

By-elections of Senate seats

KARACHI (INP): The Provincial Election Commission of Sindh on Sunday announced that the by-elections to two general seats of Senate from Sindh will be held on March 14, Thursday, in the Sindh Assembly building. The polling for the Senate seats will start from 09am to 04pm in the assembly. Jam Saifullah Khan and Mohammed Aslam Abro are the nominated candidates of PPPP .

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Qazi Faez Isa, administering the oath of office of the President of Pakistan to Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, Former President Dr. Arif Alvi and Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, were also present.

Two killed, several injured in Peshawar blast

PESHAWAR (APP/PPI): Two persons were killed and another injured in a blast in Board Bazaar area of Peshawar on Sunday morning. According to Rescue 1122, the bomb was fitted in the motorbike on Nasir Bagh road that caused the blast. The bodies and the injured were shifted to Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar.

Meanwhile, The preliminary report of the explosion in Board Bazaar has released by the police and the dead terrorists in the bomb blast in board bazar were suicide attacker, hailing from Dir, residing in Peshawar. The suicide attack has been identified as Suleman, preliminary report said and their target was PTI public meeting in Kabutar Chowk Peshawar. Another killed terrorist is being identified, Police officials said.

The investigation team is also investigating the injured person in Peshawar, said the preliminary report. Four to five kilograms of explosives were used in the Board Bazar blast, BDS team said. Explosive materials were being moved to another place by those killed in the blast, Police said. Two people were killed and one person was injured in the Board Bazaar blast, Police said.

Two people from the board explosion were brought to Khyber Teaching Hospital, a spokesman of the hospital Sajjad Khan said. He said that the injured person's name is Usman, aged 30 years. The condition

of the injured person is critical and he is being given first aid, Spokesman Sajjad Khan said.

Meanwhile, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi here Sunday said that the explosion on Nasirbagh Road was occurred during the transfer of explosives in a motorcycle, killing two persons on the spot and critically injuring another. Talking to the media, the SSP said that the bomb disposal unit's (BDU) report has disclosed that the powerful explosion was ripped through an explosive-packed motorcycle, and declared that it was not a suicide blast.

He said that three persons were transporting the explosive material through a motorcycle detonated on Nasir Bagh Road with a loud sound. The injured was shifted to Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar. The BDU's report has revealed that the dead and injured are alleged terrorists and no citizen was harmed in the attack.

PM strongly condemns terrorist attack in Peshawar: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif strongly condemned a terrorist incident in the Board Bazaar of Peshawar on Sunday. The prime minister prayed for the high ranks of the departed souls and expressed condolences with the bereaved families, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

He also directed the provision of all possible medical treatment to the injured. The prime minister reiterated

his resolve to root out terrorism.

CM KP condemns blast in board bazar: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Ghandapur Sunday condemns blast in Board Bazar on main University road and directed Inspector General of Police to submit a complete report of the bomb blast in which two persons were killed and another injured.

Talking to mediamen at the site of the bomb blast, SSP Operation Kashif Aftab Abbasi said that investigation is being conducted to ascertain whether it was a suicide bomber onboard a motorcycle with a facilitator or the explosive material was being carried to one place from other for a major blast planning.

"We are working on it," he said, adding, two people have been killed, one injured while one person died on the spot".

SSP operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi disclosed that 4 to 5 kg explosives have been used and the investigation is going on, however, it is known that explosive materials were being transferred from one place to another. What was the target, the investigation is going on, he said. However, the names of the accused are not being disclosed, SSP Operations said. He said two persons on a motorcycle were killed in the explosion while one was injured and the motorcyclists are being identified. The motorcycle was going from Board Bazar to Nasir Bagh, he added.

PTI leaders Khosa, Raja arrested amid protests against 'rigging'

LAHORE (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Sardar Latif Khosa and Salman Akram Raja were arrested as party leaders and workers staged nationwide protests against alleged rigging in February 8 general election. PTI leaders and workers took to streets across the country with rallies in various cities of Punjab, including Rawalpindi and Islamabad, along with protests in Karachi, Kandhkot, Tank and other cities.

According to a PTI spokesperson, the nation would never accept the "proven, most corrupt persons as the president and prime minister of the country against their will".

Meanwhile, the Punjab police took Sardar Latif Khosa into custody in Lahore after authorities started arresting protesting PTI workers. In a statement, Shehbaz Khosa said his father was arrested by station house officer (SHO) Cantt. "We have no information where the police have taken him [Latif Khosa]," he said.

Taking to X, Sher Afzal Marwat called the arrest "utterly deplorable and wholly intolerable", adding that the authorities in Punjab need

to stop the "unfair behaviour".

SCBA condemns arrest of Salman Akram Raja, Latif Khosa: The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) on Sunday strongly condemned the arrests of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders and lawyers Sardar Latif Khosa, Salman Akram Raja and others.

According to a statement issued by the SCBA, President Shahzad Shaukat and Secretary Syed Ali Imran "vehemently denounced" the arrests of Sardar Latif Khosa, Salman Akram Raja, Mumtaz Mustafa, and numerous other lawyers while peacefully protesting against the alleged electoral malpractices in the recent general elections.

While demanding immediate release of all arrested lawyers, the President and the Secretary said that as senior Advocates of the Supreme Court and life Members of this Association, the arrests is viewed with grave concern. "All of them have always represented the highest standards in legal profession," they commended. Expressing his utter discontent-

ment, the President stated that it is in common knowledge that SCBA have always advocated for upholding the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973.

The SCBA President further lambasted that despite this association, on numerous occasions, have called upon the authorities to respect the legal and democratic rights of citizens, including lawyers.

"The recent trend of targeting and arresting members of the legal fraternity is alarming. It reflects a blatant disregard for constitutional rights, rampant lawlessness, and an abuse of power," read the statement. Furthermore, to address the escalating aggression against the legal community, the SCBA has decided to summon emergency meeting of its Executive Committee to chart out a course of action. "Let no one be mistaken, SCBA reiterates its commitment to defending the rights of lawyers and upholding the fundamental rights, democratic principles, protection of human rights and rule of law," the statement concluded.

Ji announces million march towards US embassy

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) on Sunday announced to carry out a million march toward the United States embassy on the 27th of Ramadan to express solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine.

Addressing a Gaza Solidarity March in Islamabad, JI Ameer Sirajul Haq said that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has also failed to play its due role for Palestinians and just is restricted to statements only.

"Our parliament also passed ineffective resolutions and now the law-

makers don't even talk about the situation of Gaza," he added.

Sirajul Haq said that millions of people would be marching towards the American embassy on the 27th of Ramadan. Speaking on the political situation in Pakistan, the JI chief said that the economy of the country cannot improve till the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are in power. "These two families have ruined Pakistan and the country cannot be put on the path of prosperity until they are

removed from power," Sirajul Haq added. He said that newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari took the oath with all those who looted the country around him.

Speaking on the occasion, JI leader Senator Mushtaq Ahmed said that Israel is carrying out a massacre in in Palestine. He said that the United States vetoed the ceasefire resolution three times in the United Nations.

Senator Mushtaq Ahmed said that unlike the rulers, the people of America and Europe have supported Palestine.

The Frontier Post

Ruet-e-Hilal Committee meet today

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee is set to convene on Monday for the holy month of Ramadan moon sighting at the office of Administrator Auqaf in Peshawar, under the chairmanship of Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad. The meeting will witness the participation of esteemed members from both Central and Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committees.

Zardari sworn in as President of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Asif Ali Zardari today took oath as the 14th President of Pakistan.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to Asif Ali Zardai at a ceremony held at the President House in Islamabad.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, former Prime Minister and PML-N Supremo Nawaz Sharif, parliamentarians, political leaders, Services Chiefs and other high officials attended the ceremony.

Asif Ali Zardari, as a joint candidate of the PML-N and the PPP, defeated Sunni Ittehad Council candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai in the presidential elections held on Saturday. Asif Ali Zardari is the first elected president of Pakistan, who succeeded in reaching the president office for a second time. Earlier, he served as the 11th President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 and was the first politician to complete a full term in office.

Under 18th Amendment, he gave away the presidential powers to

strengthen parliamentary democracy and bolstered provincial autonomy, and coined political reconciliation. President Asif Ali Zardari, during his first term, also helped policies that encompassed freedom of media, revolutionized telecommunications, revived Pakistan's energy sector, opened Pakistan to foreign direct investment and strengthen state-owned enterprises.

The PPP government under his leadership got a consensus among all the political parties on the seventh National Finance Commission award which increased provinces' financial autonomy. The PPP-led government also unveiled the Aghaz-i-Huqooq-i-Balochistan package aimed at fast track progress and development in the province.

To eradicate crippling polio disease from the country, President Asif Ali Zardari also launched Pakistan's National Emergency Action Plan 2011.

President of Iran felicitates President Zardari: President of Iran Syed Ebrahim Raeesi in a message congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as the president of Pakistan.

President Raeesi expressed hope that during his presidency, the relations between the two countries, having historical, cultural and religious history, will be more developed and deepened than before.

The Iranian President stated, "As always, and especially in the new era, the Islamic Republic of Iran declares its readiness to expand relations with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

Xi Jinping felicitates Asif Zardari on election as President: Chinese President Xi Jinping has congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as President of Pakistan.

In his message today, Xi Jinping said China and Pakistan are good neighbors, good friends, good partners and good brothers.

He said the two countries have achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations. The Chinese President said Beijing is ready to work with President Zardari to carry forward the traditional friendship between the two countries.

PM increases Ramazan Package to Rs12.5 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has increased the volume of Ramazan Package from Rs7.5 billion to Rs 12.5 billion, besides directed for enhancing its outreach in the country to facilitate the masses during the upcoming holy month. Along with Utility Stores and Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), mobile units would provide edible items at subsidized rates, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release on Sunday.

In the initial phase, a total of 1200 mobile points and 300 permanent package relief centers were being established. The prime minister desired that maximum relief should be extended to the poor people.

During the month of Ramadan, the masses would be provided different edible items at lesser rates compared to market rates.

Besides, designated places, trucks would supply food stuff to different places and GPS technology would be used for this purpose.

A video would be released for use of mobile app. A dashboard would be

created to supervise sale of mobile flour with the help of digital technology. On March 7, the prime minister had announced Rs7.5 billion subsidized Ramzan package.

A total of 39.6 million people would be provided food items during the holy month of Ramazan at subsidized 30 percent rates.

The items under BISP included, flour, rice, pulses, ghee, sugar, syrup and milk. The subsidy on flour would be Rs77 per kg and on ghee Rs100 respectively.

PM thanks President Muizzu, President Wikremesinghe, PM Pushpa Kamal, PM Sheikh Hasina for their congratulatory messages: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday thanked President of the Maldives Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of Sri Lanka Ranil Wikremesinghe, Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina for their congratulatory messages on his election as Prime Minister.

In separate posts on X, the prime

minister thanked the President of the Maldives and said that Pakistan remained committed to deepening its relations with the Maldives.

Similarly, in another post on his X account, the prime minister expressed gratitude to Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' for his letter of felicitations on his election as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. "Look forward to working closely with him to realize the true potential of cooperation between Pakistan and Nepal," he further posted. In a related post, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, in response to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's congratulatory message, said that he looked forward to working with her to further strengthen the Pakistan-Bangladesh relationship. To a message of felicitation from President of Sri Lanka Ranil Wikremesinghe, the prime minister said that he was confident that relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka would continue to grow from strength to strength during the days ahead.

KP CM demands judicial action against polls rigging, ready for re-election

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has demanded the judiciary to take strict action against alleged polls rigging. Ali Gandapur has claimed that his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), was subjected to pre-polls rigging as nomination papers were stolen and party mandate was stolen by rigged and forged election results.

He also demanded the resignation of the chief election commissioner for not abiding by the law.

KP CM has called for a peaceful protest today against rigged elections and stolen mandate.

He asserted that international institutions and observing bodies had raised



questions on the credibility and fairness of the election and denied the election results. He insisted the rule of law and justice must prevail, and they would be ready for a re-election if

promised transparency and fairness. KP CM Ali Amin hasn't accepted the victory of newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari, saying he wasn't elected by Form-45 voters. Ali Gandapur has

refused to attend the oath-taking ceremony of Asif Zardari, labeling it a violation of the constitution to attend the ceremony of a candidate who won by undemocratic practices.



PESHAWAR: Two people were killed in a blast near Peshawar's Board Bazaar on Sunday morning.

CM reviews monitoring mechanism of model markets

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif suddenly reached Model Ramzan Bazaar Control Room in Poonch House here on Sunday and reviewed the monitoring mechanism of the provincial model market control room.

The CM observed both district and PITB dashboards developed for the purpose, besides reviewing the Qeemat App dashboard. She was briefed by the authorities concerned about the data displayed on these dashboards.

She stressed on the importance of effective monitoring of the delivery of Ramadan Nigahban hampers at beneficiaries' doorsteps. She said: "I will not tolerate any obstruction or neglect in this regard."

The chief minister highlighted, "District Score Cards would be developed on the basis of performance of district administration in the delivery of Ramadan Nigahban hampers at beneficiaries' doorsteps, and handling of other related issues thereof."

She added that marks would be deducted for the violation of SOPs in this regard. By the 10th of Ramadan, Ramadan Nigahban hampers will reach all the needy, she informed and directed the authorities concerned to also include home delivery information in the dashboard.

Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, Secretary Industries Ehsan Bhutta, and DG Industries Asif Ali Farukh were present on the occasion.

CM pays tributes to

martyred constable: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has paid tribute to the martyred constable for embracing martyrdom due to firing of dacoits in Sargodha.

Constable Mohsin Abbas of the Muhafiz Squad deputed in the suburban area of Sargodha embraced martyrdom due to firing by dacoits in the course of patrolling.

In her message, the CM acknowledged that the martyred Constable Mohsin Abbas laid down his life for the sake of protecting the life and property of the people. Maryam Nawaz added that sacrifice of the martyred constable would always be remembered.

The CM ordered the Inspector General of Police to look after the family members of martyred constable.

Sindh Nari Day urges for women empowerment

KARACHI (APP): The Women Speakers on Sunday laid a great stress on the empowerment of women and effective implementation of laws related to them in the Sindh province while marking the occasion of 'Sindh Nari Day' at Karachi Press Club.

They said that the effective implementation of women laws was lagging behind in the province and needed authorities due attention. The Speakers said that they had gathered to highlight the issues of girls and women as well as their success stories. They said that the women were putting in their efforts and struggling for their rights in the society. The first session of the Sindh Nari Day was moderated by Dr. Shehnaila Zardari with speakers including Waheeda Mahesar.

Speaking on the issues of women and economy, Waheeda Mahesar said we had to equip our people with trainings and skills to overcome the challenge of unemployment in the society. She also stressed the need for documentation of informal economy.

Pushpa Kumari on the occasion said that the problems of Muslim or non-Muslim women were the same. She said that the minority women were struggling for their rights as the Muslim women were attempting to achieve them.

While expressing her views over the enactment of family law related to minorities, she said that such other laws should also be made to facilitate them. She emphasized that the forced conversions should be stopped and the minorities be provided with protection under the law.

Other sessions titled poetry on women empowerment; success stories: women's participation and contribution in law, sports, media and theater moderated by Fahmida Riaz; youth and education moderated by Shazia; and recitation of poetry by Shaiza Kareem were held. Later, Sindh Nari musical programme also held.

Public-private partnerships in health sector

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Specialized Healthcare & Medical Education, Khawaja Salman Rafique, emphasized the vital role of public-private partnerships in Pakistan's healthcare system during his visit to a free medical camp organized by the Alfalah Foundation Pakistan on Sunday.

Assessing the provision of medical facilities at the camp, the provincial minister commended the administration of Alfalah Foundation Pakistan for their efforts in organizing the event, which aimed to provide free medical services to the residents of Salamapura, here.

"I congratulate the administration of Alfalah Foundation Pakistan on organizing the free medical camp for the citizens," stated Minister Rafique.

Patients at the medical camp are benefiting from free services for various health issues including heart, nose, ears, throat, and gynecological problems, as highlighted by Minister Rafique.

"Serving humanity holds great significance in the eyes of Allah Almighty," Minister Rafique emphasized, underscoring the importance of such initiatives in fulfilling healthcare needs and promoting well-being in communities.

Unwavering commitment to minorities protection

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Human Rights & Minorities Affairs (HRMA) Ramesh Singh Arora has affirmed his commitment to ensuring the protection of minorities throughout Punjab under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

He stated this while participating in a prayer ceremony of Christian community at FGA Ground, Kot Lakhpat, here on Sunday.

Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora expressed gratitude to the Christian community, which offered special prayers for Mian Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. He acknowledged Maryam Nawaz's historic achievement as the first woman Chief Minister of Punjab.

He congratulated Maryam Nawaz on behalf of the Christian community and expressed confidence that Pakistan's minorities would always stand united with their leadership.

The minister reiterated the importance of safeguarding minority rights, emphasizing guidance received from Maryam Nawaz Sharif. With 3.3 million religious minorities in Punjab, the commitment to their service remains unwavering, as highlighted during Maryam Nawaz's dedicated efforts. Over the next four months, a developmental package of Rs 850 million would be allocated for various schemes, including the renovation of a church in Lahore, and upgradation in Mariamabad and Youhanaabad, he said.

Furthermore, initiatives include a 5 percent job quota and a 2 percent quota in higher education. He urged public to prioritize education for their children, especially considering the unfortunate tendency for minority children to be overlooked in this regard.

Commissioner for strict action against profiteers during Ramzan

KARACHI (APP): Commissioner Muhammad Saleem Rajput has directed the officers concerned that implementation of government fixed prices of essential items must be ensured during Holy month of Ramzan and shopkeepers and traders made bound not to charge over prices of the daily use items failing which structure action should be initiated against the violators.

According to statement issued here on Sunday, the Commissioner said on the directives of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, pricing control must be implemented during Ramzan at all cost and strict action against profiteers and hoarders be expedited. Meanwhile, the local administration has initiated action against profiteers in all 7 districts of Karachi division and over 800000 rupees fine was imposed against 137 profiteers for charging higher prices of the essential items.

'Killer' of grandfather arrested from airport

LAHORE (APP): A police team of Special Operation Cell arrested the alleged killer of his grandfather, who was attempting to flee abroad. As per details, Abdul Wasay had allegedly killed his grandfather over a property dispute last year in the area of Ahmadnagar police station, Gujranwala.

Punjab Police Special Operation Cell continued follow-up for the arrest of the accused, entered all his information in the PNIL list of the airport as it was expected he might try to run abroad. Finally accused was arrested at the airport while he was trying to escape abroad.

A spokesperson for the Punjab Police said that the accused had been handed over to Gujranwala Police for further legal action.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar appreciated the Special Operation Cell for arresting the accused.

WAPDA constructs mosque

LAHORE (APP): A newly-constructed Jamia Masjid has been inaugurated in Komila city of Upper Kohistan district in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The mosque has been constructed by WAPDA at a cost of Rs 203.66 million under 'Local Area Development Programme' of Dasu Hydropower Project, according to WAPDA spokesman, here Sunday. He added that the scope of work included dismantling of the old structure and construction of a new building. A madrasa, adjacent to the mosque, has also been constructed for imparting Islamic education in the area. Construction of the mosque commenced in August 2021. Having a mesmerising view, the mosque is located in the heart of Komila city.

He mentioned that WAPDA is spending Rs 17.35 billion for socioeconomic uplift of the locals in Dasu Hydropower Project area. These schemes relate to resettlement, social development and environmental management.



KARACHI: Volunteers cleaning Karachi's oldest new Memon Mosque ahead of holy month of Ramazan. —APP Photo

PPP leaders felicitate Asif Ali Zardari

LAHORE (APP): Several leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) extended warm congratulations to Asif Ali Zardari on his assumption of office as the 14th president of Pakistan.

In a joint statement released on Sunday, prominent PPP figures including Chaudhry Aslam Gill, Usman Malik, Rana Irfan and Rao Khalid emphasised the significance of the presidency as a unifying force in the nation's political landscape.

Asserting their commitment to upholding the coalition government, the leaders rebuffed speculations of its impending dissolution, affirming the PPP's unwavering support.

Three more children died of Pneumonia in Punjab

LAHORE (INP): In its continuing and shocking prevalence, Pneumonia has claimed three more lives of children in the last 24 hours in Punjab on Sunday.

As per the available information one of the dead children of pneumonia was belonging from Lahore.

In the ongoing year, 2024, pneumonia has unfortunately taken 479 lives just in Punjab, whereas 272 new cases of the disease have been reported currently in the province of which almost 37 cases are from Lahore. The total number of cases in Punjab has reached on more than 38000 in the year.

Hampers' delivery at doorsteps to continue till 10th of Ramazan

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Divisional Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa has said that relief hampers' delivery under the 'Ramazan Negahban' package at doorsteps of beneficiaries would continue till 10th of Ramazan.

Presiding over a meeting at his office here on Sunday, he reviewed distribution of food hampers and establishment of agri fair shops at Model Bazaars across Lahore division.

The commissioner revealed that 117,781 eligible individuals in the Lahore division had been provided with food hampers under 'Ramazan Negahban' package on their doorsteps. The daily target for all districts had been set and zero tolerance policy would be adopted on the targets. Lahore aims to reach a daily target of 25,000 to 30,000 doorstep deliveries, while Sheikhupura aims for 10,000 to 15,000 daily, Kasur targets 10,000, and Nankana Sahib aims for 5,000 to 10,000 doorstep deliveries daily. He said that the Ramazan Negahban package had been delivered to 75,000 eligible individuals in Lahore so far.

In a briefing, it was revealed that for verification of data, CNIC numbers had been obtained along with addresses of households. He announced that the Ramazan package doorstep delivery would cover 1,010,146 eligible individuals in the division.

The commissioner emphasised activation of agricultural fair price shops in all model bazaars across Lahore division from Monday. There will be agriculture fair price shops in 10 model bazaars in Lahore.

DC Lahore Rafia Haider, DC Nankana Sahib Muhammad Arshad, DC Kasur Arshad Bhatti, and DC Sheikhupura Dr. Waqar Khan participated in the session via video-link.

Banks holiday on 1st of Ramazan

LAHORE (APP): All banks will remain closed for public dealing on the 1st of Ramazan, while the banks staff will attend office to deduct Zakat.

A notification in this regard has been issued by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). According to the SBP, the 1st of Ramazan will be a "bank holiday" for Zakat deduction, and all banks, development finance institutions and micro-finance banks will not transact with the public on the said date.

CCPO directs SPs to promptly address pending investigation cases

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Bilal Siddique Kamyana on Sunday directed the divisional Superintendents of Police to promptly address the pending investigation cases.

Chairing the performance review meeting of the Investigation Wing at his office, he expressed dissatisfaction over the performance of certain officers and warned that any lack of interest in fulfilling duties would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Kamyana said that issues concerning female complainants should be resolved on a priority basis. He emphasized the importance of treating women visiting police stations with dignity, respect and courtesy.

He also directed the Divisional SPs to review complaints made by female complainants on a daily basis. The CCPO instructed the SSP (Investigation) to monitor the investigation proceedings and ensure the regular monitoring of performance of divisional officers.

He stressed for effective use of information technology to ensure the apprehension of criminals. He stated that timely registration of FIRs, merit-based investigations, and providing justice to the hapless strata were vital responsibilities.

The CCPO stated that Investigation Wing played a key role in ensuring justice. The Investigation Wing should resolve cases using modern forensic science and traditional skills. Effective investigations help in controlling crime, he added.

DIG (Investigation) Zeeshan Asghar, SSP (Investigation) Anooch Masood Chaudhry, Divisional SPs (Investigation), and incharges (SSIOU) were present in the meeting.

Lesco plan for Ramazan finalised

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco) has prepared a plan to provide uninterrupted power supply to domestic consumers during Sehra and Iftar timing in Ramazan, sources told APP on Sunday.

On the instructions of the Ministry of Power Division, Lesco has completed arrangements for Ramazan. Lesco has also established a control room at its headquarters for system monitoring. All officers concerned would be present in the control room during Sehra and Iftar, while a notification had also been issued to form a separate team for monitoring the power control room.

A separate team of Grid System Operation Circle has also been formed and orders have been issued to ensure additional trolley transformers in subdivisions and to replace faulty transformers within three hours, sources added.

LGCD minister reviews MCL performance, directs measures to eliminate encroachments

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Local Government & Community Development (LGCD) Zeeshan Rafique on Sunday visited the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL) and reviewed the urban facilities being provided to the citizens.

The minister also chaired a meeting at Town Hall, MCL and oversaw the department's achievements and targets. He specially assessed the department's performance, directing vigorous measures for elimination of encroachments from the city roads.

The LGCD minister stressed the need for usage of advance and latest equipments to tackle and eradicate issues of sewerage, saying that survey of manholes in streets and colonies should be conducted regularly. He mentioned that the scope of 'Saaf Suthra Punjab' programme under the leadership of Chief Minister was being gradually extended. Attention is also being given to ending wall-chalking during cleanliness campaigns.

The LG ministers directed that areas commonly overlooked during cleanliness campaigns were a primary target. He expressed a strong commitment to addressing sewage issues, utilizing all possible means for resolution. Zeeshan Rafique emphasized the significant role of urban residents in cleanliness campaigns, citing increased awareness among the public.

He stressed the need for organized awareness campaigns on media and social platforms. He called for a sustained and systematic survey of alleyways for the removal of wall chalking, aligning with Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's directive. He emphasized prompt action on sealing open manholes and addressing complaints regarding salaries in some municipal offices. Ensuring uninterrupted salary payments to employees, Rafique directed the active involvement of relevant municipal branches in curbing encroachments.

Highlighting preparations for the coming Eid rush, the minister urged the provision of necessary facilities at bus stops before Eid. He announced the expeditious posting of personnel in vacant positions across municipal service sectors. He cautioned strict actions against complaints related to parking stands in major cities. He commended the efforts to revive the historic Shah Ghaus Mahmood Library at Delhi Gate under the MCL's jurisdiction.

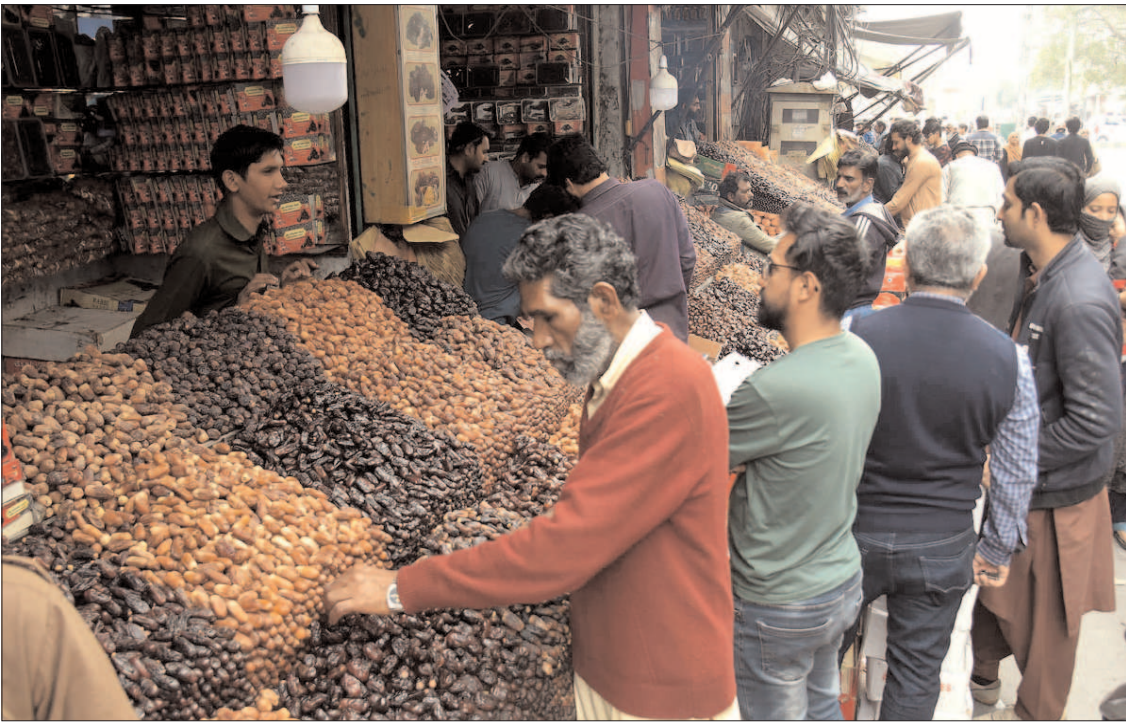
Film director Masood Pervez remembered

LAHORE (APP): Renowned film director Masood Pervez was remembered on Sunday on his 23rd death anniversary.

He was born in Amritsar in British India in 1918. After the Partition, he migrated to Pakistan and settled in Lahore.

Movie 'Beli' was his directorial debut. He directed and produced Urdu and Punjabi films, including Heer Ranjha, Zehr-e-Ishq, Koil and Khak Aur Khoon.

He was awarded Nigar Award twice and died on March 10 in Lahore in 2001.



LAHORE: Vendors are busy in arranging and displaying different kinds of dates for selling on the arrival of Holy Month Ramazan. —APP Photo

CM condemns blast in Board Bazaar

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur Sunday condemns blast in Board Bazaar on main University road and directed Inspector General of Police to submit a complete report of the bomb blast in which two persons were killed and one other injured.

Talking to media men at the site of the bomb blast, SSP Operation Kashif Aftab Abbasi said that investigation is there to ascertain both it was a suicide bomber on board a motorcycle with a facilitator or the explosive material are being carried to one place from other for a major blast planning.

“We are working on it,”

he said, adding, two people have been killed, one injured while one person died on the spot. SSP operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi disclosed that 4 to 5 kg explosives have been used and the investigation is going on, however, it is known that explosive materials were being transferred from one place to another.

What was the target, the investigation is going on, he said. However, the names of the accused are not being disclosed, SSP Operations said.

He said two persons on a motorcycle were killed in the explosion while one was injured and the motorcyclists are being identified. The motorcycle was

going from Board Bazaar to Nasir Bagh, he added. He said injured person is undergoing treatment at Khyber Teaching Hospital and initially, the explosion seems to be suicide but investigation is going on.

Soon after the blast, Police and officials of the security forces cordoned off the area while the Rescue 1122 ambulances reached the spot as soon as the information was received. According to preliminary and unconfirmed reports, a motorcycle exploded in which 2 people were killed and 1 injured, Rescue 1122 officials said. The officials of Rescue 1122 shifted all the people to Khyber Teaching Hospital.

PIC, Qatar Charity to give free heart treatment



PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC) and Qatar Charity Pakistan on Sunday joined hands to provide free heart treatment for orphaned and underprivileged children.

According to spokesperson of Peshawar Institute of Cardiology, Riffat Anjum, the Chief Executive and Medical Director of PIC, Professor Dr. Shahkar Ahmed Shah, and representatives of Qatar Charity Pakistan MR.Sajjad Khan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

Under this agreement, Qatar Charity will provide financial assistance for the treatment of over 150 children suffering from cardiac diseases.

The initial project duration is set for four months, with the possibility of extension. Professor Dr. Ijaz Hussain, Head of Pediatric Cardiology at PIC, expressed gratitude for the financial support, stating that it would prove to be a beacon of hope for orphaned and underprivileged children.

The funding will cover free treatment, including heart surgeries, for children with congenital heart defects and open-heart surgery needs.

Qatar Charity Pakistan and the people of Qatar have been acknowledged for their support in becoming a lifeline for these vulnerable children.

Professor Dr. Shahkar

Ahmed Shah, CEO and Medical Director of PIC, highlighted that PIC’s commitment to providing top-notch cardiac care has gained recognition not only within Pakistan but internationally.

He emphasized that PIC strives to offer the highest standard of treatment to every heart patient, especially children, making it a preferred choice for international institutions.

It is important to note that Peshawar Institute of Cardiology boasts a state-of-the-art facility and a team of qualified international doctors specializing in cardiology and cardiac surgery, dedicated to treating children with heart ailments.

Strategy required to increase students enrollment

PESHAWAR (APP): The problem of bringing out of school children (OSC) under education net is persisting in KP despite the fact that education to students aged 05-16 years were declared free under the Constitution of Pakistan since 2010.

The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) 2021 Report has disclosed that the number of OSC children had swelled to about 22.8 million in the country including 4.7 million children aged between 5 to 16 years in KP which was matter of great concerns for the newly provincial government after education was devolved to provinces under 18th constitutional amendment.

Alarmingly, about 2.9 million girls and one million OSC in merged tribal districts were still out of schools, BISP report said, adding 74.4 percent of girls and 38.5 percent boys are out of schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to poverty and socio-economic imbalances.

Besides 77 percent OSC reported in Palas Kolai, 70 percent in Upper Kohistan and 69 percent in Upper Kohistan, about 61 percent of such children in Torghar, 55pc in Shangla, 53 percent in Lakki Marwat and 51 percent each in Tank and Batagram districts.

In seven merged tribal districts of erstwhile Fata, about 66 percent of children are out-of-schools in North Waziristan, 63 percent in Bajaur, 61 percent in South Waziristan, 51 percent each in Mohmand and Khyber, and 47 percent each in Kurram and Orakzai.

PML-N KP spokesper-

son Ikhtair Wali Khan while terming BISP’s report as alarming said that it negates the tall claims of PTI leadership regarding an increase in children’s enrolment in schools and uniform education policy.

He said neither promises of uninformed education were fulfilled nor the dual education system was abolished in the province, adding the private schools continued sucking the blood of millions of people in KP with a roaring increase in tuition fee while PTI leadership has paid a deaf ear to it.

Under Article 25-A of the Constitution, the education sector has been devolved to provinces and it was the responsibility of the provincial governments to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to metric level.

KPFS&HFA conduct big action in City

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority conducted a big action in Peshawar on holiday and blockaded Peshawar Motorway Toll Plaza after receiving secret information with more than 1,000 kg of non-standard and unhealthy meat was exported from a vehicle and destroyed, spokesperson of Food Authority said here Sunday.

A case has been registered against the owners, further action has been initiated according to the Food Safety Act, the spokesperson said. Actions against the adulteration mafia should be intensified in Ramadan, the spokesperson of the Food authority said.

Substances adulterated in food items do not deserve any discount, strict disciplinary action will be taken against them, he said.

Inflation to reach its peak

PESHAWAR (APP): The inflation will reach its peak before the arrival of Ramadan as the rates of various food items increased rapidly without any solid reason as live chicken is being sold at Rs 415 per kg while the eggs are being sold at Rs 260 per dozen.

During a visit to the local vegetable and fruits markets, the rates of various food items have been increased with Onion Rs 300 per kg, tomato Rs 160, white potato Rs 80 kg, Peas Rs 240, okra Rs 300, garlic Rs 650 and ginger Rs 600 per kg while lemon 200, cauliflower 110, capsicum 300 and eggplant 160 per kg available in the market.

However, an increase is also witnessed in the fruits with Kabuli apple 290, golden apple 180 and Iranian apple 310 rupees per kg being solid. Malta Punjabi 190, Malta Swat 330, while Kino is sold at Rs 120 dozen. Guava Rs 290, pomegranate Rs 430 and banana Rs 190 per dozen are being sold.

E&SE Dept changes school timings in Ramadan

PESHAWAR (APP): Elementary and Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has changed the working hours of schools for the holy month of Ramadan

According to a notification issued here on Sunday, the timings of primary schools will be from 7:30 AM to 11:10 PM.

The timings of Middle, Secondary and Higher Secondary classes will be from 7:30 am to 12:15 pm.

While on Fridays in Ramadan, the timings of primary schools will be 10:05 and higher secondary classes will be till 10:25.

Acrylic paintings by an autistic boy attract applause from visitors at art exhibition in NIC

PESHAWAR (APP): Acrylic paintings by an autistic boy attracted great applause from visitors who while highly appreciating the talent also expressed the desire of purchasing the drawings as decoration pieces. The paintings were drawn by Muhammad Yousaf, a 12 years old boy with autism and hearing impairment.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neuro-developmental disorder that affects child’s communication, socialization and cognition. People



PESHAWAR: Mayor Haji Zubair Ali listening problems of transgender Sobia Khan.

Drinking water monitoring laboratories launched

PESHAWAR (APP): The establishment of the state-of-the-art water monitoring Laboratories launched in as many as 35 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Islamabad. The project will constantly and timely check the quality of drinking water benefiting over 62 million people.

These laboratories are equipped with latest technology to ensure quick, accurate and hassle-free testing of contaminants such as arsenic, heavy metals and pathogenic bacteria through microbial testing in the drinking water thus enhancing the capacity of labs to test 16 mandatory water quality parameters

and 18 optional parameters as per WHO guidelines. The mobile laboratories will play a vital role in testing the quality of water in far-flung areas and will also be used to respond to public health emergencies during natural disasters or spread of waterborne diseases.

With an assistance of \$4.4 million from Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) the project has been implemented in 35 district laboratories in Punjab, 8 divisional labs in KP and research and monitoring laboratories, PCRWR and Pak-EPA, in Islamabad.

The project includes significant upgrades to water-quality testing laboratories, encompassing the procure-

ment and installation of advanced laboratory equipment, infrastructure enhancements to ensure a safe working environment, capacity-building initiatives for laboratory staff and the WASH Cell of the MoCC, the introduction of a Management Information System (MIS) for improved coordination, and the provision of 8 vehicles transformed into water-quality testing laboratories for the Government of KP and 1 vehicle for PCRWR.

The completion of the project was celebrated in a simple but impressive ceremony where former Chief Minister of KP Senator Muhammad Sabir Shah was the Chief Guest while Senator Ms. Keshoo Bai,

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Park Ki Jun, Country Director KOICA Pakistan, Yeon Je Ho and senior officers of both Ministry of Climate Change besides others participated.

Officially titled as “Enhancing Water Quality Monitoring System to achieve SDG 6 in Islamabad, Punjab and KP” the project is a step forward to achieving the SDG-6.

It is worth mentioning that Pakistan faces a significant challenge, with almost 44% of the population lacking access to safe drinking water. Acknowledging the fundamental right to clean and safe drinking water, the initial and vital step is monitoring its quality.

Imran Takkar shortlisted for ‘Hamaray Hero Award, at PSL

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar based a dedicated advocate for child rights in Pakistan Imran Takkar has been shortlisted for the prestigious Hamaray Hero Award in the category of Child Rights Activist.

This recognition comes after more than two decades of tireless efforts in raising awareness and building capacity on child rights nationwide.

As a prominent figure in the field, Imran Takkar serves as a key member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission’s technical working group.

He is also a valuable contributor to the Provincial Advisory Committee for the National Commission on Human Rights as well as member of the parole committee government of KP. Notably, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of 8 child courts, supported by Group Development Pakistan, KP judiciary, and the KP government.

Beyond his institutional affiliations, Imran Takkar is the founder of the KP Child Rights Movement (CRM) and an active member of the End Violence Against Women and Girls (EWAG) alliance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

For over two decades, he has served independently and through national-level civil society organizations and networks, engaging stakeholders for policy change, raising awareness, and building the capacity of duty bearers on child rights and child protection.

In recognition of his exceptional contributions, Imran Takkar’s enduring commitment to child rights has earned him a nomination for the Hamaray Hero Award.

The award, presented by HBL PSL powered by Kindom Valley, acknowledges individuals who have made a significant impact in their respective fields.

Imran Takkar expressed his gratitude, saying, “I am honored to be shortlisted for the Hamaray Hero Award as a Child Rights Activist. This recognition is a testament to the collective efforts of all those who have joined hands in promoting and protecting the rights of children in Pakistan.

Baggers’ swarm irk shoppers in city ahead of Ramazan

PESHAWAR (APP): The swarms of baggers arrived from different cities to Peshawar on Sunday has irked the shoppers and general public ahead of the holy month of Ramazanul Mubarak.

Inspite of begging has been declared illegal under the country’s laws, the beggars’ influx including male, female, children and persons with disabilities are being witnessed in crossing points, mosques’ gates and mostly frequented public places and food outlets in the city and cantonment areas, making shopping difficult for Ramazan.

Hashtnagri, Gantagar, Firdus, Nothia, Tehkal, Gubahar, Faqirabad, Qissa Khwani and others famous bazaars, which were flooded with customers and shoppers.

Occupied key points in front of shopping malls, mosques, road signals, bus terminals, railway stations, traffic squares and streets, the professional beggars used different indecent techniques to get maximum alms.

“I came from Wapda Town Peshawar to buy edible commodities for my family for Ramazan, however has faced difficulty in shopping due to swarm of beggars both male and female,” said Qaiser Khan, an ex employee of PESCO

The professional and non professional beggars have tried hard to cash the situation after witnessing an increase of buyers at Dean’s Trade Centre, Karimpura, Qissa Khwani, University Road, Hashtnagri, Faqirabad, Qissa Khwani and others famous bazaars, which were flooded with customers and shoppers.

“Most professional beggars employ various tricks to exploit human nature and religious sentiments by crying, weeping and chasing people in public places while wearing miserable attire.”

The unchecked trained beggars are pestering shoppers in markets or running after them or behind their cars to collect maximum alms in the name of Sadqa and Khairat, he said.

It has been witnessed that some beggars were emotionally blackmailing people by carrying medical prescriptions and disability

certificates.

Charity seekers can also be seen in City markets asking money in the name of construction of mosques while many beggars were resorting to lame-duck excuses like seeking treatment of their ailing family or lost jobs.

“Begging has emerged as a major social evil in recent years to the nuisance of Peshawarties,” Riazul Haq, an Ex PST teacher who was irritated by beggars during shopping at Qissa Khwani bazaar Peshawar, told APP on Sunday.

He said one of the reason of increased in beggars was price hike and inflation. The 2022 devastated floods, high population growth and climate change besides shabby economy have also contributed to increase in inflation and price hike affecting common man.

Besides bazaars, fruits, vegetables markets and shopping arcades, he said shoppers were facing great inconvenience at traffic signals, food restaurants, bus terminals, railways stations, mosques, hospitals, markets and public places due to swarms of beggars in Peshawar, Nowshera, Charsadda and other big cities ahead of Ramazan.

“It is heartbreaking to see young girls and boys’ beggars carrying wipers in hands often start cleaning cars windows on traffic signals without permission in order to get money.”

Some beggars come with water bottles, flowers, garlands, caps and rosary to give an impression that they are selling it, but actually they beg for money without an intention of selling anything.

Riaz Khan said that he was busy in Ramazan shopping along with his family

at Qissa Khwani where a teenage beggar with black colour in hand rushed towards him, asking for money or otherwise his clothes would be made dirty.

“To save my clothes, I immediately offered him Rs50, which was refused. On several requests, the beggar accepted Rs100 and started running towards other shoppers by using the same technique that was intolerable in a civilized society.”

He demanded the KP government to take instantaneous action against swarms of beggars in the city so that people could take a sigh of relief and do Ramazan shopping with an ease.

“Beggary has been declared illegal under West Pakistan Loitering Ordinance 1958,” said advocate Noman Bokhari, adding this law had not

been fully implemented, which resulted in an increase of beggars.

The central and provincial laws such as Control of Narcotics Substance Act 1997, West Pakistan Vagrancy Ordinance 1959, Pakistan Employment of Children Act 1991, KP Child Protection and Welfare Act (KPCPWA) 2010 and KP Orphanage Supervision and Control Act 1976 had been promulgated to check drug addiction and streets begging, he maintained.

Similarly, KPCPWA was enacted in 2010 to protect rights of women and children, but it has not been fully implemented on ground, resulting in swarms of beggars in Nowshera, Kohat, Peshawar and Charsadda.

He said the role of Child Welfare Commission (CWC) was important to provide protection to child

beggars in KP.

KP government has been urged to impose a ban on child beggars on the pattern of Sindh province and may direct the social welfare department to pick child beggars from markets, roads, traffic signals, streets and rehabilitate them at their welfare centres.

The spokesman of social welfare department said that special drive have recently been launched to shift drugs addicts beggars to rehabilitation centres for treatment.

Besides treatment, these beggars were provided vocational education and training to make them useful citizens of the society.

He urged well off people to donate alms and charity to their known poor deserving people and reputable organizations having clean service record so that their alms could be used for a noble cause.



In brief

JI Bahawalpur stages demo

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan, Bahawalpur chapter here on Sunday organized a rally to express solidarity with oppressed Palestinians. The rally started from JI Bahawalpur Office and after marching on city roads, reached Hamat-iyan Chowk where a protest demonstration was held. The participants of the demonstration had held banners inscribed with slogans in support of Palestinians. The participants of the demonstration demanded of the United Nations and international community to play their due role to rid innocent Palestinians from brutalities of Israeli forces.

Five marriage guests killed

NAWABSHAH (PPI): Five marriage party guests were killed and 12 others injured in Nawabshah car-truck collision, police said Sunday. As per details, the accident occurred in Nawabshah, where a car carrying a wedding guests rammed into a truck, leaving two dead initially. However, three more succumbed to injuries, taking the death toll to five and 12 others sustained injuries. Moreover, police officials said that three injured were in critical condition whereas the truck driver had been arrested.

Police constable killed

SARGODHA (INP): A police constable was killed when some motorcyclists opened fire at him while he was standing at a picket near Miani town of Sargodha on Sunday. Police said that the cops chased the assailants and when they encircled them, the latter opened fire at them. This resulted in an encounter, the police added, in which one of the assailants was killed while the other was wounded and was arrested. The deceased belonged to Mandi Bahauddin, and was nominated in over five criminal cases of heinous nature. DSP Chaudhry Fayyaz told the media that search operation was underway for the arrest of their two accomplices who managed to flee from the spot.

Motorcycle snatched

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Two unknown armed dacoits snatched motorcycle from a trader in limits of city police station Kot Addu and fled away. According to the victim businessman, this was the third incident of robbery in one week. He has said that robbery incidents were increasing due to the lack of police patrolling. City police launched legal action on the application of the trader.

Nadeem Baig honored

HYDERABAD (APP): Beloved actor Nadeem Baig was honored in here on Sunday by art-appreciative people at a special event organized in his honor. Fans from across the country welcomed Nadeem and his family with great enthusiasm. They expressed their love with rose petals and standing ovations. Nadeem, who was delighted to visit the cultural capital of Hyderabad, thanked his fans for their warm reception and praised the organizers for a flawless event. A documentary highlighting his best romantic songs and iconic films was screened, while fans presented him with gifts such as traditional Sindhi Ajrak and topi, perfumes, portraits, and shields.

Admin to ensure availability of food items at fixed prices

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district administration has set up 'price monitoring desks' in Dera Ismail Khan to ensure the availability of food items to residents at officially prescribed prices during the holy month of Ramadan.

These desks have been setup following the instructions of the provincial government in order to ensure the supply of food items to the people and to take strict action against hoarders.

The price monitoring desks were set up at different places of Dera Ismail Khan, including Muslim Bazaar, Pawanda Bazaar, Rahim Bazaar, Commissioner Bazaar, Imamiya Gate, Bannu Adda, Old Vegetable Market and New Vegetable Market.

The staff of the district administration along with the staff of the food department and other related departments would remain present at these desks from 08:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

On the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan, Assistant Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan Muhammad Faseeh Ishaq Abbasi visited the Price Monitoring Desk and reviewed the arrangements.

The assistant commissioner said the strict instructions have been issued by the provincial government and all those shopkeepers violating official rates would be dealt with iron hands.

The AC said that the officers of all departments should ensure the attendance of their staff at these desks. The officials should register the complaints relevant to their departments concerned and forward the same to their officers immediately so that maximum relief could be provided to the public during the holy month.

The public could register complaints against all such hoarders at these desks.

The complaints against profiteers and sub-standard food quality could be registered. The magistrates of district administration would take action on these complaints.

New DPO holds introductory meetings with religious leaders of Dera

District Police Officer Dera Nasir Mehmood held separate introductory meetings with the delegations with religious leaders of various schools of thought and discussed the law and order situation of the area.

The religious leaders and representatives of Shia and Sunni sects welcomed the newly appointed DPO Dera.

They assured the district police chief of their full support for maintaining peace in Dera Ismail Khan.

The religious leaders said they would be at the forefront in foiling nefarious designs of anti-peace elements.

Meanwhile, speaking at

a meeting, DPO Dera called upon Shia and Sunni communities to promote tolerance and brotherhood and cooperate with the police in maintaining peace.

He said that police make every possible effort to establish peace and order in the area, establishing peace is not possible without the cooperation of the people.

Dera police arrested female drug dealer: 16 kg hashish recovered

Dera police during the operation against the narcotics arrested the female drug dealer and recovered 16402 grams of hashish from her possession in the limits of City Police station on Sunday.

According to the police spokesman, on the direction of District Police Officer Dera Nasir Mehmood, City Police station under the leadership of SDPO City Circle Muhammad Adnan along with SHO Arslan Khan Gandapur conducted a major and successful operation against narcotics and arrested notorious female drug dealer Nasreen bibi resident of Kohat and recovered 16402 grams of hashish from her possession. While accused's partner Tariq son of Nazir resident of Kohat fled from the spot.

Police registered the case against the drug peddler and started further investigations.

Rising incidents of dacoities in Multan

MULTAN (APP): In a harrowing week marked by a spate of dacoities, the citizens find themselves gripped by fear and insecurity as criminals run rampant, striking homes and businesses in different corners of Multan city and its suburbs. The citizens demanded of government to take immediate action by taking steps to stop the unending crimes.

The Gulgasht Police Station precinct became a scene of distress for citizen Ali, who fell victim to the fearless actions of criminals. He was deprived of mobile phone and a substantial sum of Rs 54,000.

Mughees and Shoaib similarly found themselves targeted, stripped of their mobile phones and hefty sums totaling Rs 200,000 and Rs 155,000 respectively. Such incidents, once isolated, now appear to form a disturbing pattern of organized crime gripping the city.

In a separate incident within the jurisdiction of Alapa Police Station, the citizen Hamza's home was shattered as six armed dacoits stormed in, plundering gold ornaments and valuables worth Rs 2 million. The sheer audacity dis-

played by these criminals sends shockwaves through the community, amplifying concerns for safety and security among residents.

Meanwhile, the reach of criminal elements extended to Qadirpur Raan Police limits, where shopkeeper Shoukat fell prey to their nefarious designs, losing a substantial sum of Rs 400,000. Allah Rakha's unfortunate encounter saw him stripped of his motorcycle, in another incident. The onslaught continued unabated, with citizens Khuram, Mujahid, Farhan, Sabir, Khalid, and Hassan falling victim to the wave of dacoities, enduring losses of mobile phones, cash, and motorcycles in limits of Bahauddin Zakariya Police Station.

The gravity of the situation further manifested in the targeted attack on citizen Ramzan, who was relieved of Rs 295,000. The suburban areas bore witness to a hostage situation, as four armed dacoits held citizen Ali Ahmed at gunpoint, making off with a significant sum of Rs 96,500. The brazenness of the criminals knows no bounds, with even establishments like the Muslim

Pharmacy in Mumtazabad falling victim to their insatiable greed.

Amidst the chaos, the worries of the citizens became apparent, with three citizens sustaining injuries as they valiantly resisted during dacoities.

Meanwhile, the dacoits were allegedly shot dead by citizens during a dacoity bid at city's busiest area, MDA Chowk.

However, the sense of fear and insecurity pervading the city demands urgent action from the authorities. Citizens, namely Saad, Liaqat, Arif, Riaz and some others expressed their profound concern and called upon the government to take immediate and decisive measures to stem the tide of criminality engulfing their communities. They stated that holy month of Ramzan was approaching and it was essential to take foolproof measures for security of the people.

However, the police authorities maintained that steps were being taken. Patrolling has been increased across the city. The authorities stated that nobody would be allowed to deprive people of their precious valuables.

‘Thalassemia Safe Pakistan’ ceremony held

SARGODHA (APP): Hilal-e-Ahmar Thalassemia and Hemophilia Centre Sargodha organized a ceremony titled 'Thalassemia Safe Pakistan' here on Sunday.

Child patients of Thalassemia and Hemophilia from Sargodha district and division were specially invited to the event. Children suffering from Thalassemia presented beautiful tableau and received much praise from the audience.

Prominent guests included well-known businessmen and philanthropists, among whom were Rao

Suleman, Sheikh Farooq Wohra, In-charge of Police Khidmat Centre Sheikh Safdar, coordinator for Thalassemia and Hemophilia Centre Ghulam Mustafa Mirza participated in the ceremony. In the ceremony, center's workers and staff were honored with appreciation shields.

Coordinator Thalassemia and Hemophilia Centre Ghulam Mustafa Mirza thanked the police department and said that nearly 4,000 blood bags had been donated to Thalassemia and hemophilia patients

through camps set up by the police in the district.

Speakers said that premarital Thalassemia testing was the only solution to eradicate the deadly disease. In-charge of Police Protection Sheikh Safdar said the treatment for Thalassemia was very expensive, but the Hilal-e-Ahmar Thalassemia and Hemophilia Centre Sargodha was helping these innocent children fighting this battle with self-help and the cooperation of traders of the city, which was commendable.

Certificate distribution ceremony organized

HYDERABAD (APP): A certificate distribution ceremony was held at Hyderabad Arts Council (HAC) here on Sunday.

The event was presided over by President Arts Council of Hyderabad Ishaq Samejo in which certificates were distributed among 50 students on completion of three-month

musical training, organized in collaboration with SAMPA.

Eminent journalist Naz Sahito, Ali Dost Ajaz and music teacher Khadim Sakhrani were the chief guests on the occasion, while Secretary Arts Council and trainer Naseer Mirza hosted the session.

On this occasion, certi-

ates were awarded to 50 young singers and music loving students including Iqar Waheed Ali, Muhabbat Ali, Ali Raza, Qawal pair Noshi brothers, Sadat Lakhair, Azhar Hussain, Humayon Aslam, Govinda, Nabeel Babaar, Annie Resham, Saira Abro, Sheeshl, Babar Masihm Mehroze, Bhagchand and others.



GILGIT: An elder tailor busy sewing traditional cap at his workplace.

Raisan Bridge named

KOHAT (APP): To pay homage and rich tribute to the bravery of Captain Faheem Abbas Shaheed, General Officer Commandant Major General (GOC) Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti Sunday changed the name of Raisan Bridge to Captain Faheem Abbas Shaheed Bridge.

A touching moment when Captain Faheem Abbas (Shaheed) 's father, brothers, daughters and relatives, gathered to strengthen the collective support for the nation. In addition, local leaders and people from different walks of life participated.

Elders of the area have said that the eternal sacrifices of the Pakistan Army are not hidden from anyone, they always played the role of frontline soldiers for the protection of the dear motherland.

Finally, Major General GOC Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti inaugurated and changed the name of Raisan Bridge to the name of Captain Faheem Abbas Shaheed.

Wedding of teenager girl stopped

LARKANA (APP): The Larkana police gave fifty thousand to a poor family in shape of financial support and stopped marriage ceremony of Teenager girl.

According to the report issued here Sunday, the Larkana Police took action on the report of marriage of Teenager 13 years old girl.

According to the B-Form sought by SSP Larkana Syed Abdul Rahim Shirazi, the house of the poor girl Aliya daughter of Khalid Hussain was raided by DSP Headquarters Saffraz Ahmed and SHO Abdul Malik Bhutto and SHO Women Police Station along with ladies police on violation of the Sindh Child Marriage Act.

The parents of the teenager girl told that they were doing all these merely due to their poor economic condition. On this, the SSP Larkana gave financial support of Rs 50,000 to the girl's parents.

Prices of vegetables sky rocketed

BAHAWALPUR (APP): The prices of vegetables have sky rocketed ahead of the holy month of Ramazan, becoming out of purchasing power of common man.

Commission agents of Fruits and Vegetables Market and traders dealing with business of vegetables have increased prices of vegetables and fruits by 20 percent to 100 percent, making them out of reach of common man who is already suffering from inflation.

Tomato which was available at Rs 100 per kilogram few days back, now had taken sudden jump to Rs 200 per kilogram ahead of the holy month of Ramazan. Onion which was being sold out at Rs 120 to 150 per kilogram, now its rate had increased to Rs 240 per kilogram.

Potato was also available at Rs 40 per kg, its price has increased to Rs 60 to 70 per kg. Garlic was being sold at Rs 500 to 600 per kg, now is available at Rs 650 to 800 per kg while the holy month of Ramazan is likely to fall on Tuesday.

Two brothers killed over property dispute

NAWASHAH (INP): Two brothers, belonging to Sabqi family, were killed when some persons belonging to a rival clan opened fire at them over a property dispute in Nawabshah on Sunday.

The deceased were identified as Sudoor Sabqi and Waaseem Sabqi.

Two other people namely Muhammad Mithal and Muhammad Ali were seriously wounded.

The dead as well as the injured were initially shifted to Talaqa Hospital, Sakrand.

Later the injured were taken to PMC Hospital, Nawabshah on account of their critical condition.

Sub-inspector martyred in Thul in encounter

A sub-inspector (SI) was martyred in an encounter with dacoits in the limits of C-section police station in

Thul town of Jacobabad district in Sindh.

The exchange of fire between the police and dacoits was continuing till last reports came in, spreading terror in the area and forcing the residents to confine themselves to their homes.

More police contingents were called in to tame the dacoits. The body of SI Rasul Bux Brohi was shifted to hospital.

Two cops injured in Shikarpur

Two police personnel were injured after some unidentified persons fired at their van.

The police said that retaliation by the cops forced the assailants to flee, while a heavy police contingent was sent to arrest them.

The injured cops Shamsuddin Lehr and Muhammad Tahir were

shifted to Civil Hospital, Shikarpur.

Captive released in police operation in Shikarpur

Also in Shikarpur, an encounter took place between the police and dacoits after the former conducted a targeted operation in katcha area near Khanpur for the release of some captives.

SSP Shikarpur said that the encounter led to the release of Abdul Nabi alias Abdullah, a truck driver, who had been taken hostages by dacoits a few days ago.

Two dacoits killed in Kandiaro

In Kandiaro, Sindh, another dacoit, who had been injured in a police encounter on Link Road, passed away.

Both dacoits had been shifted to a hospital in Nawabshah.

Man guns down wife over domestic dispute

MULTAN (APP): A man shot and allegedly killed his wife over a domestic dispute in the limits of Jatoti police station.

According to Rescue officials, there was a domestic dispute between a couple in Tehsil Jatoti Muzaffargarh area.

On the incident day, the husband Abdul Rauf went to the in-laws and killed his wife by opening fire on her.

Rescue 1122 shifted the body to Tehsil headquarters hospital Jatoti after covering the body with a dead sheet in the presence of police.

The deceased was identified as 26-year-old Saira

Bibi W/o Abdul Rauf resident of Tehsil Jatoti.

The police have registered the case and started an investigation into the incident.

Clean Punjab drive enters into second phase

The Punjab Chief Minister's "Clean Punjab" campaign has entered into its second phase, with the Multan

Waste Management Company (MWMC) sending new machinery and containers into the field for a mega cleanliness operation.

The cleanliness situation has changed significantly in all union councils due to

new loader rickshaws, containers, and dust bins.

The operation clean-up launched by MWMC was continued in different areas of the city even on holiday. Piles of garbage and debris were cleared and shifted to landfill sites during the Clean Punjab campaign.

Chief Executive Officer MWMC Shahid Yaqoob said that the goal has been set to make congested union councils zero waste in one month.

The ratio of garbage collection will be increased through new machinery and trolleys from Monday in all zones.

Book on plight of people in Gaza, IIOJ&K launched

MULTAN (APP): Renowned Punjabi poet Sahil Sajid's book, depicting the sorrows of oppressed people including the victims of Gaza and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir was launched here on Sunday.

The poetry book, highlighted the sufferings of the oppressed people in impressive way. The unveiling ceremony of "Akhar Rupaye Mere Naal" (words start weeping with me) was held at Multan Arts Council. The book also depicts the brutalities and injustices being done in Ghaza and IIOJ&K and the ceremony stirred the emotions of the participants.

Sahil Sajid, hailing from Karachi, expressed that his selection of Punjabi language for highlighting the suffering of the people was essential for him to pay back the debt of mother tongue.

"Repaying the debt of mother tongue was a duty, and I endeavored to fulfill this debt through poetry collection", he remarked. He also emphasized the ability to express oneself more effectively in the mother tongue.

Sahil Sajid also reminisced about his educational journey starting from Matric in Multan and the launch of his first book "Doobta Sooraj" also held in Multan, showing his special connection to the city. He extended gratitude to "Gurdopesh Publications"

for making the publication of his book possible in Multan. The literary event was chaired by Dr. Muhammad Amin, with notable attendees including Razi uddin Razi, Shakir Hussain Shakir, Mastihsan Khayal, Javed Yaad, Salim Naz, Amjad Ramay, Yousuf Salim Qadri, Akbar Hashmi, Azhar Saleem Majhoka, Shafiq Akhtar Harr, Parvez David and Samuel Kamran.

Dr. Muhammad Amin stressed the importance of preserving endangered languages for their survival. Raziuddin Razi and Shakir Hussain Shakir highlighted that alongside the injustices in Gaza, the oppression inflicted upon Kashmiris is also a theme of the book.

197 power pilferers netted in South Punjab

MULTAN (APP): The operation against power pilferers was underway as 197 power pilferers were caught while stealing electricity in a day across South Punjab under the directions of CEO MEPCO Engineer Rana Muhammad Ayub Khan. A fine sum of over Rs 8.8 million was imposed on power pilferers over stealing 2,52,000 electricity units.

MEPCO teams also recovered Rs eight fine from power pilferers on the spot.

As many as 118 new cases were registered against electricity thieves and 17 were also arrested on the spot.

Likewise, the teams recovered over Rs 30 million pending dues from running and dead defaulters in a day.

The operation against defaulters agricultural tube wells was launched in Multan and Sahiwal and

connections of five agricultural tube wells were disconnected for non-payment of dues of over Rs 2.7 million.

Electricity meters and transformers of defaulter agricultural tubewell consumers were also removed.

Three tube well consumers paid the bills in Multan, Rahim Yar Khan and Muzaffargarh after transformers removed over non-payment of arrears of over Rs 4,60,000.



Stormclouds gather over EU's Green Deal

BRUSSELS (AFP/APP): The EU's Green Deal -- once a core Brussels mission -- is looking increasingly under threat in the bloc's upcoming elections as resistance grows to its costs and consequences.

Farmers' protests, consumer cost-of-living worries and some countries' hesitation are already undercutting the ambitious plan to make the European Union carbon-neutral by 2050. "The European Green Deal is our new growth strategy," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen announced back at the start of her mandate in 2019, as she unveiled dozens of pieces of legislation to meet climate targets agreed by EU member countries.

Five years on, the tone has changed. Now, industry and farmers denounce the new "burdens" being piled upon them. Member states, including France, are calling for a "pause" in further measures.

"This backlash is centred on the agricultural area. It's not been true for energy, industry, transports," argued Pascal Canfin, chair of the European Parliament's environment committee.

He blames what he calls a "polarisation strategy" by right-wing parties.

Many of the Green Deal's laws have been adopted: an end to selling internal-combustion engine cars by 2035; a border carbon tax; rules against importing goods from deforested zones.

But momentum stalled last year with legislation to reduce chemical pesticides and to restore wilderness ecosystems -- opposed on grounds they could undermine food production in the bloc.

The biggest group in the European Parliament, the conservative European People's Party (EPP), from which von der Leyen hails, has made the shift an electoral gambit.

"It's easy to fix a figure. But it's more difficult to really make the transition happen in industry and also with the citizens," said a German EPP lawmaker, Peter Liese.

Farmland and forestry "should be protected much more" and farmers should not be seen "as an enemy of climate policy", he said.

The climate crisis is becoming "a real identity politics issue" caught up in the farmers protests, said Susi Dennison, of the think tank the European Council on Foreign Relations.

It is being cast as "an either-or choice -- between either you do climate, or you are concerned about the economic picture," she said.

"There isn't really a strong enough response to that false dichotomy from progressive groups," Dennison said.

On the left in the parliament, Iratxe Garcia, of the Socialists & Democrats, laid the blame at the feet of "the extreme right and the EPP," accusing them of "trying to mix everything and to confuse the debate".

"What the conservatives are doing is trying to send the message that we have to choose between the farmers and the Green Deal," Garcia said, calling that "really irresponsible".

"The transition -- we have to do it. And we are prepared to confront, to speak, to explain," she said.

Yet a rightward shift in the European Parliament could put much

of the legislative slate on the issue in jeopardy, undermining transitional steps needed after 2030. It could even slow the application of laws already adopted, some of which have revision clauses. Phuc-Vinh Nguyen, of the Jacques Delors Institute, said a pause in the EU rules on battling climate change "risked being instrumentalised to legitimise populist attacks" that aim to bog down their application. For Antonio Tajani, deputy prime minister in Italy's far-right government, it was time for Brussels "to abandon its extremist and ideological stance." Industry and farming cannot be penalised by unattainable environmental goals," he said.

Already Brussels has given up on trying to revise rules around chemical products and -- because of the farmers' revolt -- has put forward a lengthening list of concessions and opt-outs from environmental rules linked to its Common Agricultural Policy.

Von der Leyen herself -- vying for a second mandate -- has for the past few months been calling for a "new phase" of the Green Deal that factors in the need for better European competitiveness for farmers and business.

The next EU legislature could seek to tie the deal to a reindustrialisation push, to attract investment, factories and jobs as part of the transition, said Neil Makaroff, of the think tank Strategic Perspectives.

Experts, however, point to a weak point in garnering those investments: a financing gap to reach 2030 climate goals that has been put at 406 billion euros (\$445 billion) a year by the think tank I4CE.

US evacuates some personnel as gang violence torments Haiti

PORTAUPRINCE (AFP/APP): With Haiti's capital spiraling deeper into gang violence, the United States said Sunday it has airlifted non-essential American staff from its embassy in Port-au-Prince and brought in additional personnel to boost security at the compound.

Residents of beleaguered neighborhoods were scrambling for safety on Saturday following the latest spasm of unrest, with a United Nations group warning of a "city under siege" after armed attackers targeted the presidential palace and police headquarters.

Criminal groups, which already control much of Port-au-Prince as well as roads leading to the rest of the country, have unleashed havoc in recent days as they try to oust Prime Minister Ariel Henry as leader of the Western hemisphere's poorest country. On Saturday, dozens of residents were seeking safety in public buildings, with some successfully breaking into one facility, according to an AFP correspondent.

The US military said early Sunday it had "conducted an operation to augment the security of the US Embassy at Port-au-Prince, allow our Embassy mission operations to continue, and enable non-essential personnel to depart."

"This airlift of personnel into and out of the Embassy is consistent with our standard practice for Embassy security augmentation," the statement from the military's US Southern Command added.

The pre-dawn operation appeared to be conducted by helicopter, apparently in flights to and from the air-

port, according to an AFP correspondent and nearby residents who heard the distinct sounds of chopper blades overhead.

The embassy said on X that it "remains open."

"Heightened gang violence in the neighborhood near US embassy compounds and near the airport led to the State Department's decision to arrange for the departure of additional embassy personnel," it added, noting that all operation passengers "work for the US government."

The unrest has seen 362,000 Haitians internally displaced -- more than half of them children, the International Organization for Migration said Saturday.

"Haitians are unable to lead a decent life. They are living in fear, and every day, every hour this situation carries on, the trauma gets worse," Philippe Branchat, IOM's chief in Haiti, said in a statement.

"People living in the capital are locked in, they have nowhere to go," he said. "The capital is surrounded by armed groups and danger. It is a city under siege."

Police late Friday repelled gang attacks, including on the presidential palace, and several "bandits" were killed, Lionel Lazarre of the Haitian police union said.

Gunshots rang out late Friday throughout Port-au-Prince and witnesses recounted clashes "between police officers and bandits" as gangs apparently tried to commandeer police stations.

Lazarre on Saturday pleaded for "means and equipment" to protect key facilities.

The well-armed gangs have attacked critical infrastructure in recent days, including two prisons, allowing the majority of their 3,800 inmates to escape.

Along with some ordinary Haitians, the gangs are seeking the resignation of Prime Minister Henry, who was due to leave office in February but instead agreed to a power-sharing deal with the opposition until new elections are held.

Washington has asked Henry to enact urgent political reform. He was in Kenya when the violence erupted and is now reportedly stranded in the US territory of Puerto Rico.

The UN Security Council gave its green light in October for a multinational policing mission led by Kenya, but that deployment has been stalled by Kenyan courts.

Port-au-Prince and western Haiti are under a month-long state of emergency, and a nighttime curfew was in effect until Monday, though it was unlikely overstretched police could enforce it.

In Port-au-Prince, Filienne Setoute told AFP how she had worked for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor for more than 20 years.

That job meant she "was able to build my own house," she said. "But now here I am, homeless. I'm fleeing without knowing where to go, it's an abuse."

"We haven't been able to sleep since last night," she added. "We're running away."

Haiti's airport remained closed while the main port -- a key point for food imports -- reported looting since suspending services Thursday.

Vienna's wacky Hundertwasser museum gets even greener

VIENNA (AFP/APP): F r i e n d s r e i c h Hundertwasser would have no doubt approved. Austria has made its "first green museum" -- entirely dedicated to the work of the maverick artist and ecological trailblazer -- even greener. The colourful Kunst Haus Wien in Vienna has ditched fossil fuels for an entirely renewable in-house hydrothermal energy system using a well in its

courtyard. The museum -- where Hundertwasser used to stay on the top floor -- draws more than a hundred thousand visitors a year, with the nearby and equally zany Hundertwasser House attracting more than a million. Curators believe the polymath, who designed a series of environmentally friendly buildings in Austria and abroad, would have approved of the 3.5 million-euro (\$3.8-mil-

lion) green makeover of the gallery.

Renovating the building according to the latest environmental standards was an attempt to live up to his reputation as a green prophet, said director Gerlinde Riedl, who called it the country's "first green museum".

Hundertwasser oversaw the opening of the museum in 1991 -- which holds the world's largest collection of his work -- after

Inkatha launches South Africa vote campaign in Zulu heartland

DURBAN (AFP/APP): South Africa's opposition Inkatha Freedom Party gathered a huge crowd of supporters for the spectacular launch of its general election campaign on Sunday, filling a stadium in the heartland of its Zulu base.

The Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban was packed to hear party leader Velenkosini Hlabisa unveil the IFP manifesto, but the impressive show of force on day one may prove to be the campaign's high point for the movement.

"South Africa stands on the brink of collapse, not because of any lack in our people but because South Africa has been subjected to poor governance, to weak leadership and corruption," Hlabisa declared in a lengthy address.

"In 2024 across the length and breadth of Africa, there is one resounding call: the call for change."

The May 29 election will be the first fought by the right-wing party without its

post-election horsetrading.

This year, three decades after the advent of democracy and end of apartheid, the ANC is expected see its support slip nationally, perhaps losing its majority for the first time but the IFP may not be able to capitalise. Former president Jacob Zuma has been suspended from the ANC after corruption scandals, but has formed a new opposition party. He remains popular among fellow Zulus and his populist platform could pick up more KZN votes than the IFP's liberal economic stance.

Nevertheless, the manifesto launch attracted a huge and enthusiastic crowd, including traditional leaders in Zulu dress, under the slogan "Let's do it for Shenge" -- a tribute to Buthelezi under his nickname and a nod to how much the party still leans on its late figurehead.

While Hlabisa launched his campaign, President Cyril Ramaphosa -- who also drew an impressive

crowd to the Durban stadium earlier this month -- was campaigning in and around Johannesburg in Gauteng, the only province with more votes and assembly members than KZN.

He conducted a walkabout in a shopping mall, greeting smiling voters and taking pictures with babies, before giving a speech in a church, the Fire Tabernacle Prophetic Ministry in Ekurhuleni.

South Africa's economy is in the doldrums and voters are concerned about soaring violent crime and crippling power cuts.

Ramaphosa has stuck to the ANC's traditional strengths, citing its legacy as the party which led South Africa out of apartheid and promising assistance to the less well off. "We must put South Africa to work. We must increase the number of people that are employed and reduce the number of people unemployed," he said. "We also want to tackle the high cost of living."

Portugal votes with centre-right poised to oust Socialists

LISBON (AFP/APP): Voters in Portugal go to the polls Sunday in an early election that could see the country join a shift to the right seen across Europe after eight years of Socialist rule.

Final opinion polls published Friday show the centre-right Democratic Alliance (AD) narrowly ahead of the Socialist Party (PS) but short of an outright majority in parliament, which could make the far-right party Chega a king-maker for forming a governing coalition.

But analysts warned the results of the election, Portugal's second in two years, remained wide open given the large number of undecided voters.

Voting stations in the nation of around 10 million people open at 8:00 am (0800 GMT) with exit poll projections expected at 8:00 pm.

The AD leader, 51-year-old lawyer Luis Montenegro, has campaigned on promises to boost economic growth by cutting taxes, and to

improve the country's public services.

"We really must turn the page," he told a packed final rally at Lisbon's bullring on Friday night.

Montenegro has ruled out any post-election agreement with Chega, but other top AD officials have been more ambiguous.

Analysts say a deal with the anti-establishment Chega, which means "Enough", may prove the only way for the AD to govern. Chega's leader Andre Ventura, a former trainee priest who went on to become a tough-talking television football commentator, has said his party is "as legitimate as the others". Chega calls for tougher measures to fight corruption, stricter controls over immigration and chemical castration for some sex offenders.

Just five years old, Chega picked up its first seat in Portugal's 230-seat parliament in 2019, becoming the first far-right party to win representation in the assembly since a military

coup in 1974 toppled a decades-long right-wing dictatorship. It increased its seats to 12 seats in 2022 and polls suggest it could more than double that number this time.

That would mirror gains by far-right parties across Europe, where they already govern -- often in coalition -- in countries such as Italy, Hungary or Slovakia, or are steadily gaining, as in France and Germany.

The election was called after Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa, 62, unexpectedly resigned in November following an influence-peddling probe that involved a search of his official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff.

Though Costa himself was not accused of any crime, he decided not to run again. Under his watch unemployment has dropped, the economy expanded by 2.3 percent last year -- one of the fastest rates in the eurozone -- and public finances have improved.

But surveys indicate many voters feel Costa's government squandered the outright majority it won in 2022 by failing to improve unreliable public health services and education, or address a housing crisis that has sparked large street protests in what remains one of Western Europe's poorest countries.

"We need to change the direction of the country because it can't continue in this state," Antonio Ferreira, a 47-year-old telecoms technician and volunteer firefighter, told AFP at an AD street rally Friday in Lisbon's upscale Alvalade neighbourhood.

The Socialists' new leader, 46-year-old former infrastructure minister Pedro Nuno Santos, has defended the government's record even as he acknowledges it could have done better in some areas.

"The right thinks they're going to win the election with their usual arrogance and lack of humility. It's the Portuguese people who will decide," he said at his final rally on Friday night.

Gunshots, then chaos before Nigeria students' kidnapping

KURIGA (AFP/APP): Students were just about to settle into their classes after singing Nigeria's national anthem when the gunshots rang out. Then chaos erupted. It was around 8:00 am on Thursday when dozens of gunmen dressed in military uniforms rode on motorbikes into the school grounds in Kuriga, a quiet agrarian village 100km outside the northwestern Nigerian city of Kaduna.

More gunmen arrived from the rear on foot, blocking all exits as shots were fired into the air.

By the time the early morning attack was over, more than 280 schoolchildren had been rounded up and kidnapped by the armed

group in the latest mass abduction in Nigeria's north-west. It was one of the largest recent mass kidnappings by gunmen known locally as bandits in Nigeria where criminal gangs target schools, colleges and highways as they hunt for large groups of victims to make ransom demands.

Nigeria's security forces on Sunday were still hunting for Kuriga school victims in forests that spread across Kaduna and other states.

In Kaduna, Kuriga's unfenced school, with its dilapidated five blocks, housed primary and secondary school sections. Security was basic as in many such rural schools.

"We initially thought they

were soldiers and began hailing them and shouting 'May God be with you,'" said Maryam Usman, an 11-year old pupil who escaped.

Then bandits began shooting in the air as they attacked the school where 1,000 schoolchildren were about to start classes. Children and teachers scattered to escape.

Some, including Usman, hid in nearby homes, but the attackers pursued them and dragged them out, hitting them with whips.

"One of the men held on to my hijab (veil) and started dragging me on the ground while I tried to resist," Usman told AFP, sobbing outside her house.

"I managed to remove my

hijab and ran off. That was how I escaped."

Mustapha Abubakar had just taken his seat in the class when he said he saw a convoy of almost 20 motorcycles with men in military uniforms coming into the school.

Abubakar, an 18-year old secondary school student, was among the hundreds seized by the attackers and herded into the forest as they were beaten with horsewhips. But he managed to escape.

"We trekked for hours in the scorching heat until we were all exhausted," Abubakar told AFP while sheltering under a tree along the lone road that runs through the village.

In climate push, German chemical maker swaps oil for sugar

LEVERKUSEN (AFP/APP): At one of Europe's largest chemical complexes, German group Covestro is trialling the manufacture of a key product using sugar as a base material instead of oil, as the industry seeks to reduce its carbon footprint.

The pilot project involves producing "aniline", a chemical used in making foams -- used widely in mattresses and armchairs, as well as building insulation. While large-scale, commercial production is probably years away, the experiment marks a small step in the chemical industry's battle to slash carbon emissions as Earth faces a dire climate emergency.

Of the 100 million barrels of oil produced worldwide every day, "a quarter

goes directly into the chemical industry," said Walter Leitner, from Aachen University, which has been involved in the aniline project for a decade.

"The chemical industry needs to be completely rebuilt." Plastics manufacturer Covestro -- a former division of chemical giant Bayer -- started trials at its complex in the western city of Leverkusen at the end of 2023, after laboratory tests. In a 100-square-metre (1,080-square-foot) room, aniline, a transparent fluid, is extracted from a 600-metre network of intertwined pipes.

Using a process developed by University of Stuttgart researchers, fermented sugar is treated with chemicals to make the product. Aniline is used as

the base ingredient for chemical MDI, which is an essential material in manufacturing foams.

Traditionally, aniline has been obtained from crude oil derivatives like naphtha and benzene, but producing it emits large quantities of carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas. Around six million tonnes of aniline are produced globally a year, around one million tonnes of it by Covestro. So far, the pilot project in Leverkusen produces just a tiny part of this, extracting just half a tonne of aniline a day.

Some experts are sceptical about such an approach.

The use of plant matter in manufacturing may cut out fossil fuels but whether it can lead to carbon neutrality "is often questionable", Jens Guenther, from Germany's

Federal Environment Agency, told AFP. This is particularly the case when it comes to the use of "so-called cultivated biomass like maize, sugar cane and sugar beet," he said.

Janine Korduan, from environmental NGO BUND, pointed out that industrial agriculture generates "CO2 and methane emissions through land conversion and the production of fertilisers and pesticides", and also leads to "major losses of biodiversity and high water consumption". Nevertheless, Guenther said the use of plant matter in production processes would likely produce significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions than using fossil fuels, although opting for waste materials rather than crops produced in large-scale farming would be preferable.

Nicknamed the "Carnation Revolution" after flower vendors handed out seasonal blooms to the soldiers, it led to Portugal's first free elections with universal suffrage exactly one year later. It is a rare example of a military coup held to install democracy and a source of pride in Portugal, where its anniversary is a national holiday called "Freedom Day".

- Influx of tourists -

With 300 days of sunshine per year, Portugal keeps setting new records for the amount of foreign tourist arrivals it draws.

The sector accounts for around 15 percent of the country's economic output, generating record revenues of 25 billion euros (\$27 billion) last year.

Dubbed the "Florida of Europe", the country is also home to many well-off foreigners -- retirees, investors or digital nomads -- seduced by its gentle lifestyle and attractive tax policies.

...and immigrants -

With one of Europe's most open immigration regimes, Portugal has seen its foreign-born population double in five years.

Fewer than half a million in 2018, last year a million foreigners were living in Portugal -- one-tenth if the country's population.

Brazilians, with their long historical links to the country, remain the largest contingent -- some 400,000-strong. Immigrants from India and Nepal are now more numerous than people from former Portuguese colonies Angola and Cape Verde.

Bangladeshi and Pakistanis also now figure in the top 10 of new arrivals.

- Surf XXL -

With over 800 kilometres (500 miles) of Atlantic coastline and countless breaks of all shapes and sizes, the country attracts surfers from around the world. The best known spot is off the coast of the central town of Nazare, where an underwater canyon some five kilometres deep near the shoreline of the former fishing village helps generate what are arguably the biggest rideable waves in the world.

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KP Untapped Mining Potential

Chief Minister KP, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has directed the concerned authorities to formulate a new mining policy and introduce rudimentary reforms in the mining sector to align it on modern lines and ensure the effective use of mineral resources to enhance the revenue of the province. The Chief Minister directed the high-ups of the concerned department to complete homework on the establishment of a government-owned Mining Company, introduce mechanical mining, and E-bidding system for the issuance of mineral leases. He further asked for shifting the colossal paperwork and clerical register to a paperless system of the Mineral Department. The Country in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular is blessed with precious minerals and hidden deposits throughout its territory. These minerals include precious metals including gold, lead, zinc, copper, rock phosphate, rock salt, marble, and multiple kinds of gemstones, etc. The KP Mineral Development Department was formed in the early 70s to play the role of custodian of the mineral resources spread over large swathes of almost all districts across the province. The KP Mineral Department could not perform well because of institutional corruption, lack of policy framework, and an effective system of bidding and monitoring of the exploitation process of precious products. Historically, the Bureaucracy run KP Mineral Department failed in the proper management of mining activities, exploration of hidden deposits, and attraction of investment from home and abroad due to ineffective mining concessions, weak regulation, and poor enforcement of mining lease agreements. Meanwhile, the leaseholders and private contractors have always colluded with bureaucracy and got lucrative mining contracts on nominal prices while not paying back the due share to the government. Resultantly, industry best practices have not been introduced and meaningful investment in technology and expertise could not be made in the past. Although Pakistan is endowed with extensive geological potential unlike other developing countries, it has not yet been able to promote growth and alleviate poverty by exploiting its natural resources to the optimum level. The country's mining industry is dominated by the public sector and there has been little or no modern exploration with the benefit of large-scale private sector investment and foreign investors with modern management, capital, and technical expertise. Wherein, the bureaucracy neither has the vision nor ability to exploit those opportunities in the best interest of the country. Previously, the KP government has introduced multiple legislations in the mining sector including the KP Mineral Policy, KP Mineral Sector Governance Act 2017, and KP Mineral Governance Rules- 2018 which need to align with global standards along with the introduction of moderate mining policies and stringent monitoring and oversight mechanisms. That promotes transparency, increases production, and boosts revenue for the government. The KP government has also launched the Mining Cadastre Portal which provides an e-Government platform for stakeholders in the mineral sector to engage directly with the Minerals Development Department. The idea of constituting a state-owned mining company would be a waste of resources rather the government should strengthen its monitoring and oversight role. The fresh KP government has picked up an important sector of the provincial economy that could make a miracle if provincial authorities succeed in formulating an investment-friendly policy, restoring investors' trust together with providing an investor-friendly environment which is crucial to untapped hidden reserves and generating revenue from that activity. The provincial government should also focus on other avenues including hydropower generation, agriculture, livestock, poultry, and forestry to expand the provincial economy and benefit the public from local resources.

President and Esteem of Presidency

The President-elect and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari took the oath as 14 President of Pakistan. The oath ceremony completed the historic electoral process, symbolized a significant transition of power and a testament to Pakistan's commitment to democratic principles. Wherein, former President Dr. Arif Alvi silently walked away from the Presidency leaving behind a legacy, that has some bitter facts, controversies, and a rigmarole of stubborn attitude that neither suits high offices nor coincides with national cause. Amid a highly contentious political environment, the defeated Presidential candidate Mr. Mahmood Khan Achakzai displayed a highly adorable sportsman spirit during which he not only accepted his defeat and offered congratulations to the winning candidate but appreciated the fairness and transparency of the polls that ended in his defeat. Historically, the office of the President is a symbol of the federation and plays a bridging role among all four federating units in the country. The President is the constitutional head of the executive and acts as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. It is a constitutional and ceremonial position that demands impartial and unbiased conduct, in line with the Constitution and the prestige of the office of the President. The Presidency has witnessed condemnable services of the nation's saviors like Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Farooq Ahmed Laghari who upheld their constitutional obligations and clumped down hard on their parties' governments. Mr. Zardari also left behind a landmark legacy during his previous term by scraping the draconian Article 58 (2) B and relinquishing his power in the larger interest of democracy in the country. However, Dr. Naqvi represented his party throughout his term and always sought guidance from the Lahore Zaman Park or prisoner number 804 whenever it came to his dealing with sensitive political and constitutional affairs. In fact, democratic norms play a crucial role in maintaining the health and stability of political systems. Democracy teaches us mutual tolerance and an acknowledgment of responsibility. Political competition should occur within the bounds of acceptable behaviour. Institutional forbearance involves self-restraint by political leaders understanding that their actions can impact the stability and functioning of democratic institutions. These norms act as guardrails, preventing political competition from becoming excessively intense and ensuring that elections don't turn into winner-take-all battles at any cost. The tragedy our nation has suffered over the past year and a half and still confronts the adamant behaviours of certain political actors. The nation eagerly elected its representatives amid economic woes and high inflation, now it comes to leaders how they pay back to the nation in the coming months and years.

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



SA is on a remarkable journey — I’ve seen it with my own eyes

Jason Greenblatt

In the past 18 months, Saudi Arabia has won the bid to host the World Expo 2030 (in a landslide vote); secured the 2029 Asian Winter Games and 2034 World Cup; attracted some of the world's best football talent; shaken up the golf world with LIV Golf; continued to significantly advance its massive giga-projects; played a significant role on the diplomatic stage with many of the world's current, complex challenges and dangers; and has been named the ninth-most powerful country in the world by US News and World Report. The Kingdom is on a roll like few nations have been in the recent past.

I first heard about the Kingdom's giga-projects directly from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in many meetings that took place during my time as the White House envoy to the Middle East from 2017-2019. Admittedly, I was mildly skeptical that the crown prince could succeed in creating these projects, massive in scale, and designed to stimulate the Kingdom's economy and diversify it away from oil. I wondered if the crown prince could actually change Saudi Arabia's societal norms in terms of women's role in society, recreation, culture and openness. I also wondered if he could reshape the country in a way that would attract people from within and outside the Kingdom to view it as one of the most exciting places to be — to do business, to tour and, yes, to live. I think at this point I can say my skepticism was wrong. I have been back to Saudi Arabia numerous times since those three years, for work and for family vacations, and, indeed, the Kingdom is quickly proceeding with all of these dramatic changes. The number of cranes dotting the skyline is eye-popping. The women I interact with are front facing, en-

gized, and proud of all that is going on in the Kingdom and their critical role in it. Each woman I interact with, from those working in government, to business women, to workers at hotels, restaurants and other businesses, shows me that the opinion piece written by Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova in The Washington Post was filled with inaccurate, outdated information about women in today's Saudi society.

There are numerous snapshots one can view to understand today's Saudi Arabia. I will mention a few that distinctly depict the Kingdom today.

First, to get a real sense of societal change and women's participation in the workforce, stop by the area known as Digital City, where the Public Investment Fund, the sovereign wealth fund of the Kingdom, has its headquarters. In between Buildings 3 and 4 is a plaza area. Throughout the day, you will see men and women going in and out of those large buildings. They take breaks in the plaza, laughing, chatting, sipping coffee, looking no different than areas around Wall Street in Manhattan or any other important business center around the globe. In the evening that plaza (known to locals as “the valley”) becomes a popular hangout for Saudis looking for a pleasant area to hang out and pass the time.

Another example is the area known as Diriyah, northwest of Riyadh. Diriyah, a UNESCO World Heritage site, takes you back to the ancient history of Saudi Arabia. But what is being developed there will take your breath away — the neighborhoods, parks, hotels, retail and other commercial areas, restaurants, world class museums, and universities are all a short drive, but worlds away, from bustling

Riyadh.

I was with one of my daughters and son-in-law visiting Layali Diriyah, a highlight of Diriyah during Riyadh Season during which events and family, food-oriented and other exciting activities energize Riyadh's winter. As we sat at one of the restaurants sipping mint tea and soaking it all in, I remarked to them that only a few years ago they never would have seen this. What we were watching — men and women laughing, dining together and enjoying one another's company in public — was not possible when I first visited the Kingdom. I told them a story from my first trip in 2017, on my first morning in Riyadh when I went to a Starbucks. There was a separate entrance for men, women and families; I sat in the segregated men's area taking it all in. Those separate entrances and segregated areas are long gone, replaced with busy cafes, restaurants and other eateries, where men and women freely mix, mingle and have fun. I also made the point to my children to observe the well-behaved, polite crowds. Lively to be sure, but there was no one around who was threatening, too boisterous, smoking marijuana, or in your face, as one might see on the streets of some major cities these days. It was all about good, clean, respectful fun.

As observant Jews, we have certain dietary restrictions and we observe the Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat), where for a period of about 25 hours from Friday evening until Saturday evening each week we avoid using electronics. The hotel staff, including those from Saudi Arabia, did all it could to help us with our kosher meals and the Shabbat-related challenges at the hotel. The help with our Shabbat needs was

always given with a warm smile. Their approach is to try to make everyone feel welcome.

The last snapshot is how the Kingdom has grown its tourism sector. According to Ahmed Al-Khateeb, the minister of tourism, the tourism sector hosted 100 million visitors in 2023, including 77 million domestic and 27 million international tourists. Considering how so many Saudis used to leave the Kingdom for vacations because there was so little to do at home, these numbers are quite impressive. Moreover, this growth is with only some of the projects starting to open, with massive ones yet to come, including NEOM, an ambitious giga-project whose ambition is to “redefine livability, business and conservation.” I spent two days in NEOM this trip, meeting many of its sector heads and others who live and work there. There is a level of seriousness and commitment exuded by each of them that is hard to match.

Those who throw shade on Saudi Arabia and accuse it of “sportswashing,” subjugating women, and other ills are not paying attention. The Kingdom is not perfect; no country is. And there remains lots more work to do. But the Kingdom is on a remarkable journey. Rarely does one have the opportunity to watch a country building and rebuilding itself for the future, in terms of projects, infrastructure, a new economy and, indeed, society itself. Rarely do you get to watch history unfold in front of your eyes, a country reshaping itself, striving to become one of the world's leading destinations for business, tourism, and living. Even rarer is to watch a population, especially the young adults and youth, embrace and eagerly support the changes and want to proudly help advance them. That is today's Saudi Arabia.

Saudi climate action through carbon capture and storage initiatives

Khulood Rambo

The Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute, the world's leading authority on CCS, reports that the level of policy support from governments reached historic highs in 2023. This has strengthened the business case for CCS and resulted in the project pipeline growing more rapidly in the past year than at any other time.

Furthermore, CCS in the Middle East and Africa region already accounts for around 8 percent of global capacity and is on the cusp of a remarkable upturn, with commitments by the UAE and Saudi Arabia in announcing net-zero targets for 2050 and 2060 respectively.

Saudi Arabia, a global energy powerhouse, has embarked on an ambitious journey to combat climate change and transition toward a more sustainable future. As part of its commitment to the circular carbon economy, or CCE, the Kingdom is actively pursuing carbon capture and storage initiatives.

The Joint Development Agreement with Saudi Aramco is one of the largest initiatives on this front. This agreement aims to establish one of the biggest CCS hubs globally. The hub will be located in Jubail Industrial City and is set to start operating by 2027.

In its first phase, it will have the capacity to extract and store 9 million tonnes per year of carbon dioxide. The long-term goal is to extract, utilize, and store a staggering 44 million tonnes per year of carbon dioxide by 2035. In equal measures, the Al-Khobar CCS Project will capture carbon dioxide emissions from industrial sources.

The captured carbon dioxide will be transported and stored in geological formations deep underground. This project represents a significant step toward achieving the Kingdom's climate goals.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is constructing the world's largest green hydrogen

plant. The plant is set to produce up to 600 tonnes of green hydrogen per day by 2026, which will play a crucial role in decarbonizing the energy sector.

In addition to ongoing efforts in the renewable energy transition, showing the Kingdom's heavy investments, 13 new projects are underway, with a total capacity of 11.4 gigawatts. By 2030, Saudi Arabia aims to generate 50 percent of its power capacity from renewables. These projects are expected to reduce approximately 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

The Saudi Green Initiative aims to combat climate change, improve quality of life, and protect the environment for future generations. This initiative focuses on three key targets: Emissions reduction, afforestation, and land and sea protection.

Emissions reduction includes measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions;

afforestation targets involve planting 10 billion trees in Saudi Arabia and 50 billion across the Middle East; and land and sea protection aims to safeguard natural ecosystems.

Saudi Arabia is committed to placing 30 percent of its land and sea under protection by 2030. Biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration are an integral part of this effort.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia announced the launch of the GHG Crediting and Offsetting Scheme in early 2024, which aims to support and incentivize emission reduction and removal projects across all sectors in the Kingdom.

In summary, Saudi Arabia's carbon capture and storage initiatives demonstrate its determination to address climate change head-on. By leveraging technology, international partnerships, and a commitment to sustainability, the Kingdom is positioning itself as a global leader in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

A tale of two Benjamins, only one of whom Biden wants to deal with

Yossi Mekelberg

This is a tale of two Benjamins and one US administration. The first is Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister; the other is Benjamin (Benny) Gantz, a member of the war Cabinet, yet a political rival of the prime minister. To put it plainly, President Biden and his administration can't wait to see the back of the first Benjamin, that is Netanyahu, and in this they have joined the majority of Israelis, who share the same sentiment.

From once being a political celebrity in Washington, Netanyahu has become a cause for concern, especially since at the beginning of last year he formed his populist, ultranationalist coalition, mainly to ensure his own political survival. Since then, he has been banished from Washington, becoming persona non grata in the White House. His extremely irresponsible and brutal behavior since the onset of the war with Hamas only enhanced that sentiment.

In his place, the Biden administration was looking for a “responsible adult” in the government, hence they turned to the second Benjamin: Enter Benny Gantz, whose National Party leads the opinion polls by a large margin and who arrived in Washington this week. Breaking with protocol, the White House had invited him to visit Washington for talks with the most senior members of the administration short of the president himself, but including Vice President Kamala Harris, while neither side consulted Netanyahu, let alone asked for his approval.

It took nearly five months for Washington to take this decision, an unusual one in the world of diplomacy, especially between close allies, but an inevitable expression of exasperation at the policies of the Israeli government before and after Oct. 7. In the final analysis, Israel under Netanyahu has switched from being a strategic ally of the US to being a burden that is not only directly endangering America's national interests, but negatively affecting its domestic politics, threatening regional and international stability, becoming detrimental to the very survival of Israel itself.

From the outset of the sixth Netanyahu government, Biden was deeply perturbed by its assault on the democratic system and especially on the judiciary. Hence the US president refused to meet with Netanyahu for the first nine months of the current Israeli government, again a rarity in relations between the two countries. When a meeting eventually took place, last September, it was held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly — there was no much-coveted visit to the White House for the Israeli prime minister. It was an uneasy meeting, during which Biden made it clear that what bonds the two countries is their shared democratic values. This can be seen only as a coded warning to Netanyahu that straying from these values risks the special relationship between the two administrations.

Washington is under no illusion that should Gantz become Israel's prime minister, the path toward serious negotiations on a two-state solution will not be easy, painless, or rapidly established. Yet, at this point, this is their best bet, gambling on a centrist candidate who responds to reason, has no ulterior motive, and whose considerations, unlike those of his rival Netanyahu, are not dominated by either a corruption trial or an increasingly megalomaniac and general detachment from reality.

At this point, with less than a year until the US presidential election, it is far from guaranteed that Biden will win a second term, but after more than 150 days of the war in Gaza, there is a rethink taking place as to whether Israel can be regarded as a strategic asset beyond America's commitment to the long-term security and well-being of Israel. However, as it stands, the

Biden administration is becoming increasingly alarmed and annoyed that Netanyahu is treating the alliance as a one-way street in which the tail wags the dog, and is doing his best to sabotage any chance of a post-war Israeli-Palestinian peace, and more generally the security and geopolitical architecture of the region as envisaged by Washington.

Biden must also feel a strong sense of personal betrayal. Since Oct. 7 he has stuck his neck out in support of Israel, and in a manner which might cost him the presidency come November. His administration has not shied away from blocking UN Security Council resolutions calling for at least a humanitarian truce, although they are calling for a ceasefire elsewhere beyond the halls of the UN.

Moreover, the US has been supporting the continuation of Israel's military campaign, even while most of the world opposes it in the face of the horrific images of the mass killing of Palestinians and the desperate humanitarian situation that has brought Gazans to the point of starvation. America's ongoing support for Israel can only be deeply damaging for its reputation and standing in the region.

The “gratitude” that the Netanyahu government has shown is in the form of bluntly ignoring US requests for it to define its war aims beyond the open-ended and unachievable one of the “total destruction of Hamas” with no timeline or operational plan. From his first visit to Israel after the Hamas attack, Biden has urged Israel to learn from his own country's mistakes in the aftermath of 9/11, in addition to his caution that democracies must conduct war in accordance

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with international law, which means with proportionality.

However, five months into this war, and with more than 30,000 Palestinians killed and most of the Gaza Strip becoming uninhabitable, it is obvious that Israel has failed to heed this advice. Israel has continued throughout to ignore US requests to allow for humanitarian pauses, to present a workable plan for the day after — not the one that Netanyahu recently presented that has no partners and no chance to become a reality — and to play ball with the plan

Washington is putting together with regional powers that will lead to a peace with the Palestinians based on a two-state-solution. The invitation of Gantz to Washington for high-level discussions was a clear message about who Washington thinks should be in power in Israel and who the US is looking forward to doing business with. Kamala Harris' recent speech calling for an immediate truce, and laying the blame for the mere trickle of humanitarian aid to the Strip squarely with Israel, was Washington taking the gloves off by publicly rebuking Israel's conduct of the war. Parting with Netanyahu and his dangerous government might take longer than is desirable, but the Biden administration has now made it very clear that by not hastening its demise, Israel is in danger of losing the support of its biggest and most important ally, something it cannot afford to let happen.

External perceptions of the next US presidential election

There is no doubt that foreign observers are looking at the US and wondering what will come next. On the foreign front, both Russia and Gaza are key vectors of further international attention. Having just completed Super Tuesday, the US is moving toward its presidential election in November 2024. What type of America will international observers see, as both foreign policy challenges and internal discontent and political jockeying continue?

First, a quick notation: Although a new Trump administration is a possibility, there are still many legal steps that could derail former President Donald Trump's candidacy, but not stop his political machine or base from operating. So, the prospect of President Joe Biden winning also brings with it many pros and cons. Both leaders are seen as being at a unique stage of their older life. Some in Washington feel that at the end of the day Biden and the Democrats will win because of Trump's criminal convictions and doubts over his financial affairs.

To be sure, outside observers see American society is divided across a number of different planes that are becoming more complex and creating very sharp divisions. Never has there been such breakdown in family and personal relationships, especially between generations. Polarization runs rampant in the halls of the US Congress all the way down to what's left of the family dinner table.

Four years ago, in the run-up to the presidential election, there were predictions of major problems on a US local or regional level. Trump-era laws help to complicate local politics,

such as abortion, in the US, and the current administration seems to counterbalance gender identity and, consequently, there are urban and state divides over halting current trend lines in these two issues and others. Here polarization takes a whole new level of stress as a factor in the inability to communicate on key policy questions. Issues regarding

The international scene is no less divisive for the US presidential election. A major war in Europe and the tragedy of Palestine and Israel means that US domestic issues will become highly inflamed via rhetoric and information warfare. American universities are exploding from the hatred that is rising, affecting the quality of the education received. Universities today are not learning environments but incubators of narrative hatred. We are seeing now in universities and in workplaces across the US greater divisions leading to major lawsuits, and dismissals of university personnel and suspension of students. Naturally, many are looking at the possibility of Trump returning to office based on the fact that Biden has fudged America's foreign policy to the point of failure at a key moment in regional history in the Middle East. Outside observers note this moment frequently in their analyses, and many different actors are expanding their influence, such as Iran. Concepts such as strategic failure begin to arise and the discourse regarding what is ongoing with America and what will come next.

Texas stand as a case in point. Many outside observers view this behavior as "strange" for America.

The international scene is no less divisive for the US presidential election. A major war in Europe and the tragedy of Palestine and Israel means that US domestic issues will

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The answer is not easy. Policymakers and stakeholders who were observing the situation in Washington are increasingly seeing the pluses of a change in administration and would welcome it because continuation of the current phase and what comes next with both Russia and Gaza is a key determinant.

On top of this break in continuity between the administrations is how the next leader will deal with accusations of human rights violations and genocide. How a new Trump administration would use this as a potential political tool is an interesting question. A rules-based order does not seem to be on the cards, so how will the International Court of Justice contend with such an America? The next administration, whether Biden or Trump, is going to have to deal with the legalities surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and radical settler actions as well as accusations against US government officials.

The presidential election is also showing to the rest of the world that the US has no fresh blood for a political renewal or thinking. Many joke about the Soviet-like nature of the age of America's leaders, and they do have a point. But Trump would be more willing to use a hammer instead of Biden's light touch on major policy issues. That fact makes some foreign observers curious, and nervous, about what comes next from the US.

A US election is supposed to be a renewal. Current events preclude more immediate credibility problems. What the morning of Nov. 6, 2024 brings will be seen in the following years.

Next step on net-zero ambition for Europe

Since the Ukraine war began, the EU has reprioritized energy security as it moves away from Russian fuels in its energy mix. However, on Thursday, the bloc made a significant pivot toward climate action, taking a key new step toward meeting its net-zero ambitions.

Many of the 27 EU nations are proud of their intent to become the first continent to hit net zero before 2050. Despite the Ukraine war, there is widespread acknowledgement of the importance of this pioneering goal, with the European Green New Deal encompassing more than 50 major sustainability initiatives since the signature policy agenda was announced by the Ursula von der Leyen-led commission.

This has helped the 27-member bloc rebrand itself as a global green superpower, which it hopes can secure a renewed political lease of life to boot. This after several difficult decades that saw the rise of challenges, such as growing Euroskepticism, and multiple financial crises.

Along this journey, there have been predictable obstacles to delivering on Europe's climate ambition. One of these challenges, for instance, is the political backlash (or "greenlash") by the political right, which includes not just populist

groups, but also the mainstream conservative European People's Party, the largest bloc in the European Parliament.

Conversely, there have been unexpected impediments, too, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Another unanticipated blockage to climate action delivery cited by governments is the 1998 Energy Charter Treaty, signed by dozens of nations, which was originally intended to protect international investments in petroleum-rich post-Soviet states.

Outside of the EU, current signatories include Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

This international treaty allows energy companies to try to sue governments over policies that damage their investments. In recent years, the deal has been increasingly criticized by NGOs and some governments for allowing corporates to challenge policy decisions that would see the closure of fossil fuel plants as countries seek to deliver on net-zero.

EU countries have so far been the target of around 90 percent of Energy Charter

Andrew Hammond

Treaty disputes, in part because of the region's significant climate ambition. For instance, the EU 27 have embarked on a challenging pathway as set out in the RePowerEU strategy to scale up use of clean energy, while also saving almost 20 percent of energy consumption.

Renewable successes in the first year of this strategy include reaching a record of 41GW of new solar energy capacity installed, and increasing wind capacity by 16GW. This helped generate, for the first time, more EU-wide electricity from wind and solar sources than from gas.

In recent years, a steady stream of EU and non-EU European nations have signalled their intent to leave the Energy Charter Treaty, including Italy in 2016. Most recently, the UK announced last month its departure decision, too.

Last July, the European Commission first proposed a coordinated bloc-wide departure from the treaty by the EU 27 nations. A total of nine member states have so far announced their intent to withdraw from the Energy Charter Treaty since Italy — Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. In the meantime, Germany,

Luxembourg and Poland have officially notified their withdrawal.

On the other side of the ledger, however, a number of other EU countries, including Cyprus, Finland and Hungary, had expressed interest in staying in. Meanwhile, other members of the bloc had pushed for supporting wider international efforts to reform the treaty.

Until February, these splits in the EU had delayed decisive action, but suddenly a breakthrough was fashioned in negotiations this year. What the European Commission proposed last week was that, before leaving the treaty, EU countries should allow reforms to pass at the Energy Charter Treaty conference, expected potentially in November, while allowing the EU and Euratom, the European Atomic Energy Community, to leave the treaty.

This is not just an example of pragmatic politics in action to deliver a deal. It also potentially allows the member governments to revise the ECT in a way that would halve the time (from 20 to 10 years) that non-EU energy firms would continue to enjoy the pact's protections to their investments across the bloc after treaty departure.

The wider agenda for reform of the Energy Charter Treaty includes potentially extending its

investor-state dispute settlement provisions to clean tech, such as carbon capture and hydrogen. However, this slate of proposed reforms, which some NGOs and governments still claim still gives too much protection to fossil fuel firms, requires unanimous approval from about 50 nations that are signatories to the treaty. This fell down in 2022 when France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain prevented the EU Council from approving the potential revisions to the Energy Charter Treaty deal.

What Europe hopes now is that energy firms will increasingly move their investments in the continent to cleaner fuels. EU officials estimate that reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 will require about 700 billion euros in additional investment by the bloc each year, and the role of the private sector is, therefore, key to delivery.

Taken together, the EU's decision to leave the Energy Charter Treaty is widely welcomed by NGOs as another key step on the journey to deliver climate action.

Europe increasingly hopes that investment will be redirected from fossil fuels to cleaner energies that will help the region become the first to hit net-zero before 2050, the key goal of the bloc's Green New Deal.

How Britain stood up to be counted on Ukraine

Luke Coffey

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps visited Kyiv last week to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian defense officials.

It was his third visit since he became defense secretary last August. On this trip, Shapps said the UK would commit \$450 million to provide Ukraine with 10,000 advanced drones.

Such a commitment from London should not come as a surprise. There have been many geopolitical changes in Europe since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Longstanding neutral countries such as Sweden and Finland have joined NATO, the world's leading military alliance. Before 2022 this would have been unthinkable. Russia is now reliant on weapons from North Korea and Iran. Moscow is even manufacturing Iranian-designed Shahed drones inside Russia for use against Ukraine. Again, this is something that would have been unimaginable before 2022. But one of the most important geopolitical shifts is the re-emergence of Britain as a major actor in Europe.

Immediately after the Brexit vote in 2016, many policymakers and commentators were wondering what the UK's future role in Europe would be. Throughout the tense Brexit negotiations with the EU in the years after 2016, it seemed to some that Britain's influence across Europe was waning. On the contrary, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it is clear that British influence across the continent is on the ascendancy.

This is because the UK stepped up to lead at a time when many other European countries, and the US too, were dithering. British leadership matters because the war in Ukraine is of vital importance to the West. Russia's invasion has changed the geopolitical landscape in Europe in a way not seen since the 1940s. For the first time in the 21st century, one country used military force to annex part of another. The last time this was done anywhere in the world was in 1990 when Iraq, under the rule of Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait. So the stakes are high for European security. And far from shying away from its European responsibilities, Britain has led the way in supporting Ukraine at almost every turn.

The UK has repeatedly rallied its European neighbors to support Ukraine. For example, in early 2022 during the lead up to Russia's invasion, when many European countries were in denial that such a military operation would take place, the Royal Air Force was already airlifting much-needed weapons to Ukraine.

These included the very capable anti-tank weapons that proved to be crucial in the defense of the capital Kyiv in the opening days of the conflict. By the early summer of 2022, the UK started a program to train 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers a year at locations across Britain. This happened months before any other country publicly committed to training Ukrainian soldiers. In fact, the UK training mission was started months before the EU started its training mission for

Ukraine is just the latest example of Britain's important role in European affairs. For hundreds of years, England, and then later the UK, has played a major role in Europe. This will continue to be the case for hundreds more years into the future. Britain's relationship with the EU is hardly a determining factor. British support for Ukraine is made easier by the fact that issue has not become politicized in the way that it has in the US. There is strong support for Ukraine throughout the chamber in the House of Commons. As the UK heads into a general election this year, it is unlikely that there would be any significant change in Britain's leadership role on Ukraine if the Labour Party won power.

By the early summer of 2022, the UK started a program to train 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers a year at locations across Britain. This happened months before any other country publicly committed to training Ukrainian soldiers. In fact, the UK training mission was started months before the EU started its training mission for Ukrainian soldiers in the autumn of 2022. After the first major wave of airstrikes against Ukrainian civilian infrastructure in October 2022, Britain was among the first countries to say that advanced air defense systems would be sent to Ukraine. Weeks later, the British were also the first European country to commit to sending main battle tanks to Ukraine. The UK was also the first country to commit to training Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets. Perhaps the boldest expression of support to Ukraine has been the UK's delivery of Storm Shadow missiles last summer. With a range of 250km, the Storm Shadow was the first long-range weapon to be provided to Ukraine by the West. Soon after the Brits provided Storm Shadow, the French followed by providing their version of the same missile. Since its first use last summer, the Storm Shadow has played the leading role in enabling Ukrainians to strike Russian Navy.

long-range weapon to be provided to Ukraine by the West. Soon after the Brits provided Storm Shadow, the French followed by providing their version of the same missile. Since its first use last summer, the Storm Shadow has played the leading role in enabling the Ukrainians to strike the Russian Navy. The missile's long range has pushed the Russian Navy far enough away from Ukrainian waters to allow grain exports to continue to the Global South. In addition, last December the UK launched a program to help Ukraine improve its naval capabilities. British support for

Of course, there was a lot of post-Brexit anxiety across Europe. But the UK's steadfast and consistent displays of commitment to European security are undeniable: so much so that some members of the European Parliament have called for an EU-UK defense treaty.

The war in Ukraine, and the UK's response to it, should once and for all relieve any anxieties some may have had about Britain's role in Europe after Brexit. Geographically, the UK is a European country. Geopolitically, it is a European power. It always has been and always will be.

A day of celebration for the strong and powerful women of the Gulf

Sinem Cengiz

Anticipating the post-oil future, the Gulf states have revolutionized their diplomatic strategy in recent years, placing a greater emphasis on women's empowerment both domestically and internationally. On Friday, International Women's Day, the Gulf Cooperation Council hosted an inaugural ceremony at its general secretariat in Riyadh to celebrate the achievements of Gulf women and underscore their importance in the development of the six GCC states.

I attended the event, which brought together prominent Gulf women in the fields of diplomacy, economy, security, and science. Ambitious female employees at the general

secretariat were the driving force behind this initiative. When the GCC was established in 1981, Fawzia Al-Khajah was the only female employee at its headquarters. There are now about 300, about 30 percent of the workforce.

Before the ceremony, Deemah AlYahya from Saudi Arabia, secretary-general of the Digital Cooperation Organisation, and Tahani AlTerkait from Kuwait, an adviser to GCC secretary-general Jassim Al-Budaiwi, shared their experiences at a workshop for female GCC employees. After that I had a discussion with Al-Budaiwi about initiatives aimed at enhancing women's status in the workforce and in wider society.

He emphasized the GCC's commitment to advancing women's inclusion. "Each GCC country has its own plans, own history and own story in regard to women's empowerment. However, one common objective for all the GCC states is encouraging and increasing women's participation in various fields," he told me.

The GCC has set its goals for female empowerment on three pillars: strong government commitment, effective collaboration among GCC states, and comprehensive GCC policy transcending national borders. The organization has already taken significant steps in promoting women's integration.

In 2021, the GCC estab-

lished its first Permanent Women's Committee, with representatives from the six member states. This committee meets every two years to offer recommendations to GCC governments and coordinate efforts on issues related to women's empowerment and sex equality. The Gulf states will also host an event focused on women's empowerment in the GCC during the Commission on the Status of Women next week in New York.

With International Women's Day behind us for another year, we should continue to recognize the progress made in expanding opportunities for women in the Gulf,

acknowledging their achievements across social, economic, cultural, and political spheres. Many pioneering women in the Gulf states have played a role. On social media, the GCC has already published inspiring stories about women from each member state. Through their achievements, they are exerting a positive influence on society and moving beyond the traditional mindsets that have shaped women's roles in the Gulf states for decades.

Although the journey toward women's inclusion in the region has faced challenges and progress has sometimes been slow, in recent years there have

been determined strides, driven by factors including economic development, government policies, and social change. There is a growing awareness of women's participation, supported by both societal and governmental initiatives. The GCC governments are rapidly catching up with other nations: you can feel the changes that have been introduced over the past few years. Meeting ambitious women reinforces my belief that their increased presence in the diplomatic, economic and security fields will lead to a more sustainable and prosperous state for current and future generations. Studies have shown that women's inclusion in these key areas can add

varied perspectives and novel ways of understanding critical issues.

Anticipating the post-oil future, the Gulf states have revolutionized their diplomatic strategy in recent years, placing a greater emphasis on women's empowerment both domestically and internationally. The inclusion of women is particularly important in male-dominated fields, and there has been immense progress in this. The presence and level of activity of women is integral to the success of the different visions of the GCC states: they are well aware that the success of their endeavors depends on how they invest in all members of society. Reflecting on Friday's

event, AlTerkait said it was more than just a celebration: it was an opportunity to spotlight the critical role played by women in the GCC. She said the event was a form of soft diplomacy, showcasing the increasing involvement of Gulf women in negotiations and decision-making roles.

Celebrating this important day with Gulf women in Riyadh was impressive. Women's participation is increasing considerably, and there have been notable gains in women's rights.

But there are still challenges to overcome, and more needs to be done. May all women worldwide strive to achieve their goals and contribute to the betterment of their societies.



Pak, Chinese experts forge agricultural alliance

ISLAMABAD (INP): To strengthen agricultural collaboration between Pakistan and China, the Diplomatic Insight Group (DIG) has hosted a distinguished delegation from China, comprising top agricultural scientists and business leaders.

According to Gwadar Pro, this significant gathering aimed at fostering discussions on innovative agricultural practices, sustainable development, and the promotion of international agricultural cooperation, according

Dr. Farhat Asif, Chairperson of Diplomatic Insight Group, and CEO Mr. Muhammad Asif Noor welcomed the Chinese delegation to their office. The delegation included Prof. Dr. He Cheng from China

Agricultural University, Prof. Dr. Wang Jingyu from Northwest A&F University, and executives from leading companies like Tianjin Henrylead Biotechnology Development Co., Ltd. and Fujian Shengnong Biotechnology Co., Ltd. etc.

The Diplomatic Insight Group's subsidiary, the Centre for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Studies- Institute of Peace and Diplomatic Studies (IPDS), is already playing a crucial role in enhancing Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Through organizing seminars, webinars, and conferences, and facilitating Chinese agricultural companies in Pakistan, IPDS is at the forefront of bridging the knowledge and technology gap between Pakistan and China in agri-

culture.

The discussion was enriched as the participants discussed the future of agriculture and livestock management, including discussions on the growth of livestock, advancements in vaccinations, and the manufacturing of dairy products like cheese.

Particular emphasis was placed on the innovation in technological and scientific methods to enhance the health and productivity of cows, buffaloes, and other livestock, showcasing a shared vision for a more sustainable and efficient agricultural future.

One of the most enlightening parts of the meeting was around the implementation of advanced scientific and technological strategies in livestock manage-

ment.

The experts explored the development of comprehensive vaccination programs for poultry, innovative cheese manufacturing processes, and breakthroughs in improving the health of cows and buffaloes.

These discussions highlighted the potential for significant improvements in animal welfare and productivity and emphasized the importance of sustainable practices in the global food supply chain.

This meeting has laid the groundwork for future joint ventures, exchange programs, and research initiatives that promise to bring about transformative changes in agriculture and livestock management across the globe.

Pakistani oranges reach Russia

ISLAMABAD (INP): Trucks bearing Pakistani oranges reached two Russian cities in what is being hailed as an important milestone for regional trade.

The operation, carried out by the National Logistics Cell, involved a total of 16 trucks that travelled from Sardogha in Punjab to Russia. The trucks travelled over 6,000 kilometres to reach their destination. The trucks were carrying the kinow variety of Pakistani oranges.

According to details, fourteen of the trucks reached Russian city Derbent, while the other two reached Grozny.

A special ceremony was organised to welcome the trucks which was attended by officials from the transport union, Russian customs and Pakistani embassy.

The journey has successfully exhibited Pakistani ability to reach foreign markets by road which will also prevent wastage of high-quality agricultural produce at home.

Statistics show that almost 40% of agricultural products are at risk of being spoiled due to lack of cold storage. However, reefer services can keep the products fresh even during long-distance travel.

332 gas connections disconnected

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 332 connections; Rs 7 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 13 connections on illegal use of gas while another 12 on use of compressor. In Multan 06 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 14 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.45 million against gas pilfers.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 230 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 6.51 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged 6 FIRs against gas pilfers.

In Sahiwal two connections were disconnected illegal use of gas.

In Sheikhupura 47 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.03 million booked against gas theft cases. In Faisalabad the team disconnected 8 connections on illegal use of gas and imposed fine of Rs 0.16 million against gas theft cases.

Govt asked to announce strategies

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has asked the new government that its strategies should not only focus on short-term gains but also encompass a long-term vision for sustained progress. He emphasized that such transparency from the government is crucial for instilling confidence in the business community and investors.

The APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed that the country has had trouble raising enough money to cover its expenses. Due to the low tax-to-GDP ratio, borrowing and outside help are heavily relied upon to close the fiscal imbalance. There is a recurring budget deficit because the government spends more than it takes in. The national debt burden has risen, as a result, needing substantial financial resources for debt repayment. Both internal and external debt in Pakistan has been constantly rising.

He called upon the newly-elected government to announce clear and robust economic strategies, as the country has stuck in low economic growth situation, where double-digit policy rate for the last few years has diminished capacity to increase domestic production, and exports, negatively impacting domestic resource mobilization.

Soneri Bank Limited: Shareholders approve 2023 annual results



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The annual audited financial statements of Soneri Bank Limited for the year ended 31 December 2023 were approved by the shareholders of the Bank in their 32nd AGM held in Lahore and through video-link via Zoom on Friday, 08 March 2024. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Alauddin Feerasta, Chairman of the Board, with Muhtashim Ahmad Ashai, President and Chief Executive Officer and other members of the Board of Directors and Senior Management also in attendance.

The Bank posted profit before tax (PBT) of Rs. 12,357 million and profit after tax (PAT) of Rs. 6,075 million in the year 2023, as compared to Rs. 4,554 million and Rs. 1,883 million respectively in 2022; which represents a healthy growth of 171.35% and 222.61% respectively as compared to last year. Earnings per

share (EPS) for the year was reported at Rs. 5.51 per share for the current year, as compared to Rs. 1.71 for the comparative prior year. During the meeting, the shareholders approved the final cash dividend for the year ended 31 December 2023 @ 30.00 percent i.e. Rs. 3.00 per share, as recommended earlier by the Board of Directors.

The Bank's Net Interest income for the year was reported at Rs. 22,759 million, significantly increased by 102.00 percent against Rs. 11,267 million for the prior year, while non-interest income increased by 25.23 percent to end at Rs. 6,459 million as against Rs. 5,157 million for the last year. Despite inflationary pressures, growth in expenses was restricted at 26.35 percent as compared to the prior year with Non-markup expenses reported at Rs. 15,471 million for the year ended December 2023.

During the year 2023 the

Bank surpassed the landmark number of half a trillion, and the Bank's Deposits registered an increase of 26.42 percent when compared to 31 December 2022, ended at Rs. 517,869 million at 31 December 2023. However, the Bank's CA percentage is 30.42 percent as at 31 December 2023, with year end Current deposits at Rs. 157,541 million as against Rs. 134,080 million at the year end 2022.

During the year, net provisions against loans, advances and investments amounted to Rs. 1,389 million, as against a net reversal of Rs. 375 million booked in the previous year. Resultantly, the Specific provisioning coverage improved to 80.01 percent at 31 December 2023 (December 2022: 71.61 percent).

The Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio as at 31 December 2023 stands at 18.44 percent, while the Leverage Ratio is at 4.02 percent.

Iran willing to revive Pakistan Steel Mills: PDP

KARACHI (PPI): Revival of the Pakistan Steel Mills would surely help in boosting our economy but the provincial government of Sindh and the Centre are not interested in it, said Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor here Sunday.

He said in a statement that recently Iran has expressed willingness to revive the PSM and previously Russia and China had also shown keen interest in this regard but our own rulers want to sell precious lands of the PSM to real estate tycoons against hefty commissions and kickbacks. He said worldwide steel making is a very profitable sector and even the PSM was a profitable entity before a corrupt political government deliberately ruined it through excessive

recruitments. He said the same government had also doomed the PIA through excessive recruitments; however, no action was taken to these mega corrupt politicians who still enjoy high offices in Pakistan.

He said there are rumors that a special export industrial zone would be established on the land of the PSM. Others say that a technology park would be established there. Yet others say that this land has been allocated to a private steel mill belonging to some Middle East tycoons. He said this land belongs to the people of Pakistan and Sindh and it must be saved from real estate tycoons and mega corrupt politicians and their parties.

Altaf Shakoor said that the PSM should be revived and rerun with help of Iran,

or China or Russia as Pakistan needs steel for its different sectors. He said that the SIFC should ensure that this precious land is only used for genuine industrial purposes and not given to the real estate mafia. He said revival of the PSM would boost the local economy by providing quality steel at reasonable prices.

He demanded from the Prime Minister, Sindh chief minister and the chief of army staff to ensure that the real estate mafia doesn't get the land of the PSM and this deliberately ruined national project should be again revived in the larger interests of the country and nation. He said the corrupt elements behind the doom of the PSM should be punished severely as per law and constitution.

PIAF makes best use of platform to resolve business matters

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chief Fahimur Rahman Sehgal, in the lead of Pattern-in-Chief Mian Anjum Nisar, along with former Chairmen Muhammad Ali Mian and Mian Abuzar Shad, Senior Vice President Lahore Chamber, Chaudhry Zafar, PIAF members, Malik Khalid, Sheikh Sajjad Afsil, Shaban Akhtar, Umar Sarfaraz, Ahsan Shahid, Ashfaq Ahmed and market officials visited the main commercial centers of Lahore, including Baden Road, Cooper Road and adjacent markets, and held meetings with the officials of the organizations.

Addressing the meeting, Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front chairman Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol called for taking all steps to ensure a business and investment-friendly environment as it was imperative for economic progress and prosperity of the country.

Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol observed that in view of achieving economic growth through consistency in policies, the government will have to take solid measures to strengthen the trade and industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small businesses.

Mian Anjum Nisar, on this occasion, observed that the successive governments should pursue the same set of objectives and



try to maintain consistent policies for a long-term of at least 10 years. The government should focus on the industrial sector in order to take the economy forward. Neglecting the industrial sector at this juncture will further aggravate the balance of payments situation, he added.

Pointing out the problems being faced by the trade and industrial sectors, he stressed the need for providing a level-playing field to the business community.

The government should also reduce the cost of doing business by ensuring supply of energy at concessional tariff especially for SMEs sector, he added.

President Anjum Nisar, Patron General Abdul Waheed, Sultan

Mehmood, Chairman Mian Mansoor, General Secretary Mian Zafar and other market officials welcomed the PIAF delegation. Addressing the traders, Patron Chief PIAF Mian Anjum Nisar and Chairman PIAF Fahimur Rahman Sehgal said that PIAF's manifesto is to solve the problems of the business community on a priority basis.

The business community is facing problems like FBR harassment, closure of LCs, import problems, unannounced load shedding, parking, overbilling, departmental actions and expensive electricity and gas in the markets.

The government should solve the above problems on a priority basis in consultation with the traders. PIAF's mission is to create a stable economy and

prosperous business community. On this occasion, Chairman PIAF Fahimur Rahman Sehgal congratulated President Baden Road Tahir Hafeez and other officials for their success in the market election and said that the issues of the traders will be resolved through the platform of PIAF. Former Chairman PIAF Mohammad Ali Mian, Mian Abu Zarshad, and Zafar Mahmood Chaudhry also addressed the event.

The PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that the sales tax should be reduced in the upcoming budget and added that fluctuations in the dollar are harmful to the country's economy. In this regard, the State Bank should regulate commercial banks.



In brief

Shiffrin returns from injury

ARE, Sweden (Agencies): Mikaela Shiffrin returned from six weeks out with a knee injury to win the women's slalom in Are, Sweden. The American's 96th win of her World Cup career, which extended her own record, also marked an eighth season slalom title. That equalled a record shared by compatriot Lindsey Vonn, for downhill, and Sweden's Ingemar Stenmark, in the giant slalom and slalom. "I am proud of myself," said Shiffrin, who turns 29 next week. She had to be airlifted to hospital after crashing out of a downhill race in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on 26 January, but the injury she sustained - sprained knee ligaments - was not as bad as first feared. Shiffrin's lay-off means she is now too far behind in the race for the overall women's season title, including races in every discipline, but with Slovakia's Olympic gold medalist Petra Vlhova sustaining a season-ending knee injury in January, she was not seriously pushed for the slalom title. Victory in Sweden means Shiffrin's closest remaining challenger, Germany's Lena Durr, can no longer catch her with one slalom race of the season remaining. Shiffrin pulled out a stunning second run in Are to clinch the title, finishing 1.24 seconds ahead of 20-year-old Croat Zrinka Ljutic, while Switzerland's Michelle Gisvin was third.

Towhid guilty

ISLAMABAD (APP): Bangladesh player Towhid Hridoy has been fined 15 per cent of his match fee for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the third T20I against Sri Lanka in Sylhet on Saturday. Towhid was found to have breached Article 2.20 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to displaying conduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game, said a press release. In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to Towhid's disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period. The incident occurred in the fourth over of Bangladesh's innings, when after being dismissed, Towhid turned around on his way back to the pavilion and remonstrated aggressively and inappropriately with the Sri Lankan players. Towhid admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by Andy Pycroft of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, so there was no need for a formal hearing. On-field umpires Sharfudoula Saikat and Tanvir Ahmed, third umpire Gazi Sohail and fourth umpire Masudur Rahman levelled the charge. Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points.

Sri Lanka reignite timed-out row

SYLHET (AFP): Sri Lanka have reignited the row over the 2023 World Cup timed-out dismissal of Angelo Mathews after celebrating their Twenty20 series win in Bangladesh by pointing to their wrists. Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto told Sri Lanka's players to put the November controversy behind them and urged them to focus on the rest of the tour, which includes three one-day internationals and two Tests. "They haven't moved on from the timed-out incident," Shanto said of the visitors' celebration following their T20 series win in Sylhet on Saturday.

Quetta Gladiators edge Lahore Qalandars in a last-ball thriller to reach PSL 9 Playoffs

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Mohammad Wasim Jr smashed a last-ball six to muscle Quetta Gladiators into the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 playoffs with a tense six-wicket victory over Lahore Qalandars here on Sunday.

Opting to bat first, Lahore Qalandars set a stiff target for Quetta Gladiators in their all-important PSL 9 fixture. The defending champions had a cautious start to their innings as in-form opener Sahibzada Farhan knitted a 38-run stand with Tahir Baig before both fell victim to Abrar Ahmed in the sixth over.

Farhan scored 25 off 22 deliveries, hitting four boundaries while Baig made a scratchy 12 off 13.

Abdullah Shafique then

put on a one-sided partnership with Shai Hope, who managed a mere five off seven deliveries before walking back in the 10th over with just 69 runs on the board.

Promoted himself to bat up the order, Shaheen Shah Afridi partnered strongly with Abdullah Shafique and put Lahore Qalandars in control.

The duo added a monumental partnership for the fourth wicket with both scoring half-centuries in the process.

Their partnership yielded 91 runs off 57 deliveries before Mohammad Amir struck in the final over to get rid of Shaheen. Qalandars' skipper smashed two boundaries and four sixes on his way to a 34-ball 55.

Meanwhile, Shafique

carried his bat all the way through and top-scored for the Qalandars with an unbeaten 59. His 39-ball knock featured three boundaries and two sixes.

For the Gladiators, Abrar Ahmed bagged two wickets while Amir and Mohammad Wasim Jr made one scalp each.

It is worth mentioning here that the two-time champions and holders Lahore Qalandars are already out of the playoffs race while Quetta Gladiators need one victory out of their remaining two fixtures to seal their spot in the final four.

The Gladiators are fourth in the PSL 9 standings with nine points in eight matches while the Qalandars are at the bottom with three points in nine matches.



Women Handball Intervarsity Championship at GCWUS

SIALKOT (APP): The 34th HEC All Pakistan Women Handball Intervarsity Championship 2023-24 was held at the Government College for Women University Sialkot (GCWUS).

According to a university spokesperson, the Punjab University team won the championship. Twelve teams from all-over Pakistan played 24 matches in the tournament. In the final match, the Punjab University won after a very tough competition with Lahore College University, while for the third position, Superior University defeated Government College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS) by one goal in a tough competition.

After the final match, the closing ceremony was held in which Vice Chancellor GCWUS Prof. Dr. Zarrin Fatima Rizvi was the chief guest, while Chairman University of Sialkot (USKT) Faisal Manzoor, Director HEC Asif Hussain, former Member Provincial Assembly Gulnaz Shahzadi, Shabina Gilani and Lubna Tabassum from

Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS), Rana Nadeem and Sialkot Industrialists were the guests of honour.

Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Convenor Sports Committee Prof. Dr. Yasir Nawaz Manj, while delivering the opening remarks, thanked all the sponsors and organizing committee of the event and said that the university will continue to organize such events for female students in the future. Speaking at the event, Vice Chancellor GCWUS Prof. Dr. Zarrin Fatima Rizvi thanked all sponsors and appreciated the efforts of all teams including Convener Sports Committee Prof. Dr. Yasir Nawaz Manj and Director Sports Atiya Altaf for the successful organization of the event. She said with the support of the business community of Sialkot, GCWUS had been able to hold such a big event.

Chairman, Board of Governors USKT Faisal Manzoor, while speaking, congratulated the Vice Chancellor GCWUS and the University administra-

tion and said that in the future, the two universities will conduct various educational and research activities with mutual cooperation.

Along with the cash prizes for the players, he also announced a special discount for the children of the faculty and staff at Classic School and University of Sialkot (USKT).

Director Higher Education Commission Asif Hussain while speaking said that the Chairman HEC has issued instructions to conduct extracurricular activities along with education and research for students in HEC universities so that a healthy and literate society can be formed.

Director Sports Atiya Altaf thanked the Vice Chancellor, HEC, sponsors, teams from all over Pakistan, coach and handball federation for preparing the team. At the end the top 4 teams, tournament referee and other staff were given cash prizes and trophies by the Vice Chancellor GCWUS Prof. Dr. Zarrin Fatima Rizvi.



RAWALPINDI: Islamabad United batter Shadab Khan celebrates after scoring a (50 runs) during the Pakistan Super League (PSL 9) Twenty20 cricket match.

Batters run amok in Pindi as United win a thriller against Sultans

RAWALPINDI (APP): Home team Islamabad United beat Multan Sultans in a thrilling run-fest by three wickets to qualify for the playoffs of HBL PSL 9 on Sunday evening at Pindi Cricket Stadium.

Multan Sultans and Islamabad United are now placed first and second on the points table with 12 and 11 points respectively and playoff qualifications sealed. The second fixture for today, featuring Lahore Qalandars and Quetta Gladiators, will take place at National Bank Stadium in Karachi at 7pm.

Islamabad United's pursuit of a mammoth 229-run target was jolted on the second ball of the innings as Alex Hales fell for a golden duck, with David Willey picking him up for the seventh time in T20s. In the following over pacer Mohammad Ali outfoxed Salman Ali Agha as he took a brilliant return catch leaving United in dire straits, with the scorecard reading 4-2. Veteran batter,

Colin Munro and skipper Shadab Khan joined forces to bail out United.

The duo put on a 141-run third-wicket partnership off 64 balls, producing the third-highest partnership of HBL PSL 9. The fourth over of the innings was taken for 19 runs setting the tone for the partnership. United scored 65-2 in the powerplay.

Usama Mir's first and second over of the spell yielded 21 and 20 runs respectively, as Munro and Shadab went berserk.

Abbas Afridi, bowling the 13th over, brought the Sultans back in the game with two wickets. First, he dismissed Shadab (54, 31b, 6x4s, 2x6s) and then Azam Khan for a two-ball duck.

The following over saw the departure of Munro (84, 40b, 9x4s, 5x6s) as Jordan struck to remove him with the scorecard reading 157-5 after 14 overs.

Haider Ali, batting at six, chipped in with 19 off 13, hitting Usama for a hat-trick of boundaries before falling to Ali in the 17th

over. With 38 required off the last three overs, Faheem struck Jordan for a six on the first ball of the 18th over bringing the equation down to 26 needed off 12.

Usama bowled the penultimate over giving away 13 runs as Imad hit him for back-to-back boundaries. Abbas, defending 13 off the final over, gave away five off the first three balls before dismissing Faheem (23, 14b, 2x4s, 1x6).

Naseem Shah took a crucial single on the fourth ball to give strike back to Imad (30 not out, 13b, 4x4s, 1x6), who hit a crucial six down the ground on the fifth ball to level the scores. A boundary off the last ball gave United the ticket to playoffs, also registering the third-highest successful chase in HBL PSL history.

Abbas picked up three wickets. Ali chipped in with two while Willey and Usama had one each to their name.

Earlier, Islamabad United bowlers were put to the sword after skipper

Shadab won the toss and elected to field first. The Sultans' opening batters, Mohammad Rizwan and Yasir Khan, got their team off to a brisk start with the latter being the aggressor.

Yasir hit Imad for two boundaries in the second over and then tonked Faheem for two towering sixes and a four in the fourth over.

Hunain Shah, bowling the fifth over, brought an end to the 44-run opening partnership as he rattled Yasir's (33, 16b, 4x4s, 2x6s) stumps. A ball later, Rizwan brought out his typical flick over the leg side and hit Hunain for a maximum.

Faheem pinned Rizwan (20, 17b, 2x4s, 1x6) leg-before wicket on the last ball of powerplay leaving Sultans 58-2.

Johnson Charles, playing his first HBL PSL 9 game, joined Usman in the middle to runriot against United's bowling line-up. They added 86 off just 44 balls for the third-wicket partnership.

Zalmi has reached playoffs for ninth time: Sammy

KARACHI (APP): The Head Coach of Peshawar Zalmi Darren Sammy on Sunday said that the Peshawar Zalmi has reached the playoffs for ninth time. While talking to media persons after a practice match at the National Bank Stadium here, he said, "We trusted the young players from the first year."

He said that the credit went to the players for consistency. Sammy said that experience had come into the team because of Babar Azam. He said, "Babar Azam is a superstar and he always tries to learn."

The Zalmi's Head Coach said that his love for Zalmi was different and coaching was his passion. He said, "I am here representing Peshawar and I will not say anything about the coaching of Pakistan." He further said, "We look forward to playing matches in Peshawar." He said that a day would come when they would play in Peshawar and see how they were welcomed.

Djokovic ends five-year Indian Wells absence with difficult win

INDIAN WELLS (AFP/APP): Novak Djokovic struggled to a winning comeback at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters five years after his last appearance, defeating Aleksandar Vukic 6-2, 5-7, 6-3 on Saturday.

World number one Djokovic, who had not played since losing an Australian Open semi-final to Jannik Sinner on January 26, is chasing a sixth title at the desert venue in the season's first Masters event.

The 36-year-old Serb captured the 400th Masters-level victory of his career, joining Rafael Nadal as the only men to reach the 400 milestone at the elite level.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion has won his last 11 Masters matches, collecting titles last season in Cincinnati and Paris Bercy.

In the women's draw, third seed Coco Gauff rallied from four games down in the final set to defeat France's Clara

Burel 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

Former number one Naomi Osaka continued her comeback after motherhood as she reached the third round with a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Ludmila Samsonova.

Djokovic claimed the opening set in 35 minutes with two service breaks but had to come from a break down in the third against his 69th-ranked Australian opponent. Vukic held to 6-5 in the second set and landed a reflex service return winner on the line to square the match at a set each.

In the third set, top seed Djokovic broke for a 3-2 edge and closed out victory with a second break after just over two hours, notching his 51st win at the tournament where he first competed in 2006.

"It was difficult to go through him," Djokovic said of Vukic. "He was ripping his forehead and crushing his serve."

"In the third set I man-

aged to crack the code. I stepped it up and finished the match in great style."

Danish seventh seed Holger Rune was handed a free ride into the third round when former Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic of Canada pulled out of their match with an injury.

US 12th seed Taylor Fritz, the 2022 winner, dispatched Alejandro Tabilo of Chile 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 in 73 minutes, pumping out 14 aces among his 27 winners.

"I needed to play well to protect my serve," Fritz said. "I always feel confident coming out here."

No. 13 Grigor Dimitrov, a 2021 semi-finalist, advanced past Alexandre Muller of France 7-5, 6-2.

Britain's Cameron Norrie reached the third round over Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 6-4. Last weekend's Dubai champion, Ugo Humbert, the 14th seed from France, defeated American Patrick Kyson by the same scoreline.

Spurs boost top-four hopes as they romp to win



LONDON (Agencies): Tottenham boosted their hopes of a top-four Premier League finish with an emphatic victory over 10-man Aston Villa at

Villa Park.

In an encounter billed as pivotal in the race for a spot in next season's Champions League, early second-half goals

from James Maddison and Brennan Johnson set Spurs on their way.

And a seemingly leg-weary Villa side, who played at Ajax

on Thursday evening, rarely looked capable of clawing their way back into the contest once captain John McGinn was dismissed for a reckless tackle on visiting left-back Destiny Udogie in the 65th minute.

With Spurs in complete control in the closing stages, stoppage-time goals from Son Heung-min and Timo Werner only served to rub salt into Villa's wounds.

The hosts remain fourth in the table but are now only two points above Ange Postecoglou's Spurs, who have a game in hand.

An underwhelming first period had seen the teams cancel each other out with Johnson's low attempted cross from the left, which was easily gathered by home goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, the closest thing to resembling a shot on target.

However, Pape Matar Sarr's superb cross from the right saw

Maddison prod in shortly after the break and when home defender Ezri Konsa carelessly gave possession away deep in his own half, Johnson collected Son's pass to double Tottenham's lead.

With the home stands already emptying early into 10 added minutes, South Korea forward Son swept home his 159th goal for the north London club and provided Werner's opportunity, with the German's placed close-range shot finding the right corner.

Scintillating Spurs punish Villa

With Villa aiming to reach Europe's elite club competition for the first time since they were defending champions in 1982-83, skipper McGinn labelled their meeting with Tottenham "the most important game in the club's recent history," prior to kick-off.

However, in a first half in which they continuously attempt-

ed to play on the counter-attack, there were already signs that a fourth consecutive league victory might not be forthcoming.

While they showed plenty of application there was very little by the way of quality in the final third and they were not helped by Ollie Watkins struggling off the back of an early kick from Tottenham's Dutch centre-back Micky van de Ven.

With Spurs having enjoyed the benefit of a full week to prepare, their sharpness and greater intensity told after the break. Sarr's willingness to run beyond a high Villa defensive line to brilliantly supply Maddison sparked Spurs into life.

Konsa's careless pass towards Youri Tielemans provided a further helping hand, as did McGinn's red card, which told in the later stages, allowing the visitors to pick Villa off to conclude a scintillating second-half display.



In brief

PFA destroys 1500 Kg basin

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) in an action to provide quality food items in the month of Ramadan under the mission of Chief Minister of Punjab, here on Sunday conducted a raid at a flour mill near Baga Mor and recovered 600 kg of defective flour and 7280 kg of maize flour besides destroying 1500 kg of adulterated gram flour. DG Punjab Food Authority Asim Javed said that non-standard flour was being mixed in the basin. The production was stopped until the improvement of the factory for forgery, while a case was registered against the owners. Basin samples have been sent to a food lab for further analysis. He said that a grand operation is going on to crack down on counterfeits and counterfeiting mafia in Ramadan. Supply of quality items to the fasting people will be ensured in all cases.

'Breaking Barriers' to honour women role

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Chief Commissioner's Office Islamabad has hosted a dynamic event in honor of International Women's Day, themed "Breaking Barriers." The event was attended by distinguished guests, including Humaira Ahmed, Secretary of the National Heritage & Culture Division, and Aisha Humera Ch. Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, among others, to celebrate the accomplishments and impact of women across various fields. Renowned figures took the stage to share their insights and experiences, including Geir Tønstol, the ILO's Country Director for Pakistan, and Huma Fakhar, a successful businesswoman and philanthropist. Nigar Nazir, the CEO of Gogi Studios and an accomplished cartoonist, also shared her journey alongside other influential speakers like Syed Ali Abbas, CEO of Hive, and Zeejah Fazli and Hina Abidi, notable philanthropists. Zunaira Fayyaz, a lawyer and climate expert, contributed her expertise to the enriching discussions. The event was marked by engaging panel discussions that shed light on critical issues surrounding gender equality and women's empowerment.

Professional beggars rush to markets

RAWALPINDI (APP): Professional beggars rushed in markets ahead of Ramzan ul Mubarrak. An issue that has notably intensified this season. Among the beggars, eunuchs have become a common sight, seeking alms across various parts of the city, while the local authorities appear to remain passive observers amidst this growing concern. The streets and busy roadways of Rawalpindi are now scenes of persistent begging, with a notable presence of children, women, and the elderly employing various tactics to draw sympathy and donations from the public. These individuals often engage in activities such as offering to clean vehicle windows at traffic stops, actions that suggest coordination with the so-called 'beggar mafia.' Local citizens have expressed their dismay, highlighting that the rampant beggary tarnishes the image of a society that prides itself on civility and order. Criticism has been particularly directed towards the Child Protection Bureau, an entity that, despite its mandate to safeguard children's rights, seems to turn a blind eye to the exploitation of young beggars. Despite previous efforts by the police and other authorities to combat professional begging through targeted campaigns, these initiatives have largely failed to produce lasting solutions or significantly curb the practice.



ISLAMABAD: A view of a blossoming and flourishing Yellow flowers on Green Belt Welcoming Spring in the Federal Capital.

RWMC disposes off 6,000 tons of garbage during "Suthra Punjab" drive

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) had removed over 6,000 tons of garbage from Rawalpindi city and its tehsils in the first week of a month-long "Suthra Punjab" cleanliness campaign from March 1 to 31. During the campaign, the teams collected around 5,542 tons of garbage from Rawalpindi and Murree, 247 tons from Gujar Khan, 500 tons from Kallar Syedan, Kahuta and Taxila while 346 tons of garbage had been gathered from private housing societies, the spokesman of RWMC told here Sunday.

He said that the Capital Development Authority had also dumped as many

as 4,000 tons of garbage at the Losar dump station. Similarly, the RWMC also addressed 63 complaints of the total 84 complaints received on social media platforms during the last week.

At the same time, hundreds of pamphlets were distributed, and banners were displayed to create awareness among the people. Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Aamir Khattak, Chairman RWMC Sajib Rafiq and CEO RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar visited various Union Councils of the city daily and inspected the cleanliness campaign. They interacted with the residents and received feedback and suggestions regarding the cleanliness campaign.

The spokesman informed that the city was also being cleaned by mechanical washing and sweeping at night while containers kept in the city were also being cleaned daily.

He further added that the communication and social mobilization team of RWMC were also conducting an awareness campaign about the hazards of Smog and dengue in commercial areas and educational institutions.

Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Aamir Khattak urged the residents to cooperate with the RWMC staff to make the Rawalpindi zero-waste district and in case of any complaint contact helpline number 1139.

Campaign against one wheelers launched

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) has launched a campaign against one wheeling ahead of Ramzan ul Mubarrak on Sunday. The move has been started on the special directives of City Police Officer CPO Khalid Mehmud Hamdani, informed spokesman of traffic police.

Chief Traffic Officer CTO Taimoor Khan, said that strict orders have been issued to all the traffic wardens, inspectors and Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of all sectors to impound altered motorcycles prepared for wheelies around the city roads and send the violators to jail. He added that those found involved in the activity would be sent behind bars under Section 99/A. He also said that one-wheelers not only played with their own lives but also put other road users in danger.

ECP appoints ROs for conduct of Senate elections

ISLAMABAD (PPI) The Election Commission of Pakistan has appointed returning officers in the Islamabad Capital Territory and four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan for the conduct of senate elections.

According to a notification issued by the Election Commission today, ECP Director General Training Saeed Gul will be the Returning Officer in the federal capital, whereas provincial election commissioners Aijaz Anwar Chohan, Sharifullah, Shamshad Khan, and Muhammad Farid Afridi will be returning officers in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan

respectively.

Members of the National Assembly will elect one general seat and one seat for technocrats, including Ulema from the federal capital.

The Election Commission of Pakistan also called upon members of the provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to elect members against seven general seats, two women seats and two seats for technocrats, including Ulema from each province and one seat for non-Muslims each from Punjab and Sindh which are going to be vacant after expiration of term of incumbent senators tomorrow.

AIOU organizes first Alumni homecoming

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) hosted an inaugural alumni homecoming ceremony and dinner during which former students reconnected with fellows.

The event was graced by distinguished guests, including renowned Urdu poet Iftekhar Arif, prominent columnist and analyst Muhammad Izhar ul Haq, Director General of Pakistan Institute of Education Dr. Shahid Soroya, Chairperson of Pakistan Academy of Literature Dr. Najeeba Arif, and Vice-Chancellor of Health Service Academy (NIH) Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan.

The alumni participants at the event included Lt. Gen. Asif Mumtaz Sukhera, Executive Director of National Language Promotion Department, Dr. Rashid Hameed, renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Afzal Bashir, Syed Mohsin Ali Shah, Dr. Zahid Majeed (AIOU), Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Chaudhry (AIOU), and others.

The Directorate of Student Advisory and Counselling Services (DSA&CS), AIOU, organized this homecoming event. Vice Chancellor, alumni and other participants congratulated the Director, DSA&CS, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali, and his team for the excellent arrangements.

The AIOU alumni expressed their gratitude to the Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, for providing them with an opportunity to come together and reminisce about old memo-

ries and the time they spent at AIOU.

They acknowledged that the university played a vital role in their lives and that they consider themselves to be family members of AIOU.

The alumni vowed to always be there to contribute to the prosperity and progress of the University.

Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood said that AIOU has completed 50 years of its establishment and around 50 lac students have graduated in this period. "The alumni are our proud and they are playing their full role for the development and betterment of the country", he said.

Iftekhar Arif while congratulating on the 50th anniversary of AIOU said that he had been associated with the university as a member of the executive council.

He said that the educational services of this university are commendable. Iftekhar Arif also recited his ghazals and a few stanzas from his poetry.

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq said that the alumni of AIOU are lucky that they can come to their alma mater. "I am a graduate of Dhaka University where I am unable to go", he said.

Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, Dean, Faculty of Sciences, Prof. Dr. Hajra Ahmed, Dr. Tahira Bibi and Director Student Affairs, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali also spoke at the event.

RBISE taking strict measures against 'Boti Mafia'

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RBISE), on the directives of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak was taking strict action in accordance with the law against 'Boti Mafia,' said Chairman, RBISE Muhammad Adnan Khan. He informed that RBISE had finalized foolproof arrangements for the ongoing first annual examination.

Talking to APP, the RBISE spokesman said that the board on the directives of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division had finalized the best possible arrangements to make the exams foolproof and transparent in all respects. All available resources were being utilized to eliminate cheating and copy mafia, he added.

He said that lists of the examination staff were sent to the Special Branch and Intelligence Bureau for checking the records of all the staff including Resident and Distributor Inspectors,

Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents and Invigilators.

Chairman RBISE, Muhammad Adnan Khan, and Controller of Examinations Prof. Sajid Mehmood Farooqi had directed the authorities that strict action should be taken against those who use unfair means and found cheating in the exams.

He further said that instructions were issued by the Commissioner to the Deputy Commissioners, Additional Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners of all the districts that the monitoring of all the examination centers should be done daily.

The officers were also directed to conduct the monitoring of the examination center strictly and comprehensively so that the examination could be completed smoothly.

The RBISE spokesman said that the Chairman Board and Controller of Examinations issued special instructions to the focal persons and members of six vigilance committees regarding

Standard Operating Procedures issued by the board.

The Chairman squad, special squad, mobile inspectors and vigilance committees were directed to inspect the examination centers daily and send the reports to the board office.

Required steps were being taken and the complaints were being addressed immediately, he added.

A central control room had been established in the board office while separate control rooms had also been established in the Chief Executive Office at the district level, he informed.

He said that the Chairman and the Controller had asked all the examination staff to perform their duties with utmost honesty so that the foolproof examination could be conducted in a peaceful environment.

The Chairman, the Controller of Examinations and Secretary Board, Prof. Asif Hussain were also visiting the exam centers to check all the arrangements, he informed.

Time to reign in unruly bikers

ISLAMABAD (APP): As we witness moral and ethical deterioration in different walks of life it seems like culminating when seeing the unruly bikers driving carelessly on busy roads endangering their own and others lives. Snaking through the lanes of fast moving vehicles and sometimes crossing the four wheelers from extreme right lane is becoming very common these days with police trying its bit to overcome the problem.

Almost every main artery of federal capital is seen flooded with such bikers whose ruthless driving results in damage to theirs as well as others vehicles also inflicting serious injuries. The situation deteriorated unbelievably in recent years making it difficult even for sensible drivers of four wheelers to smoothly drive to their offices, homes and markets. Except a few seen driving sensibly, the majority is always felt like in a hurry least caring for traffic laws. Since there is also no visible lane marking on roads for bikers, it is free for them to rush in any lane and chase fast moving four wheelers.

Delivery boys have become the most lethal family seen always rushing from one destination to another for maximum deliveries in minimum time totally oblivious to their duties to themselves and other commuters. The same is the case with Bykea riders who follow their own free will to move in any lane most often carrying three passengers on a bike.

"This tendency has become irksome. Whole the day only we have to save them as they themselves are least bothered about their safety," said Aamir Chaudhry, a resident of Pakistan Town. "For them it is common to hit your vehicle, damaging bumpers or body and move away. They commonly dare

to drive wrong side even in rushes," Aamir said revealing the injuries his son had suffered when a bikers driving wrong side had hit him.

"They can appear from any side – front, back, left or right – and it is you, not they themselves, to be cautious for yours and their safety," he added. Rising population, expansion of capital, costly fuel and within city mobility cost increased the bikers' number in Islamabad unbelievably.

Above this, they think the tendency to ruthless driving as their right making the situation more challenging. Although they enjoy equal right to mobility, yet it does not mean to trample down laws of land.

"We own these roads as do the others. So, it is our right to travel on these roads," said a biker Asad Mahmood. "We cannot be treated as inferior citizens of society."

One can only astonish by listening such a vague and irresponsible statement as he continues to say, "is there any marking on our roads specifying lane for us. And even if for a moment we consider the extreme left lane for bikers, then why four wheelers intrude there."

"Look sir, if they are free to drive in any lane, then we are also free to follow the suit," Asad said.

Commonly, in a situation when citizens least bother about laws of land, the forces raised for the purpose, ensure their implementation. But, in our case the situation feels different. No matter that police keeps them checking and impose fines, but still the situation is not improving.

"We are few in number as compared to bikers' population and it becomes difficult to man all roads and arteries effectively with skeletal staff," said a

police official. "Then there are weaker laws and approaches by influential to get the violators freed." "You can better understand how we feel to free a violator on a phone call whom we nab for violation of traffic rules," he stated.

Specifically speaking of the Islamabad Traffic Police, few years back it was a marvelous force and an icon for police of other cities. But, the recent years plagued it with multiple issues like staff strength, provisions of logistics and above all the political will of ruling elite.

Obviously they also have their compulsion as when there would be interference by the politicians and the seniors in getting violators freed, their passion would fade away. Such interference is worrisome and encourages violators to repeat this act. "I respectfully ask you what you would do when a violator nabbed by you make a call and present you the phone to talk with somebody influential who ask you to let that violator go," another police official questioned. "What would our feeling be when asked to free someone who had made the mockery of law."

As few years back, on same unmarked roads we could commonly see the bikers driving sensibly in the left lane. But, this practice diminished gradually with now most of people least caring for their duties to others. As respect for law always have a trickle-down effect, it is imperative for our parliamentarians, senior officials and administrators to manifest respect for law to set good example for others.

The time has come for the legislators, policy makers and administration to pay serious heed to this issue as its further deterioration may lead to frequent brawls, fighting and unfortunately to corrosion.

Authorities directed to complete demarcation work

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak has directed the concerned authorities to complete the demarcation work inside the Rakh graveyard in one week.

According to a Commissioner Office spokesperson, the Commissioner along with Chairman, One-Man Commission on Minorities Rights, Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Suddle here the other day visited Rakh Dhamiyal Graveyard and reviewed the allotment of the graves, burial arrangements and other issues.

Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi Hasan Waqar Cheema, Chief Officer, Municipal Corporation, Pastor Adil Gill and other officers concerned were present on the occasion. The Commissioner and the Chairman visited the section reserved for minorities and made a detailed review of the construction work of the cemetery.

Engr. Aamir Khattak instructed the authorities to complete the demarcation work inside the cemetery in one week.

The Municipal Corporation was also directed to give a detailed plan within a week in which the deadlines for each work

should be written.

The Commissioner said that Rakh Dhamiyal Graveyard is an exemplary graveyard of the twin cities which serves the burial needs of Rawalpindi city.

In the context of the growing population of the city, more places like Rakh Graveyard Dhamiyal will have to be reserved for the burials, the Commissioner added. In Rakh Dhamiyal Cemetery, the grave space was allotted under proper planning, the spokesperson said adding, a regular number was also allotted to each grave. The bus and ambulance services were operational for the burials.

The minorities had been given adequate space in Rakh Dhamiyal graveyard, the Commissioner lauded this step adding, this is proof that the protection of minority rights is ensured in Pakistan.

The minorities in Pakistan have full religious freedom, the Commissioner said, and added that an atmosphere of brotherhood is established by inter-faith harmony.

The officials concerned were also directed to keep a written record of all the burials in the graveyard.



ISLAMABAD: Women busy cutting dry grass at roadside.

Expired food disposed

KABUL (BNA): Kabul Municipality's Environmental Health Directorate took swift action to dispose of more than 36 tons of expired and low-quality food and health products collected from city markets. The move comes as part of the municipality's ongoing efforts to ensure public health and safety. The authorized team diligently removed items such as milk, yogurt, biscuits, cooking oil, fish, pomegranate paste, various soft drinks, and detergents from the Gazak area.

Trade house established

KABUL (BNA): The Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Azizi, met with Daniyar Jolchiev, the envoy of Kyrgyzstan in Kabul, to discuss expanding trade relations between the two countries. During the meeting, both sides focused on initiating business activities for a Kyrgyzstan Trade House in Afghanistan. Additionally, discussions were held regarding investments in mining sectors, power generation, high-voltage energy transmission cables.

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

Suggestion of engaging with IEA a slap in the face of Afghans: McCaul



KABUL (Ariana News): Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee of Congress, has said the suggestion that there is any possibility for engagement with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is a slap in the face of the Afghan people.

McCaul said this in response to US Charge d'Affaires Karen Decker's

statement about engaging with the IEA.

Decker had said on Friday that there was strong support among civil society representatives in Istanbul for the UN-led process to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international community.

"Lots of talent and energy here ready to support a political roadmap and engagement with the Taliban (IEA). Afghanistan needs all its people to thrive," she added on X.

McCaul was quoted by the House of Foreign Affairs Committee on X as saying: "The suggestion that there is any possibility for engagement with the Taliban (IEA) is a slap in the face to the people of Afghanistan who are vic-

tims of the Taliban (IEA) regime. This administration should not encourage engagement with the Taliban (IEA) under any circumstances."

The IEA has not yet commented about these remarks but continues to say they want good relations with the international community.

Afghanistan losing \$1b annually: US envoy

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan is losing more than \$1 billion annually due to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's (IEA) extreme decrees against women and girls, Rina Amiri, US special envoy for Afghan women, said on Saturday.

"The edicts prohibiting Afghan women & girls' education & employment are hurting all Afghans. To lift Afghanistan out of aid dependency & poverty, these policies must be reversed," she said in a post on X.

But the Islamic Emirate says that in recent years, many job opportunities have been provided for women and the economy of Afghanistan has also improved.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, adds that instead of making such remarks, countries should release frozen assets belonging to Afghanistan.

IEA hopes CASA-1000 power project's work to begin in April

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid says the work of the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) in Afghanistan will officially begin by the end of April with the financial support of the World Bank.

"We believe that Inshallah, this will be a vital project for the region and will help the nation a lot in the electricity sector. The work of this project will start by the end of April, Inshallah, it will begin one and a half months later," said Mujahid.

Mujahid added that the contract to transfer electricity from Central Asia to South was signed on Friday in Turkey between the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) has gone to Turkey to discuss with the countries involved in this project and the World Bank.

DABS officials said that there have been meetings between the involved countries in the last two days about how to start this project.

The request for the resumption of CASA-1000 project was made by Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan in December last year.

"Afghanistan is currently a country that can level the ground for domestic and foreign investors to invest in the electricity generation sector in all its projects," said Hekmatullah Maiwandi, DABS spokesman.

It should be stated that CASA-1000 project will transfer electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to South Asia through Afghanistan.

3 killed, six injured in highway crash



KABUL (Ariana News): Three people were killed and six others were injured after a vehicle ran off the road at Mahipar on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway on Saturday evening, officials said on Sunday.



The Ministry of Public Works of Afghanistan said in a statement that when the vehicle careered off the road, a rockslide was triggered.

This resulted in a number of other vehicles also

being damaged.

The three people who died in the incident included a woman and a child. The injured people were taken to hospital.

The highway reopened after a short closure.

200 Hindu, Sikh families return over next month



KABUL (TOLOnews): Manjeet Singh Lamba, the head of the Sikh and Hindu community in Afghanistan, told TOLOnews that currently, around 40 and 50 Sikh and Hindu citizens are living in the country, but close to 200 Sikh and Hindu families are expected to return to the country in the next month.

"Since the Islamic Emirate has recaptured the country, our people are gradually returning. There are some problems with returning to Afghanistan, such as visa issues. Currently, fifty or forty-five people are living in Afghanistan," he told TOLOnews.

Meanwhile, several Sikh citizens said they expect the Islamic Emirate to take steps as soon as possible to recover their seized lands.

Surjeet Singh, a resident of Afghanistan, called for the protection of minority rights, especially for Hindus and Sikhs in the country.

"Hindu families who had come before went back to India and are now returning. Their lands have been seized, and we want the Islamic Emirate to return our lands. Although there is now security, we want our security to be further ensured," Surjeet Singh

told TOLOnews.

"We are business-minded people and create favorable conditions for business," said Jagmohan Singh, another sikh citizen.

The Islamic Emirate pledged that the rights of all minorities in the country are protected.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, emphasized that if the lands of Hindu citizens has been seized, they can appeal to judicial and legal institutions.

"If their rights have been violated, the doors of all courts are open to them, they can file a lawsuit, and the Islamic Emirate supports them. We do not allow the rights of any Afghan citizen to be lost," he added.

"The issue of seizing Hindu lands is being thoroughly and completely investigated. If someone's land has been seized or there is an attempt to seize it, it will be prevented, and the properties will be returned to their rightful owners," said Barkatullah Rasooli, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice.

In recent years, minorities, especially Hindu and Sikh citizens in the country, have occasionally been the targets of various terrorist attacks.

NEILLI (Pajhwok): Some youth in southern Daikundi province have complained against the exorbitant expenses, high Toyana and unnecessary customs surrounding weddings and said these practices forced some youths to remain unmarried for years.

They said people in this province faced thousands of hardships to arrange basic life-saving items and pay their daily life expenses.

Jamshid Sultani, 35, the resident of Miramour district, is one of the tens of youth who could not get married due to the high wedding cost.

He said: "I am one of those who are victims of these unfavorable customs and traditions in Daikundi province, unfortunately, all people here are poor there is no work opportunities and I could not arranged the money needed for the wedding."

He said that hundreds of other youth like him were unable to get married due

to the same reason.

Sultani said: "I tried many times, but I could not arrange one million afis for the wedding expenses, now that I have passed the time of the wedding and I have not reached my dreams, even now if I get married, I will have to be in debt for several years."

He said if youth like him get married in this age they will get older while paying their wedding debt.

According to Sultani, this tradition had been set due to the unfavorable practices and customs of their society and its main victims are youth.

Qudratullah, the resident of Sangtakhtak Wa Bandar district, said the cost of wedding which the groom has to pay in this province reached 700,000 afis and most of youth were unable to arrange this amount and they have to go abroad.

He maintained: "There are outrageous customs and traditions in this province, including exorbitant Toyana, sherbahas

and other similar customs, all of which are against the principles of Islam and have caused thousands of young people to not be able to get married."

He said that some youth have to migrate for years after their marriage to pay the debt they had taken for their weddings.

He added unfavorable customs and traditions in society, especially in Daikundi Province, had forced some youth not to get married, so they face thousands of problems and depression, which had even led to suicide in some cases.

Qudrat said: "Due to these unfavorable customs and high expenses, especially the new customs that are prevalent in Daikundi under different names, I have not yet been able to get married, and thousands of other young people suffer from the same situation."

Fatima Rezae, one of the youth in Daikundi, also complained against these customs and traditions and

found work.

As the only bread winner of his family, Rahman said it was not easy to bear the heavy load of his family expenses on his shoulders alone. He asked the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to provide them with employment opportunities otherwise they have no option than seeking refuge in foreign countries.

Experts of economic affairs consider unemployment as main reason of migration to other countries. They think the government and private sector

must provide permanent employment to the unemployed youth.

An expert, Muslim Marvi told Pajhwok: "Businessmen must create industries and employ laborers."

Marvi believed the government should devise long term plans to overcome the unemployment issue and prevent people from traveling to foreign countries for job purposes.

Labor and Social Affairs director said so far 7,400 working licenses have been distributed to workers during the past one year in

Herat, which is unprecedented.

Hafiz Mirza Mohammad Abu Mansoor said work opportunities became thin in cold weather. He hoped employment opportunities would increase as the weather turns warm.

He said different mineral extraction projects have been initiated in Herat so the people must refrain from travelling to other countries because jobs will increase and soon thousands of people will be engaged in mining in the country.

Marriage cost skyrocket in Daikundi due to unfavorable customs

NEILLI (Pajhwok): Some youth in southern Daikundi province have complained against the exorbitant expenses, high Toyana and unnecessary customs surrounding weddings and said these practices forced some youths to remain unmarried for years.

They said people in this province faced thousands of hardships to arrange basic life-saving items and pay their daily life expenses.

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He said: "I am one of those who are victims of these unfavorable customs and traditions in Daikundi province, unfortunately, all people here are poor there is no work opportunities and I could not arranged the money needed for the wedding."

He said that hundreds of other youth like him were unable to get married due

to the same reason.

Sultani said: "I tried many times, but I could not arrange one million afis for the wedding expenses, now that I have passed the time of the wedding and I have not reached my dreams, even now if I get married, I will have to be in debt for several years."

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Fatima Rezae, one of the youth in Daikundi, also complained against these customs and traditions and

said objection over Toyana is a taboo in the society and any kind of resistance against the family decision is considered sensitive.

She also said that many unnecessary customs and traditions existed in Daikundi and in some cases girls and boys are unable to get married.

She added: "Youth cannot pay the Toyana, girls are also not in the favour of high Toyana and could not say anything because parents get angry and say that people will then ask that what defect your daughter had that you charges less Toyana."

She stressed if high Toyana is charged the victim is again the bride because after wedding the groom has work hard to arrange the amount.

Arif Hussaini, another youth from the Shahristan district, said heavy and back-breaking wedding expenses left negative and worrying effects on the lives of young people.

He said: "The custom is very bad, the expenses are

exorbitant, there are engagement and wedding ceremonies and dozens of different customs and customs where only money is used, these customs and customs, all these customs are to loot the groom's family."

He added that society especially the ulem must raise voice against these customs and replace them with a suitable culture keeping in mind the economic situation of the country.

Religious Scholar Ayub alizada, said there was no justification of money charged on groom under Toyana and Sherbaha and it was in fact a price charged for the girl.

He said: "When a young man does not have the ability to pay for his wedding, he will have mental problems and will end up using drugs and other inappropriate activities."

Din Mohammad Behzad, head of the Information and Cultural Affairs Department, said that high Toyana amount

charged on grooms had development many problems for youth in this province and most of youth have remained unmarried due to this problem.

He said the people of Daikundi suffered from economic problems and the high amount of money required for marriage and family was out of their range.

He said the Information Department and other government institutions had worked hard in this regard and added that ulem and parents had key role in this regard to help reduce the cost of marriage in the province.

This comes that recently a number of youth during a meeting with Governor Mawlawi Najibullah Rafai shared their concerns in this regard and asked the governor to address this issue legally.

Governor Rafai pledged to find solution or the problems after discussion with ulem and relevant government institutions.

Seven killed, five wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, some institutions expressed concerns at the economic and security situation in Afghanistan, but the Islamic Emirate dismissed the apprehensions as groundless and part of a propaganda campaign.

Afghanistan was pledged \$1.1 million in aid and joint exhibitions were held in Kabul and Ashgabat.

Casualties
Last week, seven people were killed and five others wounded across Afghanistan in various incidents.

According to local officials, two children were killed and four others wounded as a result of an unexploded shell blast in Pakhta.

Security forces rescued a child and killed two kidnappers during an operation. Unidentified gunmen killed a former commander and a 26-year-old man in Faryab.

In the same province, an alleged murderer was killed by the relatives of the deceased while returning

from the court. Security forces arrested the shooter after being injured.

According to reports, during the previous week, five people had been killed and three others injured in different incidents.

Before the regime change in Afghanistan in August 15, 2021, besides criminal incidents, hundreds of civilians and security personnel would be killed and injured every week.

Defence Minister's trip to Qatar

Acting Defence Minister Maulvi Mohammad Yaqub Mujahid and Army Chief Qari Fasihuddin Fetrat travelled to Qatar to attend the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition (Dimdex).

Yaqub Mujahid met Qatar's deputy amir besides participating in DIMDEX.

Yaqub Mujahid and his Qatari counterpart discussed ways to further strengthen relations between Afghanistan and Qatar.

International Women's Day

March 8 is marked as International Women's Day; this day is celebrated as Women's Solidarity Day all over the world.

On International Women's Day, the UN's top diplomat in Afghanistan reiterated her call for the caretaker government to reverse the restrictions imposed on women and girls.

The longer the curbs remained in place, the more damage they would result in and would push the country into deeper poverty and isolation, warned Roza Otunbayeva, special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG).

"As we mark this year's International Women's Day, the global theme of 'invest in women' should be a moment when we redouble our efforts to unlock even greater progress," said Otunbayeva.

However, IEA's deputy spokesman Mullah Hamdullah Fitrat said in a statement on X: "Women's

rights have not been respected by any system. But the Islamic system has ensured all Sharia-based rights of women."

Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, addressed a press conference regarding his recent report, which highlighted the deterioration of the human rights situation under IEA.

"We have documented public executions and corporal punishments recently. Peaceful dissent is stifled. Violence and the threat of violence are used with impunity to control and instill fear in the population. Those responsible for this must be held to account," Bennett stressed.

But government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, responding to Bennett's remarks, said his report on the human rights situation was an attempt to spread propaganda against IEA.

Mujahid said compared to the past, all Afghans, women and men, enjoyed

physical, financial and spiritual security.

Before Bennet's report, Mujahid posted a video on X about the human rights situation in Gaza. He wrote the issue of human rights was being misused in Afghanistan at a time when innocent Palestinians were being massacred ruthlessly.

Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund alleged the world, turning a blind eye to atrocities against the Palestinians, was harping on human rights violations in Afghanistan to denigrate the Islamic system.

Former Afghan ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salaam Zaeef said getting modern education of science and technology in the current circumstances was compulsory.

On his X handle, Zaeef wrote as helplessness of the Islamic world taught him that getting the knowledge of modern technology was Farz-e-Aain, and it was responsibility of Muslim rulers to defend Muslim territories with means that could not be arranged with-

out modern education.

Mujahid scorns UN report on security

A few days ago, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres presented his quarterly report on Afghanistan to the Security Council. The report claimed the number of security incidents in Afghanistan between November 1 last year and January 10, 2024 had increased compared to the same period of 2022-2023.

According to the UN report 1,508 incidents of insecurity happened from November 2023 till January 2024.

During the period, the report said, there was a 38 percent surge in violent incidents this year.

But IEA, in a statement on Thursday, termed part of the UN report regarding the surge in incidents of insecurity as biased and incorrect.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan considers this report incorrect, and calls it a misuse of the United Nations' name and title,"

the statement reads.

"While the security forces of the Islamic Emirate are fighting against the corrupt, robbers, kidnappers and smugglers every day in different parts of the country. In these areas, there has been a positive change and these incidents have considerably decreased."

Australia's Institute for Economics and Peace said in a recent report that in 2023, Afghanistan was among the countries with the lowest rate of terror incidents.

In its report, the institute said there was an 81 percent fall in terrorist activities in 2023 in Afghanistan. It said for the first time since 2019, the impact of terrorism had declined.

Joint exhibitions in Kabul, Ashgabat

Last week, the Afghanistan trade conference and Afghan products' exhibition were held in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. Another international exhibition of Iranian and Afghan prod-

ucts was arranged in Kabul.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said the Afghan-Turkmen business communication conference and the Afghan products exhibition were held in Ashgabat.

More than 300 businessmen and an economic delegation of the Islamic Emirate participated in the opening session of the exhibition.

Acting minister Nooruddin Azizi said on the occasion Afghanistan had the ability to become an industrial country and could serve as a regional industrial hub.

Humanitarian aid
Last week, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSRelief) pledged 1.1 million to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund (AHTF) to provide quality health services in central Bamyan province.

The UN food agency expressed its concern over dwindling assistance to Afghanistan, warning the situation was getting worse.



ISLAMABAD: Under auspices of NDMA, King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) Pakistan, has mobilized an emergency relief convoy to support the flood affectees of Gwadar.

NDMA with KSrelief-Pakistan mobilize emergency relief convoy

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Under auspices of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in collaboration with King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) Pakistan, has mobilized an emergency relief convoy to support the flood victims of Gwadar. This humanitarian initiative saw the dispatch of five containers loaded with 9,000 food packages and 9,000 shelters, totaling 875 tonnes, from Islamabad to the rain-impacted areas of Gwadar.

The departure ceremony, held at the Jinnah Stadium, Sports Complex, Islamabad this morning, was graced by the presence of Honourable Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mr. Sarfraz Bugti, H.E. Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al Maliki, Saudi Ambassador, along with esteemed officials from NDMA.

NDMA has diligently coordinated with Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Balochistan, ensuring seamless liaison with local authorities, facilitating inter-provincial transit, and securing the necessary clearances to

guarantee unimpeded delivery of this crucial aid. Upon arrival, the consignment will be entrusted to the PDMA Balochistan and local administration, who will oversee the equitable distribution of the relief item to the communities ravaged by the rains in Gwadar. This concerted effort underscores the commitment of NDMA's to coordinate with both national and international partners to provide immediate assistance in times of crisis, reflecting a shared dedication to alleviate the hardships faced by those in dire need.

US military airlifts embassy personnel from Haiti

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The U.S. military said on Sunday it has carried out an operation in Haiti to airlift non-essential embassy personnel from the country and added U.S. forces bolster embassy security, as Caribbean nation reels under a state of emergency. The operation was the latest sign of Haiti's troubles as gang violence threatens to bring down the government and has led thousands to flee their homes.

"This airlift of personnel into and out of the embassy is consistent with our standard practice for embassy security augmentation worldwide, and no Haitians

were on board the military aircraft," the U.S. military's Southern Command said in a statement.

Haiti entered a state of emergency last Sunday after fighting escalated while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was in Nairobi seeking a deal for the long-delayed U.N.-backed mission. Kenya announced last year it would lead the force but months of domestic legal wrangling have effectively placed the mission on hold.

On Saturday, the U.S. State Department said Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Kenyan President William Ruto about the Haiti crisis and

the two men underscored their commitment to a multinational security mission to restore order.

In Southern Command's statement, it said Washington remained committed to those goals.

"Our embassy remains focused on advancing U.S. government efforts to support the Haitian people, including mobilizing support for the Haitian National Police, expediting the deployment of the United Nations-authorized Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission and accelerating a peaceful transition of power via free and fair elections," it said.

India, European EFTA bloc sign \$100bn free trade deal

NEW DELHI (Reuters): India and the four-member European trade bloc EFTA, including Norway and Switzerland, signed a \$100-billion free trade agreement on Sunday to promote investment and exports, officials said.

The deal will see the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)—made up of non-European Union nations, including Iceland and Liechtenstein — invest \$100 billion over 15 years in India, the world's fifth largest economy, India's Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said.

"The India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) marks a historic milestone in our growing partnership," Goyal said after the signing in New Delhi. The agreement "will pave the path for mutual growth and prosperity" by boosting exports, promoting investment and creating employment, he added. The deal was signed after several rounds of negotiations spanning 16 years. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the trade agreement "symbolises our shared commitment to open, fair and equitable trade", according to a statement read out at the signing ceremony. Swiss Economy Minister Guy Parmelin said the deal "will allow us to make better use of our economic potential and create additional opportunities for both India and the EFTA states".



Kyiv air force says downed 35 Russian drones across Ukraine overnight

KYIV (AFP/APP): Kyiv said Sunday that it downed 35 Russian drones across Ukraine, including in the capital region, and that a strike on an eastern town wounded at least nine people. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dragged on for more than two years.

Ukraine said that the drone attacks were launched at central and southern regions, while the eastern Kharkiv and Donetsk region were targeted by missile strikes. "As a result of combat operations, 35 'Shaheds' were shot down" over 10 regions, the air force said on social media.

It said the drones were downed in the central regions of Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Cherkasy and Dnipropetrovsk as well as southern regions of Odesa, Kherson and Mykolaiv. Further west, the regions of Zhytomyr and Khmelnytsky were also hit by drone attacks. In the embattled Donetsk region, officials said a Russian missile strike hit the town of Myrnodgrad.

"Russians shelled Myrnodgrad with 3 S-300 missiles: at least 9 people were wounded, including 1 teenager," the head of the Donetsk region, Vadym Filashkin, said on social media. He added that "nine high-rise buildings" were damaged.

Officials published images of a tall residential building that had black-

ened walls, with destroyed cars and debris outside it.

In the northeastern region of Kharkiv, local governor Oleg Syneghubov said a recreation camp was on fire after shelling in the town of Bogodukhiv, north of the main city of Kharkiv and close to the Russian border. Syneghubov said the camp was shelled shortly after midnight. He released photos of wooden houses on fire and said there were no casualties.

Kyiv vows 'never' to surrender to Russia, slamming Pope negotiation call: Ukraine on Sunday slammed Pope Francis's call to negotiate with Russia two years into its invasion, vowing "never" to surrender after the pontiff said Kyiv should "have the courage to raise the white flag". The Catholic leader had fuelled anger in Kyiv after saying in an interview published Saturday that Ukraine should negotiate with Russia, which has seized large swathes of its territory during the war.

"Our flag is a yellow and blue one. This is the flag by which we live, die, and prevail. We shall never raise any other flags," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on social media.

While battling its bigger neigh-

bour, Ukraine has vowed not to give up its territory.

The Pope fuelled anger by saying: "When you see that you are defeated, that things are not working out, to have the courage to negotiate." Kuleba called on the elderly pontiff to stand "on the side of good" and not put the opposing sides "on the same footing and call it 'negotiations'".

He also appeared to reference some of the Catholic church collaborating with Nazi forces during World War II:

"At the same time, when it comes to the white flag, we know this Vatican strategy from the first half of the 20th century," Kuleba said.

"I urge to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and to support Ukraine and its people in their just struggle for their lives."

He also thanked Pope Francis for his "constant prayers for peace" and said Kyiv hoped the cleric would visit Ukraine.

"We continue to hope that after two years of devastating war in the heart of Europe, the Pontiff will find an opportunity to pay an Apostolic visit to Ukraine to support over a million Ukrainian Catholics, over five million Greek-Catholics and all Ukrainians," Kuleba said.

Netanyahu 'hurting Israel more than helping': Biden

WASHINGTON (APP): US President Joe Biden has said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "hurting Israel more than helping" with his handling of the war with Hamas, even as Biden stressed he would not abandon support for Israel.

"What's happening is he has a right to defend Israel, a right to continue to pursue Hamas," Biden told MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart on Saturday. "But he must, he must, he must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken."

"In my view, he's hurting Israel more than helping Israel [...] it's contrary to what Israel stands for. And I think it's a big mistake," Biden added. More than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed and 69,465 injured in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7. In what was a contradictory exchange with his interviewer, Biden said "they cannot have 30,000 more Palestinians dead as a consequence of going after" Hamas militants.

Asked whether an Israeli invasion of Rafah would be a red line for him with Netanyahu, Biden said: "It is a red line but I'm never going to leave Israel. The defense of Israel is still critical. So there's no red line (in which) I'm going to cut off all weapons so they don't have the Iron Dome to protect them."

Biden insisted, however, that Netanyahu "must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken."

He reiterated his call for a six-

week ceasefire for hostage releases and aid delivery, though negotiations appear to have stalled. Biden announced during Thursday's State of the Union plans for the U.S. military to lead the construction of a port along the coast of Gaza on the Mediterranean Sea to boost the amount of aid getting to Palestinian civilians. Progressives have called for the White House to back a permanent cease-fire in the conflict, but Biden and others have said such an agreement would allow Hamas to regroup. Instead, the administration has instead backed a temporary pause in fighting that would last at least six weeks and allow hostages to get out and more aid to get into Gaza.

On Tuesday, more than a quarter million voters cast ballots for "uncommitted" or "no preference" in Democratic primaries, largely viewed as a protest of Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

"I don't blame them for being upset. There's families there. There are people who are dying. They want something done about it. And they're saying, Joe, do something, do something," Biden said Saturday on MSNBC. "But the idea that they all think it's genocide is just not — that's a different situation," he added.

Biden, Trump spar on immigration, age in battleground Georgia: US President Joe Biden and presumptive White House challenger Donald Trump traded barbs Saturday on the key topics of age and immigration, as they targeted the battleground state of

Georgia. Biden, hoping to ride the momentum from a feisty State of the Union speech on Thursday, went to the state's capital of Atlanta to mobilize Black and Hispanic voters.

He once again attacked his Republican predecessor, who has vowed to be a "dictator" for one day.

"When he says he wants to be a dictator, I believe him," Biden told a rally, highlighting US economic strength while promising action to cut costs in areas such as housing, health and education.

In an interview with MSNBC aired Saturday night, Biden said he regretted using the term "an illegal" when referring to the killer of a nursing student last month in Georgia.

"I shouldn't have used 'illegal,' it's 'undocumented,'" said Biden, who has been criticized by progressives and members of his own party for using terminology more commonly employed by Republicans.

Trump, who is pledging a crack-down on illegal immigration as a key plank of his campaign, talked at length during his rally Saturday about the slain student. "Laken Riley would be alive today if Joe Biden had not willfully and maliciously eviscerated the borders of the United States," he told a crowd of supporters in Georgia's Republican-leaning northwestern corner. He slammed Biden for backtracking on his use of the word "illegal" to describe the Venezuelan suspect in the crime, saying, "Biden should be apologizing for apologizing to this killer."

Palestinians prepare for Ramadan in the shadow of Gaza war

JERUSALEM/CAIRO/RAFAH, Gaza (Reuters): Palestinians prepared for Ramadan in sombre mood with heightened security measures by Israeli police and the spectre of war and hunger in Gaza overshadowing the normally festive Muslim holy month as talks to secure a ceasefire stalled. Thousands of police have been deployed around the narrow streets of the Old City in Jerusalem, where tens of thousands of worshippers are expected every day at the Al Aqsa mosque compound, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

The area, considered the most sacred place by Jews who know it as Temple Mount, has been a longstanding flashpoint for trouble and was one of the starting points of the last war in 2021 between Israel and Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls Gaza. That 10-day conflict has been dwarfed by the current war, which is now in its sixth month. It began on Oct. 7 when thousands of Hamas fighters stormed into Israel, killing some 1,200 people, by Israeli tallies.

Israel's relentless campaign in Gaza has caused increasing alarm across the world as the growing risk of famine threatens to add to a death

toll that has already passed 31,000.

After some confusion last month when hard-right Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said he wanted restrictions on worshippers at Al Aqsa, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the numbers admitted would be similar to last year.

"This is our mosque and we must take care of it," said Azzam Al-Khatib, director general of the Jerusalem Waqf, the religious foundation that oversees Al Aqsa. "We must protect the presence of Muslims at this mosque, who should be able to enter in big numbers peacefully and safely." The start of Ramadan depends on lunar observations - for Palestinians it will begin on Monday, while it will start on Tuesday in some Arab and Muslim countries.

In contrast to previous years, the usual decorations around the Old City have not been put up and there was a similar sombre tone in towns across the occupied West Bank, where around 400 Palestinians have been killed in clashes with security forces or Jewish settlers since the start of the Gaza war. "We decided this year that the Old City of Jerusalem won't be decorated out of respect for the blood

of our children and the elders and the martyrs," said Ammar Sider, a community leader in the Old City.

Police said they were working to ensure a peaceful Ramadan and had taken extra measures to crack down on what they described as provocative and distorted information on social media networks and had arrested 20 people suspected of incitement to terrorism.

"The Israel Police will continue to act and allow for the observance of Ramadan prayers safely on the Temple Mount, while maintaining security and safety in the area," police said in a statement.

For the rest of the Muslim world, Israel's policing of Al Aqsa has long been among the most bitterly resented issues and last month, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh called on Palestinians to march to the mosque at the start of Ramadan. Last year, clashes that erupted when police entered the mosque compound drew condemnation from the Arab League as well as Saudi Arabia, with which Israel had been seeking to normalise diplomatic ties, extending its push to build ties with regional powers including the United Arab Emirates.

Roads inundated as heavy rains lash Balochistan

GWADAR (Monitoring Desk): Heavy rains lashed flood-ravaged Gwadar and other parts of Balochistan on Sunday, suspending normal life and traffic.

The showers, which began yesterday evening, left main roads and streets flooded with knee-high water and submerged low-lying areas in Gwadar and adjoining districts.

In Kech, heavy rains suspended traffic and blocked connecting roads.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, 21 millimetres of rainfall was recorded in Gwadar over the last 24 hours, 10mm in Turbat and 2mm in Ormara, Turbat and Jiwani. The Met Office said rain and thunderstorms with isolated showers were forecast in Turbat, Kech, Gwadar, Jiwani, Pasni, Ormara, Panjgur, Kharan,

Kalat, Khuzdar, Lasbela, and Awaran districts today.

It also warned of flash flooding in the local nullahs of Gwadar, Kech, Turbat and Panjgur, adding that snowfall may disrupt traffic in northern Balochistan till March 13. The Met department further stated that Chagai, Noshki, Washuk, Mastung, Sibbi, Nasirabad, Zhob, Sherani, Barkhan, Musakhel, Kohlu, Jhal Magasi, Loralai, Ziarat, Quetta, Chaman, Pishin, Kila Abdullah and Kila Saifullah were likely to witness a similar weather, with snowfall on hills, till March 13. Meanwhile, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) issued an alert in Balochistan.

Separately, light rain was reported in several parts of Karachi earlier in the day. In a press release issued today, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, the PDMA

said a westerly wave was prevailing over Balochistan and adjoining Sindh. "Rain-wind/thunderstorm likely to occur in Jamshoro, Dadu, Larkano, Kambhar Shahdadkot, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Kashmore, Sukkur, Ghotki, Naushahro Feroze and Shaheed Benazirabad districts today and March 12 night/March 13.

"Further, mainly cloudy and windy with chances of a few falls of drizzle/light rain are likely to occur today in Karachi division," the PDMA said. In light of the forecast, the department urged the authorities to take precautionary measures that include the availability of dewatering machines and the staff during rainfall, coordination with emergency services, establishment of helpline numbers and availability of uninterrupted power supply for hospitals.

PTI announces public gathering in Islamabad on March 23

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) announced to hold a public gathering in Islamabad on the eve of Pakistan Day on March 23. According to details, PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat while addressing the party's protest demonstration in Islamabad said that they would approach the Deputy Commissioner of the capital city to seek permission for the public gathering.

"If the administration rejects our request, the PTI will move to the Islamabad High Court," he added. Sher Afzal Marwat said that it is their right to hold a 'peaceful' protest as per the constitution. He also asked the authorities to immediately release the PTI leaders and workers who were arrested during their nationwide protest.

US military ship heading to Gaza to build port

GAZA (BBC): A US military ship is sailing towards the Middle East, carrying equipment to build a temporary pier off the coast of Gaza, the army says. The support ship, General Frank S Besson, set sail from a military base in the state of Virginia on Saturday.

It comes after President Joe Biden said the US would build the floating harbour to help get aid into Gaza by sea. The UN has warned that famine in the Gaza Strip is "almost inevitable" and children are starving to death.

The US and Jordan carried out an airdrop on Sunday, parachuting in more than 11,500 meals that included rice, flour, pasta, and canned food, the US military said.

Aid deliveries by land and air have proved difficult and dangerous.

The World Food Programme had to pause land deliveries after its convoys came under gunfire and looting. And on Friday, there were reports that five people had been killed by a

falling aid package, when its parachute failed to open properly.

The US ship departed "less than 36 hours" after Mr Biden made his announcement, US Central Command wrote on X.

It is "carrying the first equipment to establish a temporary pier to deliver vital humanitarian supplies" to Gaza, the statement continued.

The Pentagon has said it could take up to 60 days to build the pier with the help of 1,000 troops - none of whom would go ashore.

Charities have said those suffering in Gaza cannot wait that long.

Meanwhile, an aid ship laden with some 200 tonnes of food had been expected to set sail from a port in Larnaca, Cyprus on Sunday afternoon, Cypriot media reported.

However, as of around 1700 GMT, Cypriot authorities said the vessel remained in port. It was repositioning within the harbour but was not expected to leave "for some time",

they said. It follows an EU announcement that a new sea route would be opened over the weekend to allow aid to sail directly from Cyprus - the closest EU country to Gaza.

The ship, Open Arms, belongs to the Spanish charity of the same name, and the food on board has been provided by US charity World Central Kitchen. It is unclear how any aid delivered by sea would get safely to shore before the US pier is built. Gaza has no functioning port and its surrounding waters are too shallow for large vessels. However Oscar Camps, the founder of Open Arms, told the Associated Press that at the destination point - which remains a secret - a team from the World Central Kitchen has been building a pier to receive the aid. Israel has welcomed the ocean initiative, and said aid would be delivered after security checks were carried out in Cyprus "in accordance with Israeli standards".