammad Nasir Khan, Asif Parvez and Malik Fakhruddin, the owners of the illegal housing schemes namely Gulshan-e-Kashmir (Asia Housing Scheme) Mouza Misriat Kollian Chakri Road, Rawal Enclave/Rawal Town and Housing Enclave Mouza Ping Lar Ranyal, Faisal Town Phase II Mouza Kollian Padpilu Thalian, Aman Developer Mouza Rajar Chakri Road, Manan City, Multi Garden Phase-II and Khayaban Iftikhar at Mauza Chahan.



ISLAMABAD: Christian community attending religious rituals to mark the celebrating the Easter at Fatima Church F-8 in the Federal Capital.



Tourists meet with Director

KABUL (BNA): Mohammad Abdulhai Sabawoon, Director of Information and Culture Department welcomed a group of five tourists from Slovakia and Hungary. The tourists expressed their satisfaction with the Afghan hospitality, the comprehensive security in the area, and the commendable conduct of the officials of the Islamic Emirate. They also expressed interest in visiting the historical sites in Farah and requested guidance and cooperation from the officials.

UNHCR funding hospital

QALAT (BNA): Construction has commenced on a new hospital in Qalat city. The hospital is set to include internal wards dedicated to pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, surgery and emergency patient care. The UNHCR has allocated \$300,000 towards the construction of this hospital. The head of Public Health Department in Zabul mentioned to BNA that once completed, this medical facility will serve thousands of families residing in the region and the nearby areas.

## Citizen welfare and security top priorities



KABUL (BNA): Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, recently met with Hafiz Mohammad Agha Hakim, the Governor of Panjshir province. He emphasized that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan prioritizes the resolution of citizens' issues and the assurance of overall security.

According to a statement from Arg, during the meeting, Governor Hakim provided an overview of the economic and local governance situation in Panjshir.

He assured that security has been fully established in the province, and local officials are continually striving to address the people's concerns and provide necessary services. While acknowledging the Islamic Emirate's efforts in various sectors, Hakim emphasized the need for strengthening religious schools, madrassas, and health clinics, particularly in the province's remote areas. He also called for special attention to be given to the implementation of developmen-

tal projects. In response, Mr. Hanafi commended the efforts and performance of the Panjshir officials. He reiterated that national security and the resolution of citizens' issues are the Islamic Emirate's top priorities. He urged local officials to intensify their efforts in these areas. Addressing the suggestions presented, the Deputy Prime Minister assured that the Islamic Emirate would consider the issues related to the availability of facilities in the field.

## Survey begins for water conduit project

KABUL (Ariana News): Officials of the Ministry of Energy and Water have announced that a survey has begun for the project to transfer water from Panjshir River to Kabul.

Mohammad Aref Momand, the head of survey and design of the Ministry of Energy and Water, said in a meeting with Panjshir governor that the practical work of this 120 km long project from Panjshir capital Bazarak to Tarakhel area of Kabul will start soon.

Meanwhile, Panjshir Governor Mohammad Agha Hakim has also assured of cooperation in transferring the water of the province to Kabul.

A Turkish construction company called SKM is involved in the project to transfer of water from Panjshir to Kabul.

The company's officials have said that they need the support of government institutions to implement their projects.

It is expected that with the implementation of the Panjshir water transfer project, the problem of lack of safe drinking water in Kabul will be solved to some extent as 2 million people will benefit from the water.

## Floods destroy 540 homes

KABUL (Ariana News): Floods caused by heavy rainfall across Afghanistan over the last two days have destroyed more than 1,500 acres of agricultural land and resulted in severe damage to over 540 homes, the United Nations humanitarian office (OCHA) said.

Floods have also destroyed other critical infrastructure across seven provinces, including six bridges and 450 km of road.

The provinces where most damage has been reported are Faryab province in north, Nangarhar province in east, and Daikundi province in the central region.

This is the third time that the northern region has experienced flooding in less than a month, with seven people killed and 384 families affected in heavy rains that occurred on 21 and 26-27 March, OCHA said.

There have been no reports of displacement due to the recent floods, according to OCHA.

## Process of repainting taxis started

KABUL (Ariana News): Officials from the General Directorate of Traffic Police say after Kabul, the process of implementing the taxi color change plan in urban and suburban areas has begun in the northern provinces.

Haseebullah Mokhtar, the General Director of Traffic in Afghanistan, recently stated during a special ceremony in Balkh province that this process has commenced in the northern zones of Balkh, Sar-e-Pol, Faryab and Jawzjan provinces of Afghanistan.

## Kabul reiterates Afghan soil will not be used to threaten world

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate has stated that countries around the world, due to their competing interests, are raising the issue of terrorism in Afghanistan.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said that the soil of Afghanistan, under the administration of the Islamic Emirate, is not allowed to be used by any foreign group against other countries.

Previously, some media had published articles and reports expressing concern about Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terrorists again.

The spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate said, "Some countries have their competitions with others and want to use such cases to advance their own competitions, which is not correct. Afghanistan is safe and stable and poses no threat to any country."

However, some political analysts said that the Islamic Emirate must take serious action to address concerns about the use of Afghan soil against other countries.

Mohammad Matin Mohammadkhail, a political analyst, told TOLONews: "This is an intelligence matter, not an issue for which people have risen to overthrow the system. All attacks, whether in Kandahar,

Moscow, Iran, or Tajikistan, have an intelligence game behind them in the region and beyond."

Najib Rahman Shamal, another analyst, said, "Fighting against this evil phenomenon and enemy of humanity requires collective and intelligent actions by countries, both from an intelligence and military perspective, which must be undertaken in cooperation with the interim government of Afghanistan, if their hideouts exist in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or any other country."

This comes after a deadly attack on a concert hall in Russia, for which Daesh claimed responsibility, and the growing concerns about the presence of terrorist



groups in the region, for the commitment of the prompting the US Islamic Emirate to fight against terrorism.

## US drones violating Afghan airspace

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate spokesman told TOLONews that American drones are patrolling in the provinces of Kandahar and Nimroz.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, criticized the violation of the country's airspace by the US, stating that they have repeatedly protested this issue and that the US should take it seriously.

The spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate added, "These aircraft undoubtedly belong to the US, flying and crossing from the airspace of some neighboring countries to Afghanistan. Everyone should understand their responsibilities in this matter and stop the aggression."

Without naming any specific country, Mujahid emphasized that neighboring countries should not allow US drones to use their airspace to violate Afghan airspace.

Abdul Wahed Taqat, a security affairs expert, referring to the patrolling of these planes told TOLONews: "If two planes patrol in Afghan airspace today, tomorrow these patrols will increase, and then perhaps bomber planes will come, and Afghanistan will be occupied."

Sarwar Niazi, another military affairs expert, said: "Unfortunately, Afghanistan lacks air defense forces and radar, so any country that wishes can violate Afghanistan's airspace."

Previously, some sources had reported that drones were seen patrolling in the airspace of Kandahar and Nimroz in recent days.

## Kabul denies Iran recruiting Fatemiyoun forces in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate has rejected the Brookings Institution's report alleging that Iran has been allowed to continue recruiting Fatemiyoun forces in Afghanistan.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, described the relations between the Islamic Emirate and Iran as positive and stated that no country is permitted to recruit forces or conduct military activities in Afghanistan.

Mujahid said: "The

issue with the Iranian forces or the Fatemiyoun group is not correct. In Afghanistan, such activities are not allowed; countries are not supported or permitted to carry out military activities here. Such a claim is incorrect."

Previously, the Brookings Institution had reported that the "Taliban" had allowed Tehran to continue the recruitment of Fatemiyoun forces.

"Kandahar and Kabul insiders tell me that the Taliban has permitted

Tehran to continue recruiting fatemiyoun Shiite brigades in Afghanistan for its 'axis of resistance' operations in the Middle East," the Brookings' report reads.

The report also stated that Iran has the deepest access to the leader of the Islamic Emirate and his close circle, and despite religious differences and recent military clashes between the forces of the Islamic Emirate and Tehran over water issues, Iran, like other countries, has contin-

ued to maintain relations with the Islamic Emirate.

Najib Rahman Shamal, an international relations expert, said: "Iran should not exploit the vulnerabilities of people, especially the vulnerabilities of Afghan refugees living in Iran, to strengthen its front in the Middle East or elsewhere for military purposes."

The Fatemiyoun Division is an Iran-supported militia group that has been active in Syria since mid-2013.

## 2,000 police posts allocated to youths



KABUL (Ariana News): A total of 2,000 posts in the ranks of the national police, 600 posts in the army, and hundreds of civil posts have been allocated to the youths of Panjshir by the leadership of the Islamic Emirate, its governor Mohammad Agha Hakim announced.

Speaking at an event under the theme Urban Dialogue, Hakim emphasized that security prevails all over the province and there is no bullying.

"After the takeover of

the Islamic Emirate around two and a half or three years ago, the administrative framework of the Islamic system has been adjusted in all provinces, and efforts have been made to appoint people who are committed and honest to the Islamic system in various positions," he said.

Meanwhile, Ahmadullah Badr, the police chief of Panjshir, emphasized that it is the duty of every citizen to cooperate with government institutions in ensur-

ing security. Local municipality officials considered the holding of such events to be effective in bridging the gap between the people and the government.

"The municipality and the citizens are like two sides of the same coin, one cannot exist without the other," said Rahmatullah Mohammadi, the mayor of Bazarak city in Panjshir.

In the event, Panjshir residents shared their problems with the government officials and demanded to solve them.

Local officials of Panjshir emphasized that in order to solve the problems of the people of this province on time, a complaints hearing commission consisting of the governor and the security institutions will be formed, and the problems of the people will be addressed seriously.

# 16 killed, 6 wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, three different countries announced \$18.4 million in aid to Afghanistan, with Pakistan planning to initiate the second phase of repatriating documented Afghans. The move drew reactions from international organisations.

**Casualties**  
Last week, 16 people were killed and six others wounded across Afghanistan in various incidents. Kabul police said three kidnappers had been killed in a clash with security forces. Local officials said two people clashed over a squabble between their children in the Surkhrod district of Nangarhar province. One of them was killed. In the same

province, one person was killed as a result of a water dispute in Spinghar district.

Meanwhile, three people were injured during a clash in Farah. One person was killed in Ghor due to a tribal dispute. In Nuristan, one individual was killed and another wounded in a spat over loan.

In Kandahar, a woman shot dead her husband and an old landmine explosion killed three children and wounded two others.

According to reports, during the previous week, 31 people had been killed and 50 others injured in different incidents nationwide.

Before the regime change in Afghanistan in August 2021, hundreds of civilians and security per-

sonnel would be killed and injured every week.

**Reactions to Pakistani DM's claims**

In a post on X, Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif alleged: "The hub of terrorists hitting Pakistan is in Afghanistan."

"In view of the increase in terrorist incidents, there is a need for a fundamental change in the border situation. The source of terrorism in Pakistan is in Afghanistan and despite our efforts, Kabul is not making any progress in this direction," Asif wrote.

In response to the accusations, IEA chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said: "We once again reject such claims as baseless. Afghanistan itself has been

a victim of war for the last four decades, have its own problems and difficulties. Blaming Afghanistan means dodging responsibility and seeking a justification for failure."

**2nd phase of refugee repatriation**

Pakistan is gearing up for the second phase of repatriating Afghan refugees. Nearly one million registered Afghan citizens could be sent back to their homeland, with district authorities and police directed to map the whereabouts of the refugees.

Amnesty International (AI) asked Pakistan to immediately halt continued detentions, deportations and widespread harassment of Afghan refugees.

UNAMA's Deputy Special Representative and Resident Coordinator in Afghanistan Indrika Ratwatte expressed concern about the beginning of the second phase of repatriating Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

He suggested the Afghans living in Pakistan should be given enough time to return to their homeland. He opposed the forced eviction of refugees.

IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said: "Forced deportations, in any name and by any country, were illegal and against accepted norms and should not happen because the people of Afghanistan, especially migrants, have seen many problems and

should not face more."

From September 2023 to February 2024, Pakistan deported 527, 981 Afghan refugees, showing little regard for international human rights law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement.

**Pakistani trade delegation visits Kabul**

In response to an official invitation from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a Pakistani delegation led by Deputy Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Khurram Agha arrived in Kabul on Monday.

Acting Minister of Commerce and Industry Nooruddin Azizi says trade issues should be kept out of politics. Referring to recent tensions between Kabul

and Islamabad, Azizi said priority should be given to trade-related issues that must be kept apart from politics.

Muttaqi met Khurram Agha and the delegation accompanying him. Muttaqi called for taking sincere combined measures to resolve the existing problems in trade and transit sectors.

Afghanistan and Pakistan also signed trade agreements and decided on the transportation of trade goods by air in the form of "multi-model air transit" which will be implemented within two months.

**Norway: We do not support IEA rivals**

Norwegian Chargé d'Affaires Paul Kloman

Beken, in a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Maulvi Abdul Kabir, said his country did not support opponents of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

According to him, the world has not yet recognised IEA, but it is in the interest of all to see progress in this regard, emphasising the need for further efforts.

**Continuation of aid**  
Spain has provided one million EUR to the AHF. WFP says Russia has contributed one million US dollars in aid to Afghanistan. Germany has also chipped in with \$16.4 million for economic cooperation and development in Afghanistan.





ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and his wife Emine Erdogan vote during the local elections in Istanbul.

## Turkey local election: Erdogan battles key rival

ISTANBUL (Reuters): Turks voted on Sunday in municipal elections focused on President Tayyip Erdogan's bid to reclaim control of Istanbul from rival Ekrem Imamoglu, who aims to reassert the opposition as a political force after election defeats last year. Polls closed at 5 p.m. (1400 GMT) after some violence across the country related to the election of neighbourhood officials, or 'muhtars', with three people reported killed. Initial vote results are expected by early evening. Istanbul Mayor Imamoglu dealt Erdogan and his AK Party the biggest electoral blow of two decades in power with his win in the 2019 vote. The president struck back in 2023 by securing re-election and a parliament majority with his nationalist allies.

Sunday's results could reinforce Erdogan's control of NATO-member Turkey, or signal change in the major emerging economy's divided political landscape. An Imamoglu win would fuel expectations of him becoming a future national leader.

"Imamoglu is fine and does what he should as mayor, but he does not compare with Erdogan," AK Party (AKP) voter and retiree Omer said, while a jubilant crowd chanted the president's name as he emerged from a polling station in Istanbul.

Elsewhere in Istanbul, engineer

Murat Ercan disapproved of Erdogan's active role in campaigning for his party ahead of the elections, believing the president should be impartial.

"Ekrem Imamoglu is the sort of president we long for, with his constructive and smiling nature, embracing everyone," Ercan, 60, said after casting his ballot in Istanbul.

In one incident in the southeast, groups clashed with guns, sticks and stones, killing one and wounding 11. In another, one muhtar candidate was killed and four people wounded in a fight, state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

It also said 16 people were hurt in a clash in Sanliurfa, while a muhtar was stabbed in Afyonkarahisar in the west. Demiroren reported separately that one person was shot dead and two wounded overnight in Bursa.

In Istanbul, a city of 16 million people that drives Turkey's economy, polls suggest a tight race as Imamoglu faces a challenge from AKP candidate Murat Kurum, a former minister.

The results are likely to be shaped in part by economic problems driven by near 70% inflation, and by Kurdish and Islamist voters weighing the government's performance.

While the main prize for Erdogan is Istanbul, he also seeks to win back

the capital Ankara. Both cities were won by the opposition in 2019 after being under the rule of his AKP and Islamist predecessors for the previous 25 years.

Erdogan's prospects have been helped by the collapse of the opposition alliance that he defeated last year, though Imamoglu still appeals to voters beyond his main opposition Republican People's Party.

Voters of the main pro-Kurdish party were crucial to Imamoglu's 2019 success. Their DEM party this time is fielding its own candidate in Istanbul, but many Kurds are expected to put aside party loyalty and vote for him again.

In the mainly Kurdish southeast, DEM aims to reaffirm its strength after the state replaced pro-Kurdish mayors with state-appointed 'trustees' following previous elections over alleged militant ties.

"I wish for an end to the trustee system. This election is important for Turkey's future and for listening to us: Kurds are always decisive," said civil servant Elif Durgun, 32.

One factor working against Erdogan is a rise in support for the Islamist New Welfare Party due to its headline stance against Israel over the Gaza conflict and dissatisfaction with the Islamist-rooted AKP's handling of the economy.

## Ministries given targets to provide early relief to people: Attaullah Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday that all ministries had been given targets aimed at overcoming challenges facing the country.

In a press conference at the PML-N's Secretariat here, he said that in yesterday's meeting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif gave short, medium and long term targets to all ministries aimed at bringing betterment to the people. "The Cabinet consist of experienced people, youths, seasoned politicians and technocrats," he added. He said that the Prime Minister had decided to evaluate the performance of each ministry and key performance indicators had also been set for them. "By using latest technology, achievement of targets given to ministries will be monitored. Written instructions have been issued to all the ministries in which they have been informed about the targets which they have to meet," he added.

Attaullah said that targets had been given on the basis of realistic approach like the finance ministry had been given the target to reduce inflation and unemployment, increase GDP growth, restructuring of loans and digitalization of the Federal Board of Revenue. He said that ministers which would show good performance would be appreciated, adding that a self-accountability system had also been evolved and key performance indicators of ministries would be evaluated using modern IT interventions. "Reducing trade deficit, promoting vocational training, increasing forex, boosting exports in the IT sector, activate facilities like PayPal, activating wifi hotspots and introducing latest digital system across the country are some clear and key targets," he added.

Briefing about the targets of the Interior Ministry, Attaullah Tarar said that the ministry had been asked to launch a crackdown against illegal weapons, devise a new system to stop terrorism, take action against illegal



foreign residents in the country and stop smuggling. "Meetings were held related to the security of the Chinese and how to take preemptive action to curb terrorism on the basis of intelligence information," Attaullah Tarar said and added that coordination between the Centre and provinces would also be checked in this regard on the same pattern on which National Action Plan implementation had been supervised. Regarding targets of the Law ministry, the Information Minister said that steps had been taken for making laws for the protection of minorities and an eportal would be made for passed laws in the country.

He said that till September 2024, a report related to human rights would be prepared and targets related to implementation of laws would also be checked. About targets of the Ministry of Industries, Attaullah Tarar said that a target had been given related to Industrial Development Regulatory Authority and promotion of ship breaking industry. He said that in Pakistan, the minerals sector had a lot of potential, adding that a target related to exploration of minerals and their export had also been given.

He said that a target had been given with regard to ease of doing business besides a target to devise trade and bilateral trade agreements

with friendly countries. He said that the Trade Ministry had been asked to bring National Trade Policy in the cabinet by April 30 and get it approved.

The Information Minister said that the Education Ministry had been asked to ensure enrollment of out of school children, to increase PhD scholarships by 20 percent, devise a strategy related to 'National Hunarmandi' by September 1.

About the targets of the Ministry of Privatisation, Attaullah Tarar said that PIA privatisation should be completed at the earliest. He said that talks with commercial banks related to outstanding dues had reached a logical conclusion. Attaullah Tarar said that that privatization of PIA would yield positive results on the country's economy, adding that efforts were being made to overcome loopholes in the tax system. He said for the first time businessmen who were playing a significant role in strengthening the country's economy and who were big tax payers had been rewarded. The austerity committee would submit a report regarding how to reduce government expenses to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in coming few days and in the light of which the premier would announce the austerity policy, he maintained.

## President felicitates Christian community

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday felicitated the Christian community on observance of Easter.

The president said that the Constitution of Pakistan guaranteed constitutional rights to all religious communities. The president, in a message, said that all the communities enjoyed religious, political, social and economic rights in Pakistan. "The Christian community is a precious asset for Pakistan," he said, adding that Easter was an occasion that brought a message of hope, affection and prosperity, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release.

Appreciating the Christian community's contributions to national progress, he further observed that the Christian community had always played their role in the progress and prosperity of the country.

The president reaffirmed that Pakistan was committed to the protection of the rights of all communities and would ensure all steps for their prosperity. For the country's progress and prosperity, the entire nation including minorities would have to collectively work together, he added.

## CM KP greets Christian community on Easter festival

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday congratulated the Christian community living all over the country especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the occasion of their religious festival Easter.

The provincial government is participating in the joys of the Christian community, the chief minister said in a message of felicitation issued here.

Ali Amin Gandapur said all minorities in Pakistan have equal rights of all kinds as citizens. "Our religion Islam teaches to give equal rights to minorities," he said and added, our constitution guarantees all religions to celebrate religious worship, rituals and festivals with complete freedom. He said that the welfare of the minority community living in the province, the protection of their lives and property and constitutional rights were among the priorities of the current provincial government.

## Russia demands Ukraine hand over head of security service, others

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia is demanding that Ukraine hand over all people connected with terrorist acts committed in Russia, including the head of the country's SBU Security Service, the foreign ministry said on Sunday.

A ministry statement listed violent incidents that have occurred in Russia since the Kremlin's forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022, including bombings that killed the daughter of a prominent nationalist and a war blogger, and another incident in which a writer was seriously hurt.

It said investigation of these incidents showed that "the traces of these crimes lead to Ukraine."

"Russia has turned over to Ukrainian authorities its demands ... for the immediate arrest and extradition of all those connected to the

terrorist acts in question," the statement said.

The ministry statement said those to be handed over included SBU head Vasyi Maliuk, who has acknowledged his service was behind attacks on the bridge linking Crimea to the Russian mainland since the Kremlin's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russia seized control of Crimea in 2014; the bridge was built after the region was annexed.

"The Russian side demands that the Kyiv regime immediately cease all support for terrorist activity, extradite guilty parties and compensate the victims for damages," it said. "Ukraine's violation of its obligations under anti-terrorist conventions will result in it being held to account in international legal terms."

The statement referred to

the mass shooting this month at a concert hall outside Moscow in which 144 people died, but only in an oblique sense.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, and U.S. officials said they had intelligence showing it was carried out by the network's Afghan branch, Islamic State Khorasan, or ISIS-K.

Russian investigators said last week they had found proof that the concert hall gunmen were linked to "Ukrainian nationalists". Kyiv denies any connection with the attack. Russian news agencies on Sunday quoted Alexander

Bastrykin, the head of Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's most important criminal investigation body, as saying that work was proceeding to determine who was behind the attack.

## Indian opposition protest arrest of Kejriwal ahead of polls

NEW DELHI (INP): Top leaders of India's opposition coalition and thousands of supporters rallied in the capital on Sunday, decrying "autocracy" in protest at the arrest of a senior colleague ahead of general elections.

Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of Delhi and a key leader in an opposition alliance formed to compete against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was detained earlier in March in connection with a long-running corruption probe. Kejriwal's government is accused of receiving kickbacks while distributing liquor licences to private companies. Kejriwal, 55, denies the charges.

"The country is headed towards autocracy," Shiv Sena party leader Uddhav Thackeray, a former chief minister of Maharashtra state, told cheering crowds on Sunday.

"This one-man government is taking the country to ruin."

Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary elections starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world.

Many analysts see Modi's re-election as a foregone conclusion, partly due to the resonance of his assertive Hindu nationalist politics with members of the country's majority faith.

Several leaders of the two dozen political parties of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) opposition alliance are expected to address the rally.

India's main financial investigation agency, the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which arrested Kejriwal, has launched probes into at least four other state chief ministers or their family members. While Modi enjoys high levels of support, critics accuse him of using law enforcement agencies to intimidate opposition leaders. All the investigations involve political opponents of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

### Senate Election

## ECP issues final list of 59 candidates

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has published a final list of candidates vying for the Senate election for the vacant 48 seats which will be held on April 2.

Overall 59 candidates are vying for 48 seats

while it is pertinent to mention that out of 48 seats, 18 candidates have been elected unopposed.

However, the Senate election on 11 seats of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was in jeopardy, while the election on the remaining 30 Senate seats will be

held on April 2. Elections will be held on 12 seats in Sindh, 5 seats in Punjab, and 2 seats in the federal capital Islamabad. Printing of ballot papers and delivery of election materials to the returning officers has already been completed.

## Thousands gather for London pro-Palestinian rally

LONDON (AFP/APP): Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters rallied in London on Saturday, in the latest demonstration in the British capital demanding a ceasefire in Gaza and more aid for the war-ravaged territory.

The event, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, began at Russell Square in the city centre before attendees marched to Trafalgar Square for a mid-afternoon rally.

A smaller number of demonstrators also turned out for a counter-protest in support of Israel, with lines of police separating the two gatherings. London has seen numerous large-scale pro-Palestinian protests as well as smaller pro-Israel counter-demonstrations.

The rallies for Palestinians have proved contentious, attracting criticism for fuelling a hostile environment towards Jewish people. Some ruling Conservative lawmakers have branded them "hate marches".

Police have made dozens of arrests over those months for anti-Semitic chanting and banners, promoting a

proscribed organisation and assaulting emergency workers.

That included on Saturday, with officers making four arrests for hate crime, public order and terrorism offences. A man was detained for the terror-related offence related to "inviting support for a proscribed organisation," London's Metropolitan Police said. Organisers have insisted throughout they are exercising their democratic rights and that law-breakers make up a tiny minority of the sometimes tens of thousands of people who have turned out. Sally Worgan, 65, a retired social worker, had travelled from Gloucestershire in western England to attend. "I think it's important for the Palestinian people to know that people do support them, that they're not just on their own," she told AFP.

"We will keep marching," Ben Jamal, one of the organisers, told Sky News on Saturday, adding attendees wanted "a permanent ceasefire" and more aid to be delivered to Palestinians in Gaza.

"We already know that 70 percent of the British public according to opinion polls support the demands that we're making."

The Met said in the build-up to Saturday that it had "a robust policing plan in place", including requiring marchers to keep to a pre-approved route and disperse by 5:00 pm (1700 GMT). Deputy Assistant Commissioner Andy Valentine, who oversaw the policing operation, said it had been an "extremely busy" day, with several other events taking place across the capital.

"I have been clear in my intention for this weekend that we will not tolerate anyone who is intent on carrying out criminality or causing any form of disorder or anti-social behaviour," he added in a statement.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak earlier this month called for officers to take tougher action against protesters at such events, saying they "had descended into intimidation, threats and planned acts of violence".

One woman was killed and three houses were partially damaged in Mansehra and one house in Momand, three in Mardan and two in Waziristan were damaged while eleven cattle have also died due to recent rains in Swat, the report said. Due to rain and hailstorm, life and financial accidents occurred in different districts of Peshawar, Nowshera, Bajaur, Shangla, Mansehra, Bannu, Mohmand, Mardan and North Waziristan with relief materials have been provided to the victims of the affected districts by PDMA. Relief materials were provided to the victims of different districts of Nowshera, Bajaur, Mohmand and other districts as well, the PDMA said.

## 10 people killed, 12 other injured in rain, hailstorms related incident in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as 10 people were killed and 12 others injured in the heavy rain and hail storms related incident, said Provincial Disasters Management Authority report issued on the loss of life and property in the province since the last two days here.

According to details, 10 people died and 12 people were injured as a result of accidents due to rain and hailstorm during the last two days in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PDMA report said. The deaths include 8 children and 2 women, while the injured include 9 children, two women and 1 man, the reports said.

A total of 27 houses were damaged

due to the collapse of walls and roofs in different districts, in which 3 houses were completely damaged and 24 houses were partially damaged, the PDMA report said.

Due to recent rains, 4 people died and 3 were injured in Shangla with 2 houses were partially damaged and three children killed and 1 injured and 1 house partially damaged in Bannu, a woman and a child were killed and 2 were injured in Bajaur with three houses were partially damaged. Three persons including a woman were injured and a house partially damaged in Peshawar and in Nowshera, three people were injured and several houses were partially damaged, the report

the lifting of controls at the two countries' air and sea borders is of significant symbolic value.

Admission to Schengen is an "important milestone" for Bulgaria and Romania, symbolising a "question of dignity, of belonging to the European Union", according to foreign policy analyst Stefan Popescu.

"Any Romanian who had to walk down a lane separate from other

European citizens felt being treated differently," he told AFP. Ivan Petrov, a 35-year-old Bulgarian marketing executive who lives in France, said he was enthusiastic about less stressful travelling and the time he would be able to save. "This is a great success for both countries, and a historic moment for the Schengen area -- the largest area of free movement in the world," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement Saturday.