

Zardari not to draw his pay
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has decided, in view of the prevailing economic challenges, that he will not draw his presidential salary. "He took this decision to encourage prudent financial management in country. The President considered it essential not to burden the national exchequer and preferred to forgo his salary," President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release on Tuesday.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI

No. 51

Regd. No. 241

RAMAZAN 02 1445 -- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

KP experts to raise receivable finances issue with Centre

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting regarding financial issues of the province related to federation, was held here at Chief Minister's House Peshawar the other day with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. The participants were briefed in details about the outstanding dues of the province against the federal government and other related matters.

Advisor to Chief Minister for Finance Muzammil Aslam, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretary Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan, Secretary Finance Aamir Sultan Tareen, Secretary Energy & Power Nisar Ahmed and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

The meeting was informed that under the AGN Qazi Formula, the center owed Rs. 1510 billion to the province in lieu of Net Hydrol Profit, whereas, arrears amounting to Rs. 6 billion on account of province own generated electricity being provided to the National Grid, are also outstanding. It was further informed that administrative merger of the erstwhile FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province had been completed, but financial integration is still incomplete due to which, the provincial government is facing financial problems.

It was also told that the province is

not getting its due share in various federal transfers due to which the provincial government is faced with a major challenge of financial crunches adding that with the merger of erstwhile FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the population of the province has increased but the share of the province in NFC Award has not been increased accordingly which needs to be addressed to enable the province to get its due share.

The meeting was told that as per the existing population after merger of erstwhile FATA, the NFC share of the province stands 19.64% of the total but the province is getting only 14.62%. So far, the province has been provided with only 103 billion rupees out of committed Rs. 500 billion, under the Accelerated Implementation Program of newly merged districts.

The Chief Minister on this occasion, directed the authorities concerned to chalk out strategy for taking up the financial matters of the province with federation adding that all the required documents along with plan of action should be finalized within a month. He made it clear that all available legal and constitutional forums would be approached in order to get the arrears and due rights of the province.

He also directed to constitute a team of experts for effectively taking up the matter with federal government. In case, the issue is not resolved by federation, all available

options will be utilized for getting due share of the province including knocking the door of courts, he said and added that reputable Law Firms would also be hired for this purpose.

Later, chairing a meeting of the Board of Revenue, the Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has directed the quarters concerned for necessary amendments in the relevant law in order to ensure protection of women's rights in inheritance. He also directed for pragmatic steps for completing phase-I of the ongoing land record computerization project by June 2024 and phase-II by December 2024, adding that deployment of required necessary staff at districts level should also be ensured well before the process of land record computerization is completed.

Provincial Minister for revenue Nazir Abbasi, SMBR Ikramullah Khan, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan and other relevant officials attended the meeting. Concerned authorities on this occasion, briefed the participants about administrative affairs, reform initiatives, revenue collection, development projects and other related matters of the department. Addressing the participants, the chief minister said that it was imperative to introduce reforms in the board of revenue for improving public service delivery, and directed the authorities concerned to initiate home work on necessary amendments in the legal framework of the department.

We should use word of 'independence' with pride: CJP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa on Tuesday during hearing of a case stopped the lawyer to use the word of 'partition' instead of independence of Pakistan.

The CJP remarked that words of partition can be used by the people of India because they have never been rulers. We should use the words of freedom with pride, he said. A three-member bench of the top court presided by Chief Justice Isa heard the case pertaining to a property dispute.

The CJP said that we can't run the case on basis of assumptions. If there is any proof of property ownership then show it, he asked the petitioner. The court subsequently turned down the appeal of petitioner. It may be mentioned here that the petitioner even couldn't present an ownership proof before lower and high courts.

Pak-IMF talks likely from 15th

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks under the \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) are likely to commence from March 15.

According to media reports, the country's newly sworn-in Finance Minister Mohammad Aurangzeb has given the green signal for talks with the IMF for the SBA and a new loan programme. Islamabad will hold talks with the international lender about the last tranche of \$1.1 billion under the SBA programme. Pakistan has already achieved the targets set by the IMF for the second review, the sources said.

They further said Pakistan is likely to request IMF for a \$6 to 8 billion fresh loan programme. Finance ministry sources said Islamabad will engage the IMF on the economic targets for the fresh loan programme. On March 8, the IMF said it is ready to send mission to Islamabad for the second economic review after the formation of PM Shehbaz Sharif's cabinet. The IMF Director of Communications said that the focus currently is on completing the ongoing Stand-By Program, which is ending in April 2024, a mission for the second review of the Stand-By Program would be dispatched immediately after the formation of the new cabinet in Pakistan.

10-member Sindh cabinet takes oath of office

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A 10-member new provincial cabinet of Sindh has taken the oath of office at a ceremony held at Sindh Governor House. Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori administered the oath to the provincial ministers. Top officials including Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah attended the ceremony.

The ministers inducted into the provincial cabinet include Sharjeel Inam Memon, Nasir Hussain Shah, Saeed Ghani, Sardar Ali Shah, Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Sardar Mohammad Baksh Mahar, Zia Ul Hassan Lanjar, Ali Hassan Zardari, and Jam Khan Shoro. Most of the ministers have served in the CM Shah-led cabinet in the previous tenure, however, their portfolios have been reshuffled.

Sharjeel Inam Memon has been given the portfolio of minister for transport, mass transit, excise, taxation, and narcotics, according to a CM House spokesperson. Dr Azra will serve as health and population welfare minister, as per the spokesperson, while Syed Nasir Hussain Shah has been assigned portfolios of energy, planning, and development ministries. Syed Sardar Ali Shah will serve as minister for education education and literacy, college education, and mines and minerals development.

Saeed Ghani will be the minister for local government (LG) and housing town planning, public health engineering, and rural development and Jam Khan Shoro will head the irrigation, and food ministries. Zia Ul Hassan

Lanjar will serve as minister for home, law, parliamentary affairs, and criminal prosecution in the newly-formed provincial cabinet.

Sardar Mohammad Baksh Mahar has been given portfolios of agriculture, sports and youth affairs, inquiries, and anti-corruption establishment. Ali Hassan Zardari will be a minister for prisons and Syed Zulfiqar Shah will be a minister for culture, tourism, antiquities, and archives. Moreover, Allah Bakhsh Dino Khan Bhio has been appointed as an adviser on forest, and wildlife department. Ehsanur Rehman Mazari will be an adviser on inter-provincial coordination, whereas, Syed Najmi Alam will be an adviser on human settlement, special development & social housing, and livestock and fisheries departments.

Last month, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah took the oath of office a day after he obtained a majority of votes to win the election of the provincial chief executive. CM Shah made history after he was re-elected as the provincial chief executive for the third consecutive time with an overwhelming majority. The election for the provincial chief executive was held through the division of the house. Murad secured 112 votes, while the candidate of Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Ali Khurshedi secured 36 votes.

People's Party leader Sharjeel Inam Memon has joined the Sindh cabinet as a senior minister. In addition to this, Sharjeel Inam Memon has been given the portfolios of transport,

mass transit and excise & taxation. Notifications have been issued in this regard.

PPP leader Sharjeel Inam Memon has also served as the Minister of Works and Services, Transport and Mass Transit, and Information during the previous regime of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

During the previous regime, Sharjeel Inam Memon's biggest achievement was initiating the People's Bus Service and the Pink Bus Service for women.

The elimination of illegal bus add-ons in other cities of Sindh including Orange Line, Yellow Line BRT, Red Line BRT, Green Line in Karachi and Hyderabad, and the appointment of female drivers in the Pink Bus Service were among Sharjeel Inam Memon's remarkable achievements. As part of these projects, the reconstruction of bridges on these BRT routes has also been made possible due to Sharjeel Inam Memon's efforts.

Apart from this, additional electric buses for other cities of Sindh, including Karachi, and electric taxis for the citizens of Karachi, along with a women's pink electric taxi service, are also part of Sharjeel Inam Memon's vision.

As Minister of Information, Sharjeel Inam Memon achieved the establishment of the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Practitioners at the government level, marking the first time in the history of Sindh. This initiative aimed to safeguard journalists and other individuals associated with the media.

Tarar assumes charge as Minister for Information

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Attaullah Tarar on Tuesday assumed charge as Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

Federal Secretary of Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid along with other senior officers of the ministry welcomed the minister on his arrival at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Attaullah Tarar is a senior leader of Pakistan Muslim League (N) who was elected Member of National

Assembly from Constituency NA-127 from Lahore in the February 8 elections. After taking oath as Federal Minister in the President's House, today he assumed his duties in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

On his arrival at the Ministry of Information, Attaullah Tarar said the doors of the Ministry of Information would remain open for the journalist community. He stressed the need for the promotion of positive and constructive journalism in the country and strengthening the relation-



ship between the government and the media. Attaullah Tarar said he will work together with the media to communicate the government's initiatives and policies to the people.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting regarding IT and Telecom Sector.

President lays floral wreath at Mazar-e-Quaid

F.P. Report

KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari paid a visit to mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on Tuesday to pay respect to the Father of the Nation after assuming office of the President of Pakistan.

President Zardari laid a floral wreath at the grave of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and offered Fatiha. He also penned down comments in the book of visitors.

The president on the occasion was received by Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Provincial president PPP Sindh Nisar Ahmed Khuhro and other senior officers of Sindh government.

Earlier, on his arrival at the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a smartly turned out contingent of cadets from the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul presented guard of honour to the President Asif Ali Zardari. It was Asif Ali Zardari's first visit to Karachi after assuming charge of the office of the president of Pakistan for the second time.

Hussain, Hasan Nawaz land in Lahore

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Hasan Nawaz, and Hussain Nawaz — sons of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif — have arrived in Lahore after suspension of their arrest warrants by an accountability court. Upon their arrival, Nawaz received his sons at Jati Umrah residence, media reported citing sources.

Last week, an accountability court suspended the arrests warrants of Hasan, and Hussain in the Al-Azizia, Flagship and Avenfield cases. The decision was announced by accountability court judge Nasir Javed Rana in a verdict he reserved earlier today. The warrants have been suspended till March 14, as per the verdict. The warrants of the brothers were issued seven years ago when the court had declared them absconders.

Earlier, their lawyer, Qazi Misbah, filed the plea seeking suspension of the warrants were filed as both brothers planned to return to Pakistan on March 12. National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecutors Sardar Muzaffar, Usman Masood and Sohail Arif also appeared in the court. Misbah revealed the development during the hearing of the Toshakhana reference filed against Nawaz, PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari and former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani wherein the politicians are accused of having kept various vehicles in violation of the Toshakhana rules.

Arif, a NAB prosecutor, said that the accused should appear in court, as per the law. "[They] will have to appear, [as] without it the warrant of arrest cannot be suspended." He added that the purpose of the warrant is to bring the accused to court, insisting that both brothers should be given a chance to appear before the accountability court.

PM calls for roadmap to enhance IT exports

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed for submission of a comprehensive roadmap to boost IT exports. He said the government would take steps to fully avail of the billion dollars potential of the country for IT exports, besides, the young people would be provided with required facilities of education, skills development and startups.

The prime minister chaired a review meeting on IT and Telecom sector. The meeting was attended by Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Economic Affairs and Establishment Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister of State for IT Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Governor State Bank of Pakistan Jameel Ahmed, Shahzad Saleem and the relevant senior officials, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

During the meeting, the prime minister said that during their previous

tenure, positive outcome was witnessed from the initiation of different projects in the IT sector. He stressed upon resolution of all issues of start ups, freelancers and IT companies relating to banking.

Expressing his satisfaction over the IT export volume of more than \$3 billion in the current year, he emphasized upon its further increase. For bringing Pakistan's IT sector at par with the international standards, they would have to work hard, he observed.

The prime minister also asked for submission of a comprehensive report regarding special technology zones. The meeting was apprised of progress on IT package announced by the prime minister during June 2023.

During the previous tenure, due to special attention of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the IT exports witnessed 13 percent increase during the first seven months of the current fiscal year when compared with previous

corresponding year. Under the Digiskills programme, a total of 4 million students of 17 batches, comprising 28 percent females, had been imparted training. Pakistan had emerged as the second top country in the world on the basis of numbers of freelancers. Pakistan was exporting IT products to 170 countries of the world, it was further added.

The meeting was informed that during the previous year, an investment of \$400 million was made in Pakistani startups. The prime minister directed for taking all necessary, legal and policy related steps to attract investment and boost IT exports.

He also asked for expediting work on projects meant to enhance professional and technical training of youth for complete utilization of potential in IT sector. The meeting was also informed about the steps and progress on IT, E Rozgar, startups, cyber security, telecom sector and launch of 5-G.

PPP-JUI join hands for Senate by-election

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) on Tuesday decided to join hands in the Senate election. "The People's Party will support the JUI in Balochistan Senate elections, while the JUI will extend support to Yousaf Raza Gillani," JUI leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri said.

"We will not participate in government making but play our role in the Parliament," Haideri further said. PPP leader Nayyar Bukhari has said that the PPP will extend support to the JUI-F candidate in the Senate's by-election in Balochistan. The Senate by-election being held on vacant seats

of the upper house on March-14. Balochistan's three Senate seats have been vacated and the JUI has requested for the PPP's support in Balochistan, Nayyar Bukhari said.

Yousaf Raza Gillani said, "We have discussed over the matter with Maulana Sahib scores of times we welcome him here". "We are supporting to each other for the Parliament and will work in tandem in the house," he added. It is to be mentioned here that Gillani and Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) Ilyas Meharban will contest in Senate by election on the vacant seat from Islamabad.

The Senate by election will be held for six seats of the upper house in Islamabad, Sindh and Balochistan on March 14

(Thursday). According to the election commission, polling will be held at the upper house of parliament as well as at Sindh and Balochistan assemblies in Karachi and Quetta from 9:00am to 4:00pm on Thursday.

Among these general category seats, one fall vacant in the federal capital, two in Sindh, and three in Balochistan as senators relinquished their seats, following their election as members of the National Assembly as well as provincial assemblies of Sindh and Balochistan. Earlier, People's Party decided to nominate Yousaf Raza Gillani as its candidate for Senate chairman's office and he was asked to relinquish his NA seat from Multan.

Federal cabinet members assume charges

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has allocated portfolios to the newly-formed 19-member federal cabinet. According to a notification, Khawaja Asif has been named defence minister. He has also been assigned additional portfolios of defence production and aviation. Ishaq Dar has been given the portfolio of foreign minister, Ahsan Iqbal is the Minister for Planning, Development and Special Measures.

Muhammad Aurangzeb has been assigned the portfolio of finance and revenue, while Mohsin Naqvi has been assigned the portfolio of Home Affairs and Narcotics Control, Ahad Cheema has been assigned the portfolio of Economic Affairs and Establishment Division.

Musadik Malik has been assigned the portfolio of Minister of Energy and Petroleum, Mian Riaz

Hussain Pirzada has been named the Minister of Housing and Works, Attaulah Tarar has been assigned the portfolio of Information and Broadcasting, Awais Laghai has been assigned the portfolio of Minister of Railways, Safran and Heritage and Culture, Jam Kamal (Trade), Abdul Aleem Khan (Privatization and Board of Investment).

Chaudhry Salik Hussain has been appointed Minister of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Azam Nazir Tarar has been given the portfolio of Law and Justice and Human Rights, and Rana Tanveer Hussain has been assigned the portfolio of Industries and Production.

Earlier in the day (Monday), the newly-formed 19-member federal cabinet was sworn in at a ceremony held at the Presidency. President Asif Ali Zardari administered

oath to the ministers. On Sunday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif picked a 19-member cabinet after "consultations" with party leaders and communicated the names to the president.

Father, two sons killed in firing

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In an unfortunate incident, a man and his two sons were shot dead when exchange of harsh words led to a clash between the deceased and the accused in Palosai area here on Tuesday.

Police said the incident took place in the vicinity of Tehkal police station where a man named Nawaz and his sons, Asghar and Dawood were killed by the accused from the same area.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur addressing a high level meeting.

Minister announces resumption of health card plus in KP hospitals

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah addressed a press conference regarding the reactivation of free healthcare services under the Health Card Plus initiative for the people of the province. Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah shared that the Health Card initiative began in 2015, initially covering four districts of the province. By 2020, the scheme had expanded to cover the entire province, with an annual expenditure of 18 billion rupees. The Health Minister, along with Chief Executive Sehat Sahulat Program Dr. Riaz Tanoli and Program Director Dr. Ijaz, provided updates on the ongoing efforts.

Praising the successful implementation of Health Card services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Minister Shah stated that 1800 different medical treatments are now available for free in 118 public and private hospitals catering to various specialties across the province.

He highlighted that a significant amount of 10 million rupees had already been spent on the admission of seven hundred patients by noon on Tuesday. This reflects a fulfilment of Ex Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision, which has been rejuvenated, and currently, an average of three billion rupees is spent monthly on the Health Card. Furthermore, he announced the reopening of

counters for Health Cards in hospitals, with the government allocating an additional 05 billion rupees to the insurance company for this purpose. He revealed that the previous government's discontinuation of the Health Card during its tenure adversely affected the economically disadvantaged citizens. Minister Shah emphasised that the Health Card is not a temporary but a long-term project. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Ameen Gandapur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will witness new horizons of development.

The health department has issued a list of hospitals available on the Health Card Program's panel, providing free treatment facilities in 118 hospitals. Minister Shah assured that the current challenges, including over-billing and irregularities, are being addressed by restricting certain operational procedures in government hospitals. The number of hospitals empaneled on Health Card program has been reduced to less than 180 from over 180. Minister Shah acknowledged the remaining financial challenges, leaving a balance of 18 billion rupees in the system. Despite these challenges, the government is committed to restarting the program for the benefit of the people. The Provincial Assembly has recently approved a one-month budget, and while challenges persist, overcoming them is essential for the well-being of the public.



PESHAWAR: Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah along with Chief Executive Sehat Sahulat Program Dr. Riaz Tanoli addressing a press conference.

Zakat to be distributed after a break of 2 years

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting of the KP Department of Zakat, Ushr and Social Welfare was held here while adviser to Chief Minister on Social Welfare Mashal Azam Yousafzai in the chair. Secretary Social Welfare Anila Mahfouz in her briefing on the projects, budget and issues of the department informed the meeting that not a single penny of the Zakat has been distributed in the province for the last 2 years. She said that due to lack of Zakat and Ushr Council, Zakat was not distributed and the summary of establishment of Zakat and Ushr Council is ready wherein 4402 local zakat committees are established in the province with 10 Darul amaan and 25 women facilities centers. She was told that 12 Child Welfare Homes and 4 Zamung Kor Centers have been established for the protection of children wherein 189 children in child homes and 995 children are being provided in Zamung Kor. Secretary Social Welfare Anila Mahfouz disclosed that 3 Dar-ul-kafala centers have been established to make beggars respectable citizens and a total of 853 beggars are under surveillance in Darul kafals. However, she said, 84,159 deserving people are benefiting from services in 11

shelters. Adviser Social Welfare Mashal Azam Yousafzai directed the meeting that a shelter should be built in Khyber at a place where everyone can access it and Afghan siblings should be accommodated in the shelter on priority basis. She said it should be ensured that Zakat payments should be made to the deserving people. The social welfare department should collect the data of deserving people in the province, Mashal Azam Yousafzai said. There is a need to review the living allowance for financially weak people, Mashal Azam Yousafzai added.

Treatment under Sehat card restored

PESHAWAR (APP): As per the instructions of the provincial government, Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) Peshawar has restored medical services and treatment under the Sehat card facility.

According to the spokesperson of Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC), the top priority of the hospital administration was to provide facilities to patients from remote areas who were being treated under the health facility program.

She said that treatment of patients under health cards has resumed in Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) with effect from the 1st of Ramadan 2024.

Hospital Director Dr. Shehzad Faisal, Medical Director Dr. Shahzad Akbar, and Health Card Focal Person Dr. Sher Zaman on Monday discussed important issues with other admin staff and issued necessary instructions.

The spokesperson said that all medical facilities under the supervision of the hospital administration are available to all patients of the Sehat Card through the "Patient Facility Center" established by the hospital.

She said that in the month of Ramadan, the normal working hours of the IBP would remain open from 01 p.m. to 05 p.m.

Govt urged to consider business community recommendations

PESHAWAR (APP): Industry Shah Wazir, Muhammad Nawaz, Ahmed Khan, Rahat Ali Khan and Yusuf Ali, Adnan Ali, Imad Khan, Syed Rahman Naema Naz, Zahida Iftikhar, Anila Khalid, Rizwan, Muhammad Islam Haji Iftikhar and others. The participants of the meeting exchanged views on issues facing the province and presented suggestions and also briefed the FPCCI president on all recommendations in this regard. Haji Afzal and Akbar Khan gave a detailed briefing regarding problems facing industries, particularly gas and electricity and taxation in the province. The participants proposed that a monthly meaningful meeting and dialogue should be ensured with the federal and provincial governments' representatives and bureaucracy through Federation's platform.

They discussed problems faced by the business community at crossing points with Afghanistan, especially the closure of Ghulam Khan, Kharlachi, Angoor Adda, and Torkham stations, including customs clearance and other issues. It was decided in the meeting that a legal team would be strengthened for industrial assistance. Participants also mentioned issues arising from fluctuating exchange rates and dollar prices and demanded that table talks should also be held to reduce tax rates by the governments.

An agreement was also reached on solutions to problems of small traders in the province and recommendations for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with various countries in the tealeaf and sugarcane sectors.

Food Authority seizes 1500kg substandard meat

PESHAWAR (APP): Food Safety and Halal Food Authority conducts surprise checks at Peshawar Motorway Toll Plaza, on Tuesday seized over 1500 kilograms of substandard and harmful meat; legal action initiated against owners. KP Food Safety and Halal Food Authority have devised a special plan to curb adulteration and the supply of substandard food items in the markets during the holy month of Ramadan. As part of this initiative, the Food Safety team in Peshawar conducted surprise inspections at the Peshawar Motorway Toll Plaza, targeting vehicles involved in the supply of food items.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister Faisal Khan Turk presiding over a meeting at Directorate of Education.

Chief Minister condemns attack on police van — condoles martyrdom of policemen

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Tuesday strongly condemned terrorists attack on police van here and expressed grief over the martyrdom of two policemen in the incident. The Chief Minister expressed his condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families and

prayed courage for them to bear the loss with fortitude. He also prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured official. The CM asked the Inspector General of Police to submit a report into the incident and instructed to give compensation to the families of the martyrs under the Shaheed package. He said the government

would not leave the families of the martyrs alone while all possible support would be given to them. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said that KP police have made unprecedented sacrifices to protect people's lives and property, adding the sacrifices of police martyrs would not go in vain.

PHC grants bail to PTI Shibli Faraz

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court has sanctioned bail for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senator Shibli Faraz. The decision comes as a relief for Faraz, who faces over 20 different legal charges across Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and other Punjab locales.

During the bail hearing, the petitioner's counsel highlighted the myriad of cases lodged against Senator Faraz, emphasizing his willingness to present himself before the respective courts.

However, an apprehension of arrest had been a significant barrier to this compliance. Addressing these concerns, the High Court's ruling not only grants Senator Faraz provisional freedom but also mandates his appearance before the concerned courts within a 20-day window.

This court order marks a pivotal moment for Senator Faraz, offering him an opportunity to engage with the legal proceedings arrayed against him.

The decision is viewed by many as a testament to the judicial system's adherence to principles of fairness and the rule of law, even amidst the politically charged atmosphere surrounding PTI members.

KP launches admission drive

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has launched a special admission drive to reenroll out-of-school children at the start of the academic year. Faisal Tarakai, Provincial Minister of Secondary Education, told media on Tuesday that over the past decade, special emphasis was laid on promotion of education and health sectors in KP under the two PTI administrations. Despite the implementation of an educational emergency, 4.7 million children remained out of school.

The launch ceremony witnessed the admission of four children, symbolizing the commencement of the campaign.

Masood Khan, KP Secretary of Secondary Education, outlined the objective to enroll one million children within the next two months. However, he acknowledged the challenges in public schools, where essential facilities and staff, including teachers, remain inadequate.

The event incorporated national songs and physical training displays to emphasize the significance of education to children.

Torkham border: Call for speedy supply of onion

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: All Pakistan fruits and vegetables market central president Malik Sohni demand from the federal government to clear the import of onion at Pak-Afghan borders as soon as possible so that the market is not short. There are still numerous trailers of onions standing at the Torkham border.

He stated there is no onion in Pakistan rather it is being imported from Afghanistan. Onion import costs a lot, bodies, include rent, taxes, transport and other labour cost.

This is also being imported with the support of our efforts, otherwise, onion would have been Rs 600 per kg. The price of onion in Peshawar is still low compared to other provinces of Pakistan.

DG KRPA holds meeting with Advisor to CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General KRPA Miss Fouzia Iqbal held a meeting with the Advisor to Chief Minister on Finance Mr. Muzzammil Aslam at his office on Tuesday.

The DG KRPA briefed the Advisor on Finance about tax rates in different sectors, major revenue streams, and the overall collection of KRPA in the past 8 months of the current financial year. The strategy for tax collection in the remaining four months of the ongoing financial year was discussed, and the DG KRPA assured the advisor that her team is making every effort to achieve the revenue target assigned to

the authority by the provincial government.

Advisor to KPRA on Tax Enforcement Mr. Fazal Amin Shah also accompanied DG KRPA and responded to the queries.

The advisor was informed that KRPA has collected Rs26.86 billion by February 2024, and the target for the current year is Rs42 billion. The Advisor to the Chief Minister on Finance mentioned that the tax policy for the next financial year will be formulated after consultations with all stakeholders.

He directed the DG KRPA and her team to arrange pre-budget consultations with representatives from chambers of commerce and industries, own-

ers' associations of restaurants, hotels, wedding halls, car showrooms, and catering service providers for discussions.

It was decided that KRPA would start lottery schemes for restaurants/hotels to encourage documentation of economy and tax acculturation in the province and incentivize the restaurants/hotels business across the province including the newly merged districts.

The advisor agreed to withdraw tax exemptions given to certain sectors, given by the cabinet, to bring them into the tax net and sought necessary documentation for the withdrawal through the cabinet from the KPRA team.



PESHAWAR: DG KRPA Miss Fouzia Iqbal giving briefing to Advisor to Chief Minister for Finance Muzzammil Aslam.

Kajor, Pakora outlets attract Rozadars

PESHAWAR (APP): The food stalls of Kajor (dates), chappli kabab, pakora and jalebi besides other items on Tuesday attracted a large number of people ahead of the first Iftar of the holy month of Ramadan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Great rush was witnessed on food stalls especially pakora, kajor, chappli kabab and jalebi at all bazaars including Qissa Khwani, Tehkal and Hashnagri in Peshawar. Pakora is a spicy food item mostly prepared of onions, potatoes and chickens, which is being sold like a hot cake due to its delicious taste, cost-efficient varieties and energy perspectives.

Like Kajor, Pakora is the most favorite item during Iftar parties in provincial capital where special shops were opened at historic Qissa Khwani, Ghanta Ghar, Firdus, Hashnagri and others areas started making a roaring business.

Different types of Pakora are being prepared such as potato pakora, palak pakora, onion pakora, Gobhi pakora, attracting people, senior citizens, children, women and youth as special iftar item.

The delicious dish is being prepared from differ-

ent ingredients such as onion, eggs, potatoes, chicken and cauliflower after these things are dipped in a Pakora made flour.

Riaz Khan, a retired teacher of Education Department on a food stall at Hashnagri told APP that Kajor and Pakora are his most favorite food item during Iftar parties and without it his Iftar seems incomplete.

"Personally, I like chicken pakora because of its batter taste and energy's perspective," he said, adding demands of onion and potato Pakora has also increased in local markets.

The markets are flooded with Pakora, Jalebi, Dahi Bhalay and Kachalo stalls and shops where hectic buying are being witnessed when Iftar's time becomes nearer. Like other edible items, he said prices of Pakora has also increased this year as one kilogram is being sold at Rs320 to Rs340 per kilogram against Rs280 last year that needed to be checked by the district administration. "A few Pakora and dates are enough for me as it is a complete food," Khan said.

This popular snake of the subcontinent origin takes very less time in preparation and is being served as special Iftar meal

with any chutney or ketchup to people of all social class.

It is also popular among people of both rural and urban areas and being exchanged by relatives and families as Iftar's gifts. "I am going to my daughter home to give her one kilogram Pakora and two KG Kajor as special Iftar's gift," said Zeeshan Khan, a resident of Wapda Town Nowshera.

"Exchange of food dishes among relatives increase love and warmth besides bringing people closer," he said. The shopkeepers said Pajora making was a profitable business as it does not require much investment. The shopkeepers said its price has been increased due to hike in prices of related ingredients being used in preparation of this specie item.

The people also thronged to fruits and Peshawari rice outlets by taking parcel of the delicious food items for first Iftari besides Jalebi, Achar and sri-paye shops were making roaring sale.

The young children were seen exchanging food among their relatives and friends in Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda districts ahead of first iftar.



In brief

Declamation contest held F.P. Report

SWABI: Women University Swabi organized a declamation contest in both Urdu and English to commemorate International Women's Day on Tuesday. Over 16 enthusiastic students from various departments participated in the event, showcasing their eloquence and passion for women's empowerment. The event was graced by the presence of esteemed individuals, including Dr. Raisa, the Director of the Youth Development Center, Dr. Alia, Assistant Professor of Islamiyat, Waseem Khattak, Head of the Department of Journalism and Incharge of Student Societies, and Miss Faryal, Deputy Director of YDC. In the English category, Laiba Umair secured the first position, leaving a lasting impression with her powerful delivery. Memona Fayaz claimed the second position, impressing the audience with her articulate presentation, and Aysha Salih grabbed the third position. In the Urdu category, Urooj Tariq emerged as the first position holder, captivating the audience with her eloquent expression of thoughts. Huda Bashir secured the second position, and Saba Gul achieved the third position, showcasing their commendable oratory skills. The university's commitment to promoting women's voices and acknowledging their achievements was evident throughout the event, reflecting the spirit of Women's Day celebrations.

CM directs 'Kuli Katcheris' F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: On the directions of the Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz, police have started holding of 'Kuli Katcheri' for providing relief to the people and to give approach to common people to present their complaints without any hurdle. In this connection, DSP Hafizabad Rana Jamil Qaisar held open court at Masjid Sadiqia College Road Hafizabad. He listened complaints of people and assured them that their complain would be settle on merit. Rana Jamil Qaisar said that police were ready round the clock for protection of live, property and honour of the people.

Youth crushed to death

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): A youth was crushed to death under a crush laden dumper here on Tuesday, rescue sources said. According to details, a dumper carrying crushed stone got imbalanced which unloading and turned turtle near Farooqabad Canal at Sargodha Road, Sheikhpura. A 24-year-old youth Waqas was trapped under the dumper and crushed to death before could be rescued. The rescue personnel later pulled out the body under the dumper and handed it over to heirs for burial.

3 robbers held

PATTOKI (INP): Three robbers were arrested besides recovery of arms, looted cash and other valuables after exchange of fire here on Tuesday. According to details, a three-member gang of robbers was engaged in looting citizens in Pholnagar area in Saddar police station jurisdiction, when police teams on a tip-off approached them. An exchange of fire took place after which police arrested all three robbers. The police recovered 12 cell phones, hundreds of thousands rupees cash and arms from possession of the detainees and in the preliminary investigation they admitted of committing over 40 robberies in the area.

Deserving families to receive Rs10,000 for Ramazan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Provincial Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru unveiled a comprehensive strategy aimed at providing maximum relief to the people during the Holy month of Ramadan. Under this initiative 736,000 families registered under the Ehsaas program will receive Rs. 10,000 each through cross cheques ensuring transparency in the process. This move is expected to benefit more than 5 million individuals across the province.

Speaking to a media delegation led by Mardan Press Club President M. Bashir Adil and addressing party workers at his residence, Zahir Shah Toru emphasized the importance of purposeful negotiations with the Centre, particularly regarding the province's constitutional rights. He assured that Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, will engage in meaningful discussions with the Prime Minister, prioritizing the province's interests.

Toru highlighted the government's commitment to restoring law and order, making it a top priority. He reiterated the importance of collaboration with all stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan of action to combat terrorism and ensure peace in the region.

During his visit to Mardan, Toru received a warm welcome from party workers and the public, demonstrating strong support for his initiatives. He underscored the government's determination to crackdown on hoarding, adulteration, and price gouging during Ramadan, stressing strict enforcement measures across all districts.

Furthermore, Toru expressed concerns about Pakistan's escalating debt crisis and praised Prime Minister Imran Khan's efforts to address this issue. He reaffirmed the government's mission to provide relief to the poor, announcing changes to the relief policy for Ramadan to benefit an increased number of deserving individuals. Additionally, plans are underway to provide cash assistance to widows and disabled persons, with a dedicated policy set to be formulated promptly.

The announcement marks a significant step towards alleviating financial burdens on vulnerable communities during the sacred month, reflecting the government's commitment to social welfare and economic stability.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai visited District Headquarters Hospital Mardan. He reviewed the ongoing work on OPD block, mosque, hostels and diagnostic block under the development package number three of the hospital.

Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpao was also with him. DHO Dr.Javed Iqbal and C&W officials while briefing the Commissioner Mardan said that under package three of DHQ

Hospital, the work of expanding the hospital to 600 beds at a cost of two billion 60 crore rupees to be continued. 80 to 85 percent of the construction work on the ongoing facilities under this package has been completed, so we are facing the problem of funds for the remaining work, which requires a total of 40 to 50 crores of funds.

Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai made a detailed inspection of the ongoing development work and construction work. He said that DHQ Hospital is located in the center of Mardan city and there is a lot of rush of patients including from outside the city, so it is necessary to complete the ongoing work under package three as soon as possible. Dr. Javed Iqbal, said that to connect the two blocks of the DHQ hospital, the construction of the link bridge on Shamsi Road as soon as possible is indispensable so that the transfer of the patients from the old block to the private rooms becomes easier.

He said that more than 80 percent of the work of package three has been completed for a long time and if the funds are not provided on time, there is a fear of damage to the installed machinery and building. Commissioner Mardan assured that the provincial government will be approached to provide necessary funds for the completion of package three of the hospital as soon as possible. He expressed hope that there will be positive progress in this regard. He also reviewed the facilities provided to the patients in the hospital and directed the hospital administration to ensure maximum facilities to the patients.

Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai along with DC Fayaz Sherpao also inspected the price monitoring desks established by the district administration in the markets of Mardan city. He directed the staff on duty in the monitoring desk to take immediate action on the complaints of the customers regarding the rates.

LG members arranged event on sanitation services: The Local Government elected representatives and elders of union council Sikandari organized an event in the honor of Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan (WSSCM) workers for their excellent performance.

Chairman Neighborhood Council Sikandari 3 Waris Khan, Social Worker Sattar Khan, Shakir Bacha and others distributed appreciation certificates and shields among sanitation inspector Fawad Khan, supervisor Sammad Khan, sanitation workers Nasir, Umair, Mohibullah, Owais, Anwarzeb and others. Speaking on the occasion, Waris Khan, Shakir Bacha and Haji Sattar Khan stated that with the advent of WSSCM, cleanliness of Mardan city has been improved. In 100 percent areas of UC Sikandari, garbage is collected from every household early in the morning. They appreciated the workers and Management staff of WSSCM.



HYDERABAD: A view of sewerage water accumulated on road at site area needs attention of concerned authority.

Tribute paid to builders of Karakoram Highway

GILGIT (INP): The students, teachers, and officials of Karakoram International University paid tribute to the martyrs of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) at the Chinese Memorial Cemetery aka "China Yadgar" in Danyore, Gilgit Baltistan.

The event was organized by the China Study Centre (CSC) International Office, Confucius-Set, and School of Professional Development and Education (SPDCE) to pay tribute to the engineers and workers who lost their lives during the construction of KKH, a route that connects the two brotherly nations.

During the event, participants laid flower wreaths over the graves of Chinese martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the construction of KKH, also known as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Senior officials from CSC, SPDCE, and Director of Public Relations at KIU, Amjad Ali, participated in the event.

They spoke about the

importance of KKH, Sino-Pak relations, and the role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the economic development of Pakistan. Dr. Khalid Mehmood Alam, Assistant Professor at CSC, KIU, discussed the historical perspective of KKH. Fifty-four Chinese individuals are buried in the cemetery. "Due to the sacrifices of Chinese and Pakistani workers, today both countries are connected," said Mr. Mahmood, adding that China and Pakistan were always together in grief and happiness.

Dr. Sajjad Haider remarked that the sacrifices of the Chinese martyrs would always be remembered. He highlighted that the journey, which began with the construction of KKH, has continued to evolve. Today, KKH stands as an integral part of CPEC, creating economic opportunities and improving the lives of people in both nations. KKH, also known as the China-Pakistan Friendship Highway, is a

1,300-kilometer highway that stretches from Hasanabdal in Punjab to GB in Pakistan and further extends into China.

Bike rider killed

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): A bike rider was killed while two others injured after collision with bus near Rangpur Police Station. According to rescuer, the body and injured persons were removed to Rangpur Rural Health Center.

The deceased was identified as Altaf Hussain, 22, s/o Muhammad Ashiq, while injured Qaiser, 35, s/o Ghulam Yasin and Bezaad, 14, s/o Muhammad Ashiq. Police of the concerned jurisdiction was informed which reached on the spot and looked out the rescue activities. The accident was said to be caused by carelessness and over-speeding of both of the drivers, as per the initial enquiry. Further investigation was underway.



SARGODHA: A security personnel high alert during first Tarawih people praying in congregation in Gol Chowk Masjid.

Vawda forewarns of potential inflation

MULTAN (INP): In a recent statement, former Federal Minister Faisal Vawda has highlighted the significance of the next 15 days in determining the performance of the federal government. Talking to media, Vawda expressed his views on the current political landscape, emphasizing the need for accountability and suggesting potential changes in laws related to it.

Vawda remarked on the challenges faced by the PTI government, stating that it was not only formed in Pakistan but now needs to be established on the moon due to limited space. He noted the impending strict accountability starting on May 9, signaling a potential shift in the political dynamics.

Drawing attention to the provinces, Vawda humorously referred to Mulajt, Paris, Starplus, and Buzdar two, with a nod to Einstein, indicating a varied and complex political landscape. The former minister shifted his focus to economic concerns, particularly with the onset of Ramadan.

Tree plantation drive starts

F.P. Report

WANA: Tree plantation drive has been started in South Waziristan under the supervision of Pakistan Army.

According to a report on Tuesday, the climate and soil of South Waziristan are highly favorable for forest growth. South Waziristan has forests on an area of ninety five thousand acres.

With the help of Pakistan Army, planting of fifty thousand Chalghoza saplings has been started on 120 acre of land. Chalghoza on an area of one acre can generate an economic benefit of up to one million rupees annually. Seventy thousand olive trees are also being transplanted free of charge by the Pakistan Army. Pakistan Army and Forest Department are also working tirelessly to protect forests and prevent wood cutting.

DPO Kohat pays visit to police stations

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: The DPO Kohat Muhammad Umar Khan Tuesday visited Police Station Cantt and City and checked the documentary records besides meeting the officials there.

During the visit, the DPO also made a detailed review of the security arrangements of the Police Stations as well as the cleanliness situation. The DPO inspected the weapons and other equipment with the policemen on security duty at the main gates and watchtowers of the Police Stations.

The District Police Chief Muhammad Umar Khan strongly urged the security personnel to use bullet proof vest helmets while on duty. The DPO issued clear instructions to the police personnel regarding custody of weapons and taking proper precautions in security duties.

Recent snowfall

Kalash Valley cut off from rest of country

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: The recent heavy snowfall has broken record of previous so many decades. There was snowfall from five to six feet in the Kalash Valley Bumborat and Sheikhanda, which affected the communication system in the premises. The roads were closed for all types vehicular traffic, supply of electricity from a private power house also suspended as there is no power supply by WAPDA, mobile phones were not working and people of the area cannot contact their relatives and shops had severe shortage of food items.

Locals say they removed the snow from the road on self-help basis, so that people could at least bring food for themselves. Abdul Qayyum says that we were forced to lift the bulls from the houses and cleanse the snow from the road. There was a severe shortage of necessities in valley. He said that when Telenor's service was suspended, we collected the donation and sent the oil to the hill above it so that at least our contact with our own relatives could be restored and we could get the news of each other's goodwill.

The Qazi of the Kalash community Zur Mohammad Kailash says that when it was snow, not only our roads were closed but the Telenor service was also suspended. Power was off. He said that the road

was voluntarily opened by both Kailash and the Muslim community, but later the tractor of the Kailash Development Authority made a little clearer.

Locals thanked the renowned physician and social worker, Dr. Mohammad Adnan Bhutta, who always ready to help them in every hour of trouble. This time too, with his efforts, the media team reached the valley of Kailash and before that he has also setup free medical camp for some time when there was no doctor here.

Abdul Jabbar is also a tour guide of the area and a social worker. He said that the snowfall that took place on February 29 was badly affected this scenic valley. We are clearing snowfall from roads and opening the road ourselves as well as we taking the sick to the hospital on back and shoulders, but we have not yet supported by the government.

He said that during the snow, tourists often enjoy the snowfall by going to Murree, Swat and Kalam because the roads of these areas are open but there is no tourist here because the roads were closed here and the communication department of Federal government NHA was also disappeared from the scene. If the communication system is improved, tourists will come here and stay in our hotels, which will also provide us opportunity for earning livelihood and jobs.

"We only have six months of business season and our hotels are closed for six months due to sever cold weather and snowfall, the communication system is not good here," said Abdul Khaliq Kailash, president of the Kailash Valley Hotel Association. Khalil Ahmed, chairman of the Kailash Valley, said that the road of bombing has been handed over to the National Highway Authority and that the road construction as well as the removal of snow and debris from the road is also included in his contract with construction company, but this time the NHA was very disappointed us.

Not only they have stopped construction work on the road, but the snow has not been removed from the road by them and it is feared that the contractor may be withdrawn the fund for snow clearance with the support of NHA officers and will pass the bill.

The people of Kalash valley demanded that the communication system must be improved here so that the tourists can come here easily like other areas during the snowfall, and even in the cold weather, this backward area can be developed by promoting winter tourism here. They also complained of tourism department that they did nothing for promoting snow sports or winter tourism in Kalash valleys Bumborat, Rubmor and Birir in Chitral district.

Admn confiscates 300kg sub-standard meat

F.P. Report

MARDAN: In a separate raid headed by Additional Assistant Commissioner Khwla Haqdar, more than 300 kilograms of substandard meat along with remnants of livestock intended for meat processing were confiscated and handed over to the authorities.

Additionally, five freezers containing hazardous meat were also discovered at the site, on Tuesday.

According to the details, Last night on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Mardan, Fyaz Khan Sherpao, Additional Assistant Commissioner Khwla Haqdar accompa-

nied by police personnel conducted a raid on a warehouse near the Hoti Pul Mardan suspected of producing substandard and adulterated minced meat.

During the raid, more than 300 kilograms of substandard meat along with remnants of livestock intended for meat processing were confiscated and handed over to the authorities. Additionally, five freezers containing hazardous meat were also discovered at the site.

The authorities were informed that the warehouse, operated by an individual named Rasool Khan, was involved in producing minced meat by mixing

harmful additives and chemicals, which was then supplied to various markets in Mardan.

Two individuals present at the scene were apprehended, and strict legal action will be taken against all those involved in this illicit activity, as confirmed by Additional Assistant Commissioner Khwla Haqdar. The raid underscores the government's commitment to combating illegal practices and ensuring the safety and well-being of consumers. Further investigations are underway to identify and apprehend all individuals involved in this heinous business.

GSTA hold protest

F.P. Report

LARKANA: All teachers from schools across Larkana district protested in front of the press club against the filing of a case by the Government School Teachers Association (GSTA) in Larkana with the help of Gsta district Larkana president GM Abro.

It was not repeated, the protesters were carrying banners and placards with the slogans of respect education and dismissal of the case filed against the teachers. Dildar Ali Chandio, Nazir Muhammad Mugheri and others protested and said that a month ago during the issue of tension between two gazetted officers to take charge, on the request of some officers of Larkana district, Sindh Graduate

Association unit Larkana district president GM Abro.

But a case has been registered and we clearly say that the District Education Officer of the Department of Education Larkana Gulbhar Magsi is involved in this matter. Orders should be issued to dismiss the case filed against Abro. Other teachers' organization Gsta is ready to expand the scope of the protest throughout Sindh.

Meanwhile, the closing ceremony of the 6th Sindh Games 2024 was held in Mirpur Khas, in which the students of Government Girls Degree College of Larkana won four medals including gold medal by showing excellent performance.

In this regard, student Ayesha Jatoti won a gold

medal in the 100 meters race, 2 bronze medals were won by Ayesha Jatoti in the 400 meters race, 3 silver medals were won by the girls' basketball girls' college team, 4 silver medals were won by the girls' throwball girls' college team.

Similarly, in the 6th College Sindh Games, one gold medal, two silver medals, one bronze medal, a total of four medals were awarded to the principal of the college, Prof. Nafis Akhtar Ansari, director of physical education, Anila Abaro, all the teaching staff of the girls' college and the medal-winning students and all sportspersons. Congratulations were given to all the students of the Girls' College who participated.



Conditions inside Fukushima's nuclear reactors still unclear

TOKYO (AP): Japan marked 13 years since a massive earthquake and tsunami hit the country's northern coasts. Nearly 20,000 people died, whole towns were wiped out and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was destroyed, creating deep fears of radiation that linger today. As the nation observes the anniversary, the AP explains what is happening now at the plant and in neighboring areas.

A magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck on March 11, 2011, causing a tsunami that battered northern coastal towns in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures. The tsunami, which topped 15 meters (50 feet) in some areas, slammed into the nuclear plant, destroying its power supply and fuel cooling systems, and causing meltdowns at reactors No. 1, 2 and 3. Hydrogen explosions caused massive radiation leaks and contamination in the area.

The operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, says that the tsunami couldn't have been anticipated. Government and independent investigations and some court decisions have said the accident was the result of human error, safety negligence, lax oversight by regulators and collusion. Japan has since introduced stricter safety standards and at one point shifted to a nuclear energy phaseout. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government reversed that policy and has accelerated restarts of workable reactors to maintain nuclear power as a main source of Japan's power supply. A deadly Jan. 1 earthquake in Japan's northcentral region destroyed many homes and roads but didn't damage an idled nuclear power plant. Even so, it caused worry that current evacuation plans that solely focus on radiation leaks could be unworkable.

The nation marked a moment of silence, with Kishida attending a memorial in Fukushima. About 20,000 of more than 160,000 evacuated residents across Fukushima still haven't returned home. Decontamination work before the Tokyo Olympics meant to showcase Fukushima's recovery led to the elimination of some no-go zones, but they remain in seven of 12 towns that had been fully or partially off-limits. In Futaba, the hardest-hit town and a co-host of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, a small area was opened in 2022. About 100 people, or 1.5% percent of the pre-disaster population, have returned to live. The other host town, Okuma, which along with Futaba sacrificed part of its land to build an interim storage site for nuclear waste gathered from the decontamination, has seen 6% of its former residents return. Annual surveys show the majority of evacuees

have no intention of returning home, citing lack of jobs, schools and lost communities, as well as radiation concerns.

Residents who have raised radiation worries or linked it to their health problems have come under attack for hurting Fukushima's reputation. The disaster-hit towns, including those in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures, have seen sharp population drops. Fukushima Gov. Masao Uchibori said on NHK TV that a growing number of young people want to move to Fukushima to open businesses or help in the reconstruction, and he expressed hope that more residents will return. Last August, Fukushima Daiichi began discharging treated water into the sea, and is currently releasing a fourth 7,800-ton batch of treated water. So far, daily seawater sampling results have met safety standards. The plan has faced protests from local fishers and neighboring countries, especially China, which has banned Japanese seafood imports. Fukushima Daiichi has struggled to handle the contaminated water since the 2011 meltdowns. TEPCO says the start of the process is a milestone and removing the tanks is crucial to make space for facilities needed as decommissioning progresses. The contaminated cooling water is pumped up, treated and stored in about 1,000 tanks. The government and TEPCO say the water is diluted with massive seawater before release, making it safer than international standards.

Despite earlier fears that the water discharge would further hurt Fukushima's hard-hit fishing industry, they have not damaged its reputation domestically. China's ban on Japanese seafood, which mostly hit scallop exporters in Hokkaido, apparently prompted Japanese consumers to eat more Fukushima seafood. Sampling and monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency have also boosted confidence in local fish. Fukushima fishing returned to normal operations in 2021, and the local catch is now about one-fifth of its pre-disaster level because of a decline in the fishing population and smaller catch sizes. The government has earmarked 10 billion yen (\$680 million) to support Fukushima fisheries. The contents of the three reactors is still largely a mystery.

Little is known, for instance, about the melted fuel's condition or exactly where it's located in the reactors. Not even a spoonful of the fuel has been removed. About 880 tons of melted nuclear fuel remain inside the three damaged reactors, and Japanese officials say removing it would take 30-40 years. Experts call that timeline overly optimistic.

Claudia sign commitment for peace

MEXICO CITY (AP): Mexico's presidential candidates signed a commitment for peace with Catholic Church leaders that proposes strategies to reduce the violence in the country. During the meeting led by the Episcopal Conference of Mexico, presidential front-runner and ruling party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum said she would be open to dialogue but didn't to accept several criticisms of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's security strategy made by the religious leaders.

"I do not share the pessimistic evaluation of the current moment," said Sheinbaum, who contended that not all Mexicans feel fear, distrust or uncertainty, as the church said in a document previously shared with all three candidates. Sheinbaum said homicides dropped during the presidency of López Obrador. But organized crime has long controlled swaths of Mexico through violence and corruption. It has diversified beyond drug trafficking in recent years, extorting businesses big and small for protection payments. According to the church leaders, Mexico suf-

fers from a "deep crisis of violence and social decomposition." The church's first criticism of the government's security strategy arose in 2022, when the murder of two Jesuits priests in the north of the country shook the public opinion and the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

These concerns were discussed in 2023 during a "National Peace Dialogue" that brought together civil society, academics, violence victims and businesspeople who searched for solutions to achieve justice, security and peace. Document is titled "National Commitment to Peace" and brings together policies aimed at fighting Mexico's chronic violence. The relationship between López Obrador and the Catholic Church has been tense ever since the murder of the Jesuits priests. Bishop Ramón Castro, secretary general of the Episcopal Conference, said last week that he wished for a deeper dialogue between the president and the church. During her speech, opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez criticized the increased military presence in Mexico and recalled that eight priests

have been murdered during López Obrador's presidency. "I will make all these proposals my own," said Gálvez of the commitment to peace. "I am convinced that the churches, and particularly the Catholic Church, to which I belong, play a fundamental role in building peace." Among her proposals to confront Mexico's violence, Gálvez said she would improve the working conditions of police, prosecutors and judges. "A problem of this magnitude requires everyone's participation," Gálvez said.

Jorge Álvarez Máynez, a little-known congressman running the presidency for Mexico's small Citizen's Movement, also expressed support for the church leaders and addressed López Obrador's strategy of "hugs, not bullets." "They told us that we didn't have to worry because they (the criminals) were only going to kill each other," Álvarez Máynez said. "But they were wrong." Last February, bishops of Guerrero, one of the most violent states in Mexico, negotiated with criminal groups in an attempt to stop the wave of violence that afflicts its population.

Russia responsible for Navalny's death: UN

GENEVA (Reuters): The UN human rights expert on Russia said that the death of opposition politician Alexei Navalny was Moscow's responsibility as he was either killed in prison or died from detention conditions that amounted to torture.

Russian authorities say Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic, died on Feb. 16 in an Arctic prison of natural causes. Navalny's wife Yulia Navalnaya has accused Putin of having him killed, an accusation the Kremlin rejects.

"So the Russian government is responsible, one way or another, for his death," Mariana Katzarova told Reuters on the sidelines of an event on Russian political prisoners at the

United Nations in Geneva. She cited long periods of solitary confinement which she said amounted to about 300 days, which could have caused "a slow death over several years". Katzarova, who was appointed last year and has not yet been granted access to the country, also said other detainees in Russia could suffer the same fate as Navalny. She was "very worried" about opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza.

"Ever since the death of Alexei Navalny, there is no day passing without asking myself, who is the next Navalny?" she said. "And there will be a next Navalny, for sure, with this level of repression." Katzarova, a Bulgarian former investigator for Amnesty International, is

one of dozens of independent human rights experts mandated by the United Nations to report on specific themes or crises, though the only one reporting on one of the five states with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Civil society groups say that around 600-1,000 political prisoners are being detained in Russia for voicing opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine or refusing to fight in it. Moscow rejects criticism of its domestic rights record. In her address at the UN meeting earlier, where Nobel Prize-winning Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov also spoke, Katzarova called for more pressure on Moscow to release political detainees and investigate Navalny's death.

Spain's PM calls for recognition of Palestinian state

BILBAO (AP): Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that he will propose that Spain's parliament recognizes a Palestinian state. "I will propose granting Spain's recognition to the Palestinian state," Sánchez said. "I do this out of moral conviction, for a just cause and because it is the only way that the two states, Israel and Palestine, can live together in peace."

Sánchez added his voice to a chorus of other European leaders and government officials who have said that they could support a two-state solution in the Middle East as international frustration grows with Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories. French President Emmanuel Macron said last month that it's not "taboo" for France to recognize a Palestinian state. British Foreign Minister David Cameron said that the United Kingdom could officially recognize a Palestinian state after a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. Sánchez said that his position on the conflict in the Gaza Strip is much like his country's support for Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion more than two years ago. He stressed that Spain demanded "respect for international law from Russia, and from Israel, for the violence to end, the recognition of two states, and for humanitarian aid to reach Gaza." His comments at a rights conference in the city of Bilbao came as aid shipments were headed for Gaza amid the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a new international willingness to work around Israeli restrictions. Five months after Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage, Israel's military has battered the territory, killing more than 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Russia detains South Korean man

MOSCOW (BBC): A South Korean man has been detained in Russia accused of espionage, Russian media report. South Korea's foreign ministry has also confirmed the arrest, saying they were trying to provide consular support. Baek Won-soon was arrested in the far-eastern city of Vladivostok "at the start of the year", state agency Tass reported, and is now in a Moscow jail.

He is believed to be the first South Korean detained in Russia under suspicion of espionage. Little is known about his case, with South Korea's foreign ministry saying "the details" were under investigation and "it is difficult to comment". But Russian state media Tass quoted an unnamed official in their report saying Mr Baek is alleged to have passed on information "constituting state secrets to foreign intelligence services." South Korean media have reported that Seoul was only officially informed by Russian authorities of the arrest last month.

Yonhap, a South Korean outlet, is reporting that Mr Baek was arrested by Russia's Federal Security Service in January after arriving in Vladivostok from China. The outlet said he is a religious worker and he had been accompanied by his wife, who was also detained but then later released. She is believed to be back in South Korea, the outlet reported. Mr Baek's detention is the latest in a series of arrests of foreigners made by Russian authorities since the war in Ukraine began two years ago.

Moscow has been accused of arresting other countries' nationals to use as a political bargaining chip and for prisoner exchanges. Among the cases are American man and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich who was detained last March on espionage charges and a Russian-US journalist Alsu Kurmasheva who was accused of spreading "false information" about the Russian military.



TOKYO: People observe a moment of silence at 2:46 p.m., the moment the earthquake struck in Iwaki, Fukushima prefecture, northern Japan.

S Africa's party field candidates who have faced graft allegations

CAPE TOWN (AP): South Africa's ruling African National Congress said that six officials facing accusations of corruption have been included on its list of candidates for this year's election, bringing more scrutiny on a party that already has had its reputation badly damaged by graft.

ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula told reporters that four of the six were included provisionally and were still to be cleared by the party's internal integrity committee having been implicated in a national commission of inquiry into corruption that exposed massive government graft during the administration of former President Jacob Zuma. Another 14 officials implicated by the corruption inquiry were either disqualified from standing or were not nominated as candidates, Mbalula said, without disclosing their names.

The ANC has finalized a list of 284 candidates who are in the running to become lawmakers, and some of them cabinet ministers, following the May 29 national and provincial elections. President Cyril Ramaphosa also is on the list as he seeks a second and final term. How many of the ANC candidates are installed as lawmakers will depend on how many votes the party receives in an election that analysts predict will be its toughest since

coming to power at the end of apartheid in 1994. South Africans vote for parties and not candidates in national elections and parties receive seats in Parliament depending on their share of the vote. Lawmakers then elect the president.

Corruption is a burning issue in South Africa and is one of the factors responsible for the ANC's decline in support. The ANC's list was closely watched for signs of whether the party would take a strict stance with regards to the allegations after Ramaphosa made fighting corruption one of his priorities when he was elected to succeed Zuma in 2019. Ramaphosa has had his own reputation tarnished by a separate scandal involving more than \$500,000 in cash that was stashed in a couch at his ranch and stolen in 2020. The theft only came to light in 2022. The four ANC candidates provisionally included on the list pending the finalization of integrity investigations include current Sports and Culture Minister Zizi Kodwa, former Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba and former State Security Minister David Mahlobo, the three who have come under the most scrutiny. Current Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe, who is also the chairperson of the ANC, was cleared to stand after the judge-led national inquiry into corruption recommended he be investi-

gated for allegedly receiving security upgrades at his home from a company at the center of multiple scandals.

Mbalula said there were "no adverse findings" against Mantashe from the ANC's integrity committee. Although the national inquiry into corruption, which lasted from 2018-2022, implicated numerous senior ANC and government figures and recommended they be investigated, hardly any have faced criminal charges. Mantashe, Kodwa, Gigaba and Mahlobo have not been charged with any corruption. Mbalula said every one of the approved candidates for the election, from Ramaphosa down, were the subjects of "rigorous" eligibility investigations, were interviewed by an ANC integrity commission and agreed to lifestyle audits as the ANC attempts to restore its credibility following the corruption-tainted era of Zuma. Zuma led South Africa from 2009-2018 and is alleged to have overseen a period of widespread government graft that is estimated to have cost the country over \$20 billion.

He is currently on trial for corruption, although that case relates to him allegedly receiving bribes before he was president. The trial started in 2021 but Zuma has launched a series of legal actions that have delayed the case and no testimony has yet been heard.

'Anybody but Putin': Russians in Serbia vote without hope

BELGRADE (AFP): "unfriendly". Around 280 polling stations will be open in some 140 territories, according to the Central Election Commission's website. Most will be open during the same three-day period as back in Russia -- from March 15 to 17 -- while some embassies will provide the opportunity for early voting, according to the TASS news agency. "It's my civil obligation," said Viktor, a 35-year-old Russian living in Novi Sad, north of Belgrade. "I will vote for anybody but Putin." Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, tens of thousands of Russians have settled in Serbia, where the community has largely flourished. Some have opened restaurants or started tech companies and other businesses, making a noticeable and buzzy impact on the Serbian capital. Serbia has also offered room for political activists still angling to remain relevant in Russia. In recent weeks Russian expats have organised protests against the war in Ukraine, held memorial ceremonies following the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and petitioned for Nadezhdin's candidacy. "Here we have an opportunity to stay on the street and say the things we say to you today," Ksenia Kuznetsova, a 33-year-old

Russian, told AFP on the sidelines of an anti-war protest. "All of my friends, all of my family [that] stayed in Russia, have no voice. And I feel an obligation to do it instead of them," she added. While she planned to vote, Kuznetsova is worried about having to go into the Russian embassy to cast her ballot. Some also worry that Moscow is ramping up pressure on the Russian diaspora across the world. For Elena Kuposova and her family of four, that fear is all too real. They faced imminent deportation from Serbia after their residency permit was rejected without explanation. The rejection follows years of living lawfully in Serbia after leaving Russia nearly a decade ago. Kuposova's family had invested in a business, sent their children to Serbian schools, learned the language and largely stayed out of politics.

"We are very law-abiding people, very quiet in our life," she told AFP. "I've never been politically active in Serbia, nor in Russia..." With one exception, Kuposova admitted. She signed an anti-war petition. This might have been enough to catch the attention of Russian intelligence agencies, she suspects, who pressured their Serbian allies to act. "They really don't want people outside

Russia [to] say anything against war ever, and this act against our family is quite random," she added. They feel an example has been made of them to scare others. "Other people hear about it and they will be afraid to say anything at all," she said. The family appealed the decision and it appeared they may get a reprieve from Serbian authorities. But the story has rattled the Russian community in Serbia, and came after a Russian exile known for organising cultural events had his residence permit annulled, forcing him to leave. Elsewhere, singer and comedian Maxim Galkin said he was denied entry into Indonesia for a concert in Bali in January, while the anti-war Russian rock band Bi-2 was briefly detained by Thai authorities, sparking fears they would be deported to Russia.

Yet the crackdowns -- along with Navalny's death in a Russian prison last month -- has only reinforced the exiles' belief that they were right to flee Russia. Whether the vote is fair or not, exiles are adamant that it is one of the few avenues left to have a say. "I plan to participate but that does not mean that I trust the Russian election system," said Alex Maddalena, 44. "I'm sure that it's completely untrustworthy."

Russian student jailed for pro-Ukraine wi-fi name

MOSCOW (BBC): A student has been sentenced to 10 days in jail in Moscow after renaming his wi-fi network with a pro-Kyiv slogan. The Moscow State University student had titled the network "Slava Ukraini!" which means "Glory to Ukraine!". A Moscow court found him guilty of displaying "symbols of extremist organisations".

Since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, thousands have been handed prison terms or fines for criticising the invasion or supporting Ukraine. The student was arrested in Moscow, after a

police officer had reported the network name to authorities. According to court documents, officers inspected his room within the university's student accommodation, and found his personal computer and a wi-fi router. The court said he had used the network to "promote the slogan 'Slava Ukraini!' to an unlimited number of users within wi-fi range." The router has now been confiscated. "Slava Ukraini" has become a rallying cry for supporters of Ukraine, and is regularly heard chanted during protests against Russia's

full-scale invasion, which it launched on 24 February, 2022. The student was found guilty of "public demonstration of Nazi symbolism... or symbols of extremist organisations". Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly made baseless claims about a "neo-Nazi regime" in Ukraine, and used it to justify his invasion. The student is the latest in a long list of ordinary Russians who have been punished for their comments - or actions - about the war. Last month, hundreds of people were detained for simply laying flowers in memory of oppo-

sition leader Alexei Navalny, who died under suspicious circumstances in an Arctic Circle prison. The conflict is not even allowed to be called a "war" in Russia - it must be referred to as a "special military operation". According to Amnesty International, last year more than 21,000 people were targeted by Russia's "repressive laws" used to "crack down on anti-war activists". The human rights group said "deeply unfair trials" were used to "dish out prison sentences and hefty fines to silence critics in response to the slightest dissent."

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

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How power turns into peril

THE newly throned Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has directed the authorities to ensure uninterrupted gas and power supply to the consumers during the holy month of Ramadan. He also directed for provision of every possible facility to the private sector, and local and foreign investors in the exploration of gas and oil, refining, and distribution of these natural resources. The Prime Minister was of the view that the government was not meant for doing business rather its responsibility was to extend all kinds of facilities to the private sector and ensure the protection of the rights of the consumers especially the vulnerable segments of society. He also asked for steps for the promotion of global investment in the exploration of Tight Gas and undersea oil and gas reserves to utilize huge potentials in Pakistan's maritime sector.

Today's Pakistan has become an epicenter of administrative and regulatory issues seriously affecting public life and civic activities of society. Kitchen heating and light are the essential elements and no household could survive without them. Unfortunately, those dearly needed utilities are now rare in major cities while the public is compelled to pay excessive bills for their partial or no availability. Historically, State-Owned Entities (SOEs) are the major producers and distributors of basic utilities including electricity, gas, water, and sanitation services, henceforth the majority of the enterprises face political interference, institutional corruption, and bulk operational losses or circular debt which has now shaped into an incurable problem in the country. The government and the State-Owned utility providers gradually shifted their operational losses to the consumers on account of indirect/direct taxes, increased tariff rates, Fuel Price Adjustment (FPA), and multiple other heads without any remorse and accountability.

At the time, there is a permanent 3-hour electricity shutdown schedule across Pakistan in the summer wherein natural gas often is not available to consumers in major cities in winter from October through February and each household is compelled to use an LPG cylinder for cooking and heating purposes. Amid such gruesome conditions, the relevant authorities frequently raise the prices of gas and electricity at regular intervals. The matter became worse when local utility prices were conditioned with the IMF's bailout package for Pakistan, which pressured the government to raise the prices of gas and electricity to address the growing issue of circular debt.

Although, Pakistani leaders accept ground realities and are aware of the public issues even then failed to resolve problems due to bureaucratic hurdles and pressure from the cartels. Over 200 State-Owned entities are currently indebted in loans and due for privatization but each government cut expenses from social sectors including education, healthcare, and Public development programs, and relentlessly channeled massive funds into those institutions in the name of reforms, restructuring, and rehabilitation. Realistically, the government was not meant to do business, provide gas and electricity, or undertake mining or transport projects rather its responsibility was to extend all kinds of facilities to the private sector and ensure the protection of the rights of the consumers while taking care of social sectors and public wellbeing. Now a publically elected government has assumed its responsibility. Mr Sharif and his team must work in the larger interest of the public through surgical reforms in all domains from governance to politics, police to Judiciary, education, healthcare, armed forces, industry and business, revenue and taxation, and multiple other avenues that need standardization and regulation by the government. It will not only enhance government control in all fields but also increase revenue through the formalization of the economy. Although nation-building is a tough job yet every step brings us closer to the destination.

Role of Ombudsman Office

THE Federal Ombudsman office has recently informed its countrymen that the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat received and processed a record number of complaints which stood at 194,106 that is 18% higher than the preceding years. The authorities claimed that 88% complaints were disposed of within the prescribed limit of 60 days, wherein each and every decision was implemented through a comprehensive system of strict monitoring, follow up and verification before justice dispensed to the people at their doorsteps.

Founded in 1983, the Federal Ombudsman Office is the least known and poorly performed institution of the State of Pakistan. Historically, a lack of public awareness and inaccessibility remained big hurdle for the masses to benefit from services of the Ombudsman Office. Meanwhile, insufficient infrastructure, shortage of manpower, limited authority, and no cooperation from the sister agencies and other government departments were the other impediments that badly marred the service delivery of the Ombudsman secretariat throughout the past. Owing to these circumstances, the office could not perform according to the expectation of the public. Recently, the federal Ombudsman office established its regional offices across the country and constituted a team of professional investigators to effectively investigate and resolve public disputes in a stipulated time frame. The Ombudsman staff often hold Khulli katchehries and mediate talks/ agreement between petitioner and accused through Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) mechanism to settle their mutual issues amicably. Thus, Ombudsman office provide a window for the people to settle down their disputes through mutual consensus who otherwise are disappointed from lengthy courts hearing and prolonged investigation of the LEAs. The Federal Ombudsman Secretariat has implemented a wide range of measures to resolve the problems of the Overseas Pakistanis, pensioners and prisoners specially the women and juvenile inmates in government custody, which considerably enhanced its worth and improved service delivery to the public.

In the current scenario, the Ombudsman office is playing vital role in resolving family matters and land disputes along side assisting the police and lower courts to dispose off their long-held unsolvable cases in short span of time. There is need for further empowerment and strengthening of the Ombudsman setup in all parts of the country, so this mechanism perform a more kinetic role in our society.

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US' hollow response to Israel's shameful starving of Gaza

Chris Doyle

PALESTINIANS in Gaza must be confused. Most know that it is American bombs that Israeli forces have used to pulverize nearly every square centimeter of their besieged enclave. American food parcels are now landing on them too. Death or dinner; bombs or bread. Most Palestinians in Gaza probably have not watched or read "The Hunger Games," but the feeling that their lives are being toyed with is strong.

Emphasizing the absurd lethal lottery of the aid drops, five Palestinians were killed and 10 injured when one pallet crashed into them after its parachute failed to open. The international community has violated so many of the cardinal principles of international law and aid delivery that trashing the "do no harm" principle seems barely worth a mention in this context, as 23 Palestinians have thus far died from starvation and dehydration. Correction: 23 Palestinians have been starved and dehydrated to death.

In Gaza, there are few large, clear drop zones, such as those used in Syria for example. The parachutes can land on dangerous, unsafe, semi-destroyed buildings. Winds, not least in the upper atmosphere, can carry them off course, which is why some pallets have landed in the Mediterranean. There are no forces to receive and secure the aid packages, let alone ensure that they get to the most needy. In fact, the fittest and strongest are most likely to get there first, not the ones dying of starvation. It becomes a dangerous scrum, as those surviving on grass and animal feed fight for every last morsel.

Yes, the current American leadership has developed a bizarrely last-minute aversion to seeing Palestinian babies and others dying of starvation. It does not look good, but then again nor did the carpet-bombing of much of Gaza. This conscience was barely pricked when schools, hospitals, mosques, churches and homes crumpled under the 900-kg bunker busting bombs the US had supplied.

President Joe Biden made the unusual step of slamming Israel in his State

of the Union speech. "To the leadership of Israel, I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip. Protecting and saving innocent lives has to be a priority." Why was such a statement not made when Israel imposed a total siege in October, Palestinians ask. Biden also announced a plan to build a pier in Gaza. "Tonight, I'm directing the US military to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary pier in the Mediterranean on the coast of Gaza that can receive large shipments carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shel-

electricity since early October last year. And bottles of Tabasco sauce and Skittles sweets formed part of the first US airdrop on Gaza. Israel has permitted this. Perhaps the state that imposed a total siege on Gaza did not have much choice.

Back in October, there was no such intention of allowing Palestinians food and water. Many still object to it now, including government ministers. Still, Israel has insisted that it must inspect all aid entering Gaza, no matter by what means. Dates and other dried fruits have been rejected purely because the

instruct Israel to open the land borders and allow full access for trucks is extraordinary. Rather than build a new port in Gaza, why did the US not insist that Israel's port of Ashdod be used?

Let us be clear. The fastest and most efficient way to get lifesaving aid to a population that is starving is via trucks, not air. The maritime route will take time to get up and running, though in the long run there will be benefits of Gaza having a port, providing Israel does not bomb it. As aid agency Doctors Without Borders made clear, this is all a "distraction."

The US could also have reminded Israel that, as the occupying power, it has legal responsibility for the welfare of the population under occupation. It is Israel that should be supplying that aid, not the US taxpayer. Israel should be turning the water back on, providing the electricity. All of this only focuses attention on the weakness of Biden. Rather than deploy the full power of his office and bring a recalcitrant ally to heel, he has allowed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to dictate the terms of engagement, no matter how ridiculous.

Israel, of course, claims Hamas diverts much of the aid. The evidence, as ever, is thin. No doubt this does happen. But what matters more: a starving population getting fed or whether Hamas fighters get some water and flour. In other contexts, aid is not restricted. No power stopped aid into Syria for fear of Syrian regime soldiers possibly getting some rice. Starving Hamas is an admittance of using starvation as a weapon of war, except Israel has extended that to an entire population. As Muslims around the world start their Ramadan fasting, Palestinians in Gaza will just be continuing their externally imposed fast. For them, there is barely ever an iftar to break their fast. Just across the border with Egypt, the food, water and medicines all sit waiting. The trucks are there. What is lacking is the political and moral will of the world's most powerful leaders, not just to get the border crossings opened and the aid in, but also to end the bombardment and slaughter. It is truly shameful.

Yes, the current American leadership has developed a bizarrely last-minute aversion to seeing Palestinian babies and others dying of starvation. It does not look good, but then again nor did the carpet-bombing of much of Gaza. This conscience was barely pricked when schools, hospitals, mosques, churches and homes crumpled under the 900-kg bunker busting bombs the US had supplied. President Joe Biden made the unusual step of slamming Israel in his State of the Union speech.

ters."

The maritime route will take time to establish. Sixty days, according to the Pentagon - days most Palestinians do not have. When fully operational, the US states that it could deliver up to 2 million meals a day. The first ship, a Spanish one, is ready to leave Cyprus, but it is not clear how it will offload its cargo. At least it has a possible medium to long-term benefit.

The airdrops have largely been for show. They are the most costly, most hazardous and least efficient means of getting aid into Gaza. Nobody in the humanitarian sector was enthused by the airdrops. For most Palestinians, they are just a rather hollow attempt at virtue signaling.

Some pallets contained microwave meals, barely useful in a Strip that has been deprived of mains

stones had not been removed. The reality is that the average number of trucks entering Gaza is at 20 percent of what it was before Oct. 7, while the need has shot up.

It is one thing for local powers like Jordan and Egypt to arrange airdrops. These states can hardly push Israel into a change of behavior.

They understandably wanted to do something. But the US is a global superpower. Israel depends on it for military aid, economic partnership and diplomatic backing and shielding at the UN. An American president has a thicket of powerful levers he could deploy should he wish. Biden has yet to do so, although reports do indicate plans are afoot to delay future transfers of American weaponry to Israel. For the US to resort to aid drops when it could

If Gaza has not given up, why should we?

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

ENRAGED Arabs feel helpless in the face of the Israeli genocide in Gaza often say that "all we can do for Gaza is offer our Du'a." But is it true that only invocations and supplications are possible, while tens of thousands of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are being killed and wounded by the Israeli war machine? No. There is much that can be done and, in fact, many people around the world are already doing it.

In the traditions of Hadith, the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad, the most cited reference to the need for action, collectively or individually, is: "Whoever among you sees evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot do so, then with his tongue. If he cannot do so, then with his heart, which is the weakest level of faith." Du'a is an invocation, communicated by the heart; it is a Muslim's conversation with God. It can be verbalized, or not. In group prayers, especially during Friday sermons or throughout the holy month of Ramadan, among other occasions, Du'as can be performed collectively. The nature of the collective Du'a highlights the priorities of any given Muslim group, community or even nation.

Gaza, Palestine and Al-Aqsa Mosque are among the main themes, or causes, for which Muslims beseech God's help. "Oh Allah, please free the Al-Aqsa Mosque," "Oh, Merciful One, stand by the children of Gaza," or "Oh, All Powerful, deliver Palestinians from injustice" are just a few of an almost endless stream of Du'as that are uttered from Makkah to Madinah and Jerusalem to Kuala Lumpur, in every mosque and every Muslim home throughout the world.

A Du'a is the affirmation of the relationship between man and God, delineating that nothing would occur without God's permission and that a person, no matter how poor, beleaguered or weakened, can transcend all earthly relations to speak directly to the highest of all authorities. "Your Lord has proclaimed, 'Call upon Me, I will respond to you,'" Allah says in Surah Ghafir, verse 60. That does not necessarily mean that Du'a is a last resort. Rather, it goes hand in hand with action. It does not supplant action but reinforces it. Collective Du'a is a communal declaration that all Muslims are driven by similar priorities; those of peace, justice, equality, mercy, kindness and all the rest. The dichotomy, however, arises from the fact that many Muslims feel unable to effect change regarding the horrific fate of Gaza, whether on a small or a large scale, thus the widespread notion that "all we can do is offer Du'a." I have visited South Africa several times in the past. Each time, I learned more than I could have possibly imparted. I learned that people power is far more effective, in the long run, than the opposing power of state violence. I also learned that no worldly laws, especially those that aim to impose racist apartheid, can possibly stand against our innate rejection of social inequality

and other evils. Finally, I also learned that, when people rise up, nothing can stand in their way. This last maxim is as true in the case of South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle as it is now in Palestine, particularly in Gaza. Famed Tunisian poet Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi wrote 100 years ago: "Should the people one day truly aspire to life, then fate must need respond, the night must need shine forth, and the shackles must need break." His powerful words also included a caveat, an ominous warning of terrible things to come: "Those who are not embraced by life's yearning, shall evaporate in her air and vanish."

South Africa did not make that choice, nor did Gaza. And every attempt at crushing these great peoples failed. They remained, persisted, healed their wounds and fought back. I always believed that South Africa would play a central role in international solidarity with Palestine. But, frankly, I had not expected that the African nation would become so intrinsic, even unparalleled, in holding Israel accountable for its crimes in Palestine. Its push to hold Israel and its war criminals to account at the International Court of Justice continues unabated. It was not the sheer military, economic or political power or prowess that made South Africa a factor in the Palestinian fight for justice. It was the sheer will of a nation and, subsequently, a government to translate its desire to achieve a more equitable, just and law-governed international system into meaningful action.

South Africa could have simply resorted to self-pity, highlighting its supposed insignificance in the face of more powerful US-Western governments that continue to support Israel, providing it with all the weapons necessary to sustain its genocide. It, too, could have resorted to prayers, invocations and supplications as the "only thing that can be done." It did not. On the contrary, it used its diplomatic leverage and moral authority to articulate one of the most powerful cases in favor of Palestinian freedom and against Israeli brutality ever argued before an international legal institution.

It is understandable that many may feel helpless, especially when one attempts to fathom the enormity of the crime underway in Gaza. Israel might not have used weapons of mass destruction in the Strip, but it has certainly applied all of its Western-supplied weapons to inflict mass destruction. If Gaza has not given up, why should we? Even giving up is a privilege. Gaza does not have that privilege and we should not grant it to ourselves. Gaza is fighting for its very survival and we, too, must fight for the same end.

Make a Du'a for Gaza. Let it be your first act as you undertake your quest for a just world. And make another Du'a for Gaza, to beseech God to reward your selfless and well-intentioned deeds. And, if you are besieged by desperation, still make a Du'a, so that you may discover the power to make a difference, which has always been within your grasp.

Remembering the beauty of Ramadan in Gaza

Eman Alhaj Ali

THE holy month of Ramadan has started. Muslims across the world are fasting, spending time with their families and dedicating themselves to prayer and worship. But for us, the Muslims of Gaza, this holy month is filled with heartbreak and mourning. For more than five months now, we have endured massacres, disease, starvation and thirst at the hands of the Israeli army. Its violence and brutality have not stopped or lessened as Ramadan begins.

As many of us struggle to put food on the table to break fast or to find a safe place for prayer, the memories of past Ramazans keep us warm. Amid the buzzing of Israeli drones and the sound of explosions, I close my eyes and remember the splendour of Ramadan in Gaza. The preparations for the holy month would always start early. Several

weeks ahead of it, people would go out shopping for all the Ramadan necessities. A favourite place to go would be the Old City and its traditional market, Al-Zawiya.

There, all the traditional Ramadan food items could be found: sour pickles, the best dates, delicious olives, spices that filled the air with their aroma, thyme, dried apricot paste to make qamar al-din drinks, dried fruits, and various types of juices, with khoroub (carob) being the most popular. New clothes would also be a necessary purchase. Prayer gowns would be a popular choice, as would fancy dresses for the girls and sleek costumes for the boys.

Children would pull on parents' hands and ask them to buy one of the colourful lanterns on display that read "hallou ya hallou, Ramadan Kareem ya hallou" ("dear, dear, Ramadan Kareem, dear"). The streets

would be bustling with people, decorations would be going up, cheerful Ramadan songs would be played. The atmosphere of anticipation would be like no other. Then on the eve of the first day of Ramadan, Gaza's neighbourhoods would be filled with the sound of tarawih prayers. The kids would be out until late, playing in the streets, holding lanterns, chanting, singing, and setting off fireworks to mark the beginning of the holy month.

Families would come together to share al-suhur meal and pray al-fajr together. Then some may nap, others would go out for school and work. By the afternoon, all would be back home and it would be time to read the Holy Quran. Kids would read and memorise the verses at home or in mosques. Parents and grandparents would tell stories of

prophets to children and grandchildren. Then the time would come to prepare food for the iftar meal. The hour before sunset, the whole neighbourhood would be filled with the delicious smell of various foods.

The kitchen in every home would be full of people working hard: one would be doing the maqlouba (a meat dish with rice and vegetables), another - the musakhan (a chicken dish), and still another - the mulukhiya (jute soup). Meanwhile, a neighbour may drop by and bring a platter full of the food his family had just made; he, of course, would not be allowed to go home empty-handed. With sunset approaching, the iftar table would be laid and everyone would sit down. Soon the call from the mosques to break fast would come, accompanied by the

melody of takbirat. Everyone would share the delicious food, chatting joyfully and laughing. After iftar, men, women, and children would head to the mosques to pray tarawih together, the sounds of the Holy Quran and prayers permeating every part of Gaza. Then the most joyous time of the day would come for children, as moms prepare qatayif, a popular dessert that is only made during the holy month.

Once the qatayif is all gone, families would go visit each other or gather in front of the TV to watch their favourite Ramadan series. For the people of Gaza, Ramadan is indeed the most special time of year. Gaza during Ramadan is the most beautiful place on Earth. But this holy month, we cannot celebrate and enjoy worship in peace. The colourful lights and lanterns and the chants and songs have been replaced with the flashes and sounds

of Israeli bombs exploding. The joyful noise of children playing outside in the streets has been replaced with the screams of people buried under the wreckage after another Israeli bombardment.

The neighbourhoods full of life have been transformed into graveyards. Mosques are not crowded with people because they are all destroyed. The streets are not bustling with people, because they are all covered in rubble. People fast past iftar because they have no food or water. The families gather not to greet each other and celebrate, but to mourn together the dead. As the holy month of Ramadan begins, we are bidding farewell to martyr after martyr. The pain is made that much worse by the realisation that the world has abandoned the Palestinian people, allowing Israel to continue its genocide during the Muslim holy month.

The problem isn’t Biden’s ‘illegal’ gaffe

Jose Antonio Vargas

IN 2017, then-House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi invited me to attend President Donald Trump's first address to a joint session of Congress, one of a few undocumented immigrants who were invited by Democratic leaders to the "People's House." Then, as now, immigration was central to Trump's election campaign. And then, as now, calling people like me "illegal" was a part of Trump's vocabulary, a signal to the right-wing, anti-immigrant media machine consumed by his voter base.

Seven years later, in Thursday's State of the Union address, President Joe Biden echoed Trump's dehumanizing rhetoric, referring to an undocumented immigrant who allegedly killed a young woman as "an illegal." Reacting to a clip of the moment on CNN, Pelosi remarked, "He should have said 'undocumented,' but it's not a big thing."

And you know what? She's right. Even though Biden told The Washington Post's Jonathan Capehart in an MSNBC interview Saturday that he regrets using that word - and a White House spokesperson felt the need to clarify today that the president "absolutely did not apologize" - it's not a big thing that a sitting US president referred to a group of people as "illegal." Obsessing over this single word loses sight of the more sobering reality that, in action and in copious, insidious words, Trump will be worse on immigration than Biden if reelected. The gaffe does underscore the political reality that, in the Trump era, the country has veered right on immigration, and the language that shapes the anti-immigrant policies being pushed at almost all governmental levels reflects it. Though the Biden administration began by offering solutions intended to fix the immigration system that has been broken for decades, the White House is now in reelection mode and is under pressure to respond to

public fears stirred by right-wing voices and media.

In 2021, Biden ordered US immigration enforcement agencies to stop using terms such as "illegal alien" when referring to immigrants in the United States, a rebuke of terms widely used under Trump. Three years later, Biden was at the US-Mexico border inviting Trump to work with him to push Congress to pass "the toughest, most efficient, most effective border security bill this country's ever seen." This is what it means to be undocumented in America: Though many of us have called this country our home for decades, paying local, state and federal taxes; though most major American cities would collapse without undocumented labor; though we are a sizable portion of the population in our country's biggest states (an estimated 900,000 undocumented individuals in Florida and about 1.6 million in Texas, according to Pew Research Center), we are not a voter base.

Come election season, we are always on the menu, but we never get to order. We are pawns in a political game, a boogeyman rolled out regularly by both sides to scare up votes. For the right, it's "the left will legalize them and they'll all vote Democratic" - never mind that there are plenty of immigrants from all racial and ethnic backgrounds who identify as Republican. For the left, it's "the right will never legalize them" - never mind that undocumented people are very much aware of the complicated legacies of the Clinton and Obama administrations on immigration. And while immigration is a galvanizing electoral force on the right, the issue is rarely ever a priority for the left. "Illegal" does not mean anything meaningful or substantive - it's just vibes. When I publicly disclosed my undocumented status in 2011, I started Define American, a nonpartisan, narrative change nonprofit that

serves as a resource to anyone interested in telling the stories of immigrants with the necessary facts, context and humanity. Key to understanding immigration as a process - how undocumented people like me can adjust our immigration status - is being aware of the nuances and complexity of legalization. Language is at the core of that understanding. Language is not a slice of the pie - it's the pan. It's how we understand the issue of immigration - and also how we misunderstand it. For years, as immigration has become a third rail in American politics, advocates have worked to change language and center the humanity of immigrants, with wins such as the Drop the I-Word campaign. Unfortunately, for every dehumanizing or misleading term we get someone to drop or change, two more pop up. Biden's use of the I-word should also be viewed in context with the current proliferation of the "migrant crime" narrative, which claims that migrants are bringing crime into the country. In 2022, research that Define American released with the Norman Lear Center revealed a shocking statistic: 40% of all migrant characters on scripted television shows aired between July 2020 and June 2022 were associated with crime, an all-time high since the survey was first conducted in 2018. In reality, however, native-born US citizens are more than twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes as migrants. Migrants are 30% less likely to be incarcerated than White people born in this country. The likelihood of a migrant being incarcerated is 60% lower than native-born Americans when the study also included Black Americans. As the relative size of the foreign-born population increases, the rate of violent crime, murder and robbery actually decreases. If nothing else, Biden had a point when he asked during his State of the Union

address, "But how many thousands of people are being killed by 'legals'?"

There is also a disturbing tendency for Americans to conflate migrants and asylum seekers, or to refer to asylees as a subcategory of migrants, which can have serious consequences. Last month, a vigilante group led by former New York City Republican mayoral candidate Curtis Sliwa tackled a Bronx resident during a live interview on Sean Hannity's Fox News show, misidentifying him as a migrant because he was "speaking Spanish." This kind of xenophobic assumption comes as New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, gins up a migrant crime crisis while using "migrant" and "asylum seeker" interchangeably in communications. "Migrant" is a broad term for people who move to another country. Some are lawfully admitted. Some are without status. "Asylum seeker[s]" or "asylee[s]," on the other hand, are a specifically defined and protected group in international law, because the situation in their country of origin makes it impossible for them to go home.

People who are fleeing their home countries because they have credible fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group have a legal right to apply for asylum in this country. Referring to them incorrectly can put their lives and safety in jeopardy. Suffice to say that Biden's "illegal" gaffe is but a tiny bump on the lexical hill up which undocumented activists and immigration advocates have been trying to roll a boulder since the turn of the millennium. Now, flattening the slope of that hill? That would truly be a big thing. Words do matter. And on immigration, actions matter even more. It's not about what Biden ends up calling us. It's about what Biden does - and can do - to fight for millions of people like me who may have a voice but don't have a vote.

CNN

Whoever forms Portugal’s govt, this is a victory for far right. Will Europe ever learn?

Joana Ramiro

IF the westernmost nation of mainland Europe was once seen as a paragon of sensible governance, it is now set for months or even years of political instability. Neither Portugal's outgoing Socialists (PS) nor the centre-right Social Democratic party (PSD) were able to garner a majority in Sunday's elections, ending the night barely one point apart and with a two-seat difference in the Assembleia da República. All eyes are now on the third force, the far-right party Chega ("Enough"), which quadrupled its parliamentarians from 12 to 48. Here is the real headline: an unprecedented victory for the far right in Portugal's democratic history.

Snap elections were called last November after the Socialist prime minister, António Costa, resigned after the launch of an investigation into alleged illegalities in his administration's handling of large green investment projects. (Costa was not accused of any crime, saying that while his conscience was clear, he felt he had no choice but to step down.) After more than eight years of eventful but unwavering leadership, the nation was left adrift. The opposition leader, Luis Montenegro, had been in place for just over a year when the government fell. The Socialists quickly, yet overwhelmingly, elected former infrastructure minister Pedro Nuno Santos to be their new leader.

On the campaign trail, both men proved similarly unimpressive, bordering on dull. Santos, known as a boisterous character, played

the part of young but sensible leader. Montenegro wavered between platitudes and the inescapable shadow of Chega. Poll after poll, Sunday's gridlock was long foretold.

It was one of those great ironies of history. Just short of 50 days before the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution, which toppled an almost 50-year dictatorship, the nation woke up to nearly 50 newly elected far-right lawmakers in parliament. To give you a sense of Chega's politics, it ran on a platform advocating the creation of a new crime of "illegal residence" on Portuguese soil and "reviewing" police regulations on the use of force. Pundits are now struggling to envision a governmental combination that does not include Chega.

Montenegro has so far explicitly ruled out any deals with Chega because of what he calls the party leader's "often xenophobic, racist, populist and excessively demagogic" views - the question is now how much strength is left in that cordon sanitaire. Many supporters of PS hoped for a repeat of 2015, when the Socialists came second in the election but successfully formed a government through a confidence and supply agreement with other parties. But this gangly coalition, aptly nicknamed the "contraption", would be hard to reproduce today. The Communist party is weakened, with just four MPs now where it had 17 at the time. The anti-capitalist Left Bloc, which peaked in 2015 at 19 seats, now clasps on to the five it has had

since 2022. The pro-EU Livre had more luck, going from one to four MPs. But, in total, the left fared badly, with just under 40% of the vote share.

The Chega founder and leader, André Ventura, branded the night "the end of the two-party system". A catchy slogan, for sure, evocative not only of the party's power as kingmaker, but also of the fact that Portuguese people have indeed grown tired of the two parties that have, alternately, governed the country since 1974. PS was not only fighting a war of attrition after eight years in power (marred by a series of influence-peddling and mismanagement scandals), but also fell short on its promises. Despite winning an absolute majority in 2022, the Socialists did little that could truly be called socialist. Between 2015 and 2019, PS conceded on a handful of simple social and economic demands from its far-left partners, while bolstering a limping economy with tourism revenues that injected much-needed cash but caused rents to spike, triggering an ongoing housing crisis.

Since 2019, with two comfortable majorities, Costa successfully steered the ship during the pandemic but was unable to meet the demands of the economic aftermath of Covid. Minimum wage increases were never able to meet spiralling prices; rent controls were always out of the question. In a country where 12% are living in food poverty, people felt plundered, and while Costa's replacement, Santos, led his campaign

with a sort of mea culpa approach, to the electorate it felt like too little, too late. Conversely, voters have also not forgotten about PSD's last administration, from 2011 to 2015, which wrought hardship through a series of austerity measures that went from cutting pensions to abolishing bank holidays. Indeed, sightings of the former Conservative prime minister Pedro Passos Coelho on the campaign trail were received with frostiness and even heckling.

Chega's success is the result of letting the beast of social discontent grow, feeding on the rapidly deteriorating living and working conditions. In a Portugal where incomes are the sixth lowest in the EU but "non-habitual residents" (read: expats) enjoy various tax exemptions, the most vulnerable are easy prey to an ultra-nationalist political project that promises higher wages and public spending but also lower taxes. A mere three months ahead of the European elections, democrats in Brussels should take notes from Portugal's change in fortune. But maybe it is too late.

The paradigmatic shift isn't so much the end of the two-party system, but the end of the electorate's faith in a socioeconomic model that has for many decades failed to sustainably deliver for the average working Jane and Joe. Last night, Chega was receiving messages of congratulation from far-right parties in Hungary, Spain, France and Germany. Democracies that fail to learn this lesson are doomed to open the door to the Chegas of the world.

The Guardian

Innovation from Achilles’ heel to Pegasus

Hussein Askary

THE top Chinese leader has been reiterating the importance of innovation in development and has now highlighted the key role of new quality productive forces in facilitating high-quality development. Although in the past, the relatively slow progress of science and technology in China almost became Achilles' heel for development, the country today has made remarkable achievements in almost every science and technology field.

In 2021, China became the leading country in filing applications for new patents. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, China's intellectual property office received 1.59 million patent applications (out of a total of 3.4 million filed worldwide in 2021). It was followed by the US, Japanese, Republic of Korea and European patent offices. China led the field in 2022 and 2023, too. China was ranked 12th in the 2023 Global Innovation Index, becoming the only middle-income country to break into the top 15. Needless to say, it ranked No 1 among middle-income economies. Also in 2023, for the first time China topped the list of countries with the highest number of science and technology clusters, having 24 in total. The United States and Germany followed with 21 and nine clusters respectively.

China is now a leader in many cutting-edge technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, financial technology, 5G, as well as electric vehicles, robots and drones. It is also one of the world's largest investors in and users of digital technologies. With a strong venture capital industry focusing on fostering advanced digital technologies and innovations, China is home to one-third of the world's unicorns (start-ups with a value of over \$1 billion). As such, innovation is no longer the "Achilles' heel" of the economy; instead, it has become Pegasus and is carrying China toward modernization.

How does that help the world? China's unique economic philosophy of win-win cooperation, the opposite of the West's zero-sum game in which "the winner takes all", is based on sharing the fruits of its modernization and innovations with other countries. As the global leader in railways, port, bridge and tunnel construction technology, China has been sharing it with Belt and Road partner countries. This shows the mutually beneficial nature of the Belt and Road Initiative which has enabled China to build some of the best infrastructure in the developing world - the first high-speed railway in Indonesia, the China-Laos high-speed railway, the Lekki deep sea

port in Nigeria and the magnificent Peljesac Bridge in Croatia, to name but a few.

By developing clean technologies, Chinese companies are helping many countries, including European Union member states and non-Belt and Road countries, to transition to green development. A large percentage of the electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar photovoltaic panels, and critical minerals used in clean technology and digital industries in the US and the EU are imported from China, which has become the global leader in this field.

China, which also leads in space exploration, is helping many countries place Earth-observing and telecommunications satellites in orbit and has invited all countries to benefit from its space program. Interestingly, a report by the United States Institute of Peace published in September 2023 said Beijing has made support for the development of African countries' space programs a key incentive for the continent to establish closer ties with China. "By contrast", it added "although US federal agencies and universities are actively involved in research partnerships with some African countries, space technology has not been a focus of US foreign policy in Africa."

Speaking at the China-Africa

Leaders' Dialogue on Aug 24, 2023, in Johannesburg, the top Chinese leader said China was committed to promoting the modernization of Africa. Accordingly, China launched the "Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization" to boost Africa's manufacturing sector and help the continent realize industrialization and economic diversification, and the "Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization" to expand the grain growing areas, and encourage Chinese companies to increase investment in Africa's agriculture sector and strengthen cooperation with Africa.

It has also launched the "Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development" to train 500 principals and outstanding teachers from vocational colleges every year, and teach 10,000 technicians vocational skills, and implemented the "China-Africa Universities 100 Cooperation Plan" and the 10 pilot exchange programs for China-Africa partner institutes. But these cooperation initiatives are not charities or aid programs; they are initiatives to promote mutual and equitable growth. It's time the world embraced China's development philosophy, for it benefits all and helps advance civilization with innovation as its guiding principle.

The China Daily

Can Michigan save Palestine?

Ahsan I Butt

THESE are dark times for anyone with even a modicum of sympathy for the Palestinian people, who are facing another national catastrophe, comparable to the Nakba of 1948. The despondency is entirely merited. Victimised by Israel's war in Gaza, which many experts consider genocidal, the Palestinians are up against the strongest military in the region, which also enjoys billions of dollars of military aid and diplomatic carte blanche from the most powerful country in the world.

True to form, Washington has repeatedly blocked international efforts to impose an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Worse still, there appears little recourse to the Palestinians' main demand for self-determination. Yet there is a glimmer of hope. Recent events in US politics point to a potential pathway to better times for the Palestinian people. To be sure, it is not a probable or even a likely path. Much has to go right, not least the Democratic party replacing its current sclerotic leadership. But thanks to Michigan, the pathway does exist, and it is now reasonable to conjecture that the road to East Jerusalem may run through Dearborn. Regardless of what form Palestinian self-determination takes, one certainty is that it cannot be achieved without buy-in from major global and regional actors. Though much has been written about the decline of American power and the return of multipolarity, the reality is the US remains the hegemon in the region - if not the rest of the world. In this sense, waiting with bated breath for the rise of China or another superpower to result in a breakthrough on the Palestinian question is a strategy doomed to fail. The focus must be on changing the direction of American policy, not wishing away American power. Specifically, the best bet for the Palestinian cause is for it to become a major goal of a US president's foreign policy. So how do pro-Palestinian activists go about making this a reality? Basic demographic and political factors make the Republican Party a dead end. Neo-conservatism, an ideology that still holds the centre of gravity among foreign policy elites on the right in the US, albeit less so than 20 years ago, considers Israel an indispensable ally, often elevating Israeli interests to the equivalent of American ones. Furthermore, at the voter level, Christian evangelicals are one of the strongest constituencies of the GOP - and among the staunchest supporters of Israel. Finally, older and white voters are disproportionately Republican, while the biggest supporters of Palestinians are the young and people of colour. Put it all together, and you get unsurprising results such as a recent poll that found that, among Republicans, 56 percent favour taking Israel compared to only 2 percent favouring the Palestinians. In this context, the Democrats remain the only hope for the Palestinian cause, notwithstanding President Joe Biden's wholehearted support for Israel's programme of ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities in Gaza. The only pro-Palestinian voices in the US Congress and other institutions come from the Democratic party, such as Representative Rashida Tlaib. Even those expressing milquetoast bothsidesism, such as Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Bernie Sanders, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are part of a political species whose presence would be unimaginable in the Republican Party. To be clear, I am not claiming that the Democratic Party is a likely saviour of the Palestinian people. Only that it is more probable to lead a change in US policy on Israel than the alternative. And this is where Michigan comes in. By a fortunate happenstance, there is a high concentration of Arabs and Muslims in a state that is deeply important to presidential elections. Michigan is one of the last standing bricks of the erstwhile "blue wall" in the Midwest. In the present configuration of US politics, it is essentially impossible for a Democrat

to win the presidency without Michigan's 15 electoral college votes. This is why the results from the recent primary should send shudders down the collective spine of the Biden 2024 campaign. Usually, when incumbents are running, primaries are not just a formality but a coronation. In this context, 13.3 percent of Democrats (more than 100,000 people) in Michigan voting "uncommitted" is ominous. Though its success was considerably more tepid across other states during primaries on March 5 (also called Super Tuesday) - partly due to a lack of organisational and institutional support, and partly to the differences in Muslim and Arab population density - the support of the "uncommitted" project does not need to be broad as long as it is deep. If pro-Palestinian Michiganders' hard feelings carry over to November, it portends utter disaster for Biden's re-election plans. The ugly truth is that in

Kushner, who went about sidelining the Palestinians in the so-called "Abraham Accords" and moving the American embassy to Jerusalem. There should be no mistake: Trump's victory will be a disaster for the Palestinians and the Palestinian cause. But the Palestinian people and their supporters are entitled to ask: How exactly would Biden's be any different? Would more, fewer or roughly the same number of Palestinians have been bombed, shot, crushed and starved had Trump been president post-October 7?

More importantly, from a strategic perspective, this counterargument ignores that not all political life has a four-year span; a longer-term horizon yields a clearer picture of why not voting for Biden could help the Palestinian cause. The logic is simple. Only by costing Democrats an election would Arabs, Muslims and other pro-Palestinian Americans be able to leverage their votes for meaningful change. In other words, while Trump would

Only that it is more probable to lead a change in US policy on Israel than the alternative. And this is where Michigan comes in. By a fortunate happenstance, there is a high concentration of Arabs and Muslims in a state that is deeply important to presidential elections. Michigan is one of the last standing bricks of the erstwhile "blue wall" in the Midwest. In the present configuration of US politics, it is essentially impossible for a Democrat to win the presidency without Michigan's 15 electoral college votes. This is why the results from the recent primary should send shudders down the collective spine of the Biden 2024 campaign. Usually, when incumbents are running, primaries are not just a formality but a coronation.

American democracy, parties and politicians will ignore constituents' demands unless they can credibly threaten to lose them an election. Until now, it was easy for Biden and mainstream Democrats to ignore Arab and Muslim opinion on Palestine. What are they going to do - the thinking went - vote for Donald Trump?

But now, Muslim, Arab and young voters' threats to stay home this fall are a lot more credible and less likely to be dismissed as cheap talk and false bravado. Simply put, they have shown they mean business. Ideally, Biden would get the message and dramatically change course. In the short run, this would entail making US military, economic and diplomatic aid to Israel conditional on adherence to basic human rights and international law, while laying out a viable pathway for a settlement of the Palestinian question in the medium term. But realistically, for someone with a record as deeply pro-Israel as Biden's, such a drastic shift in the twilight of his career is unlikely. It is, indeed, unlikely that a man in his 80s will change the worldview that has undergirded his foreign policy thinking, as senator, vice president, and now president, for half a century.

As things stand right now, therefore, the most likely outcome appears to be Biden sleepwalking into a loss in November, largely due to a hangover from the high inflation of 2021-23, but also the largescale abandonment of young voters and important pockets of support, including the Arab and Muslim vote, that helped secure his 2020 victory. If that is indeed what happens, then Muslims and Arabs will be hoping the loss conveys the importance of the Palestinian issue to the Democratic Party elite, and that, going forward, those yring for the party's (and country's) leadership would understand that they can no longer marginalise the Palestinian cause.

A common counterargument to this logic from Biden supporters is that doing anything to help elect Trump runs contrary to Palestinian interests. Trump, after all, was pro-Israel to an almost absurd and comical extent in his first term, delegating his entire Middle East policy to his son-in-law Jared

be assuredly worse for the Palestinians than Biden, the Democratic candidate in 2028, and forever after, would understand at a deep and visceral level that they cannot go on ignoring Palestinian aspirations and behaving as Israel's lawyer, banker and arms dealer. In so doing, party elites would be merely catching up to their base, which already demands more of an even-handed policy in the Middle East. In this rendering, Michigan could serve as the anchor of US policy in the region the way Florida does for Cuban policy. The obvious difference between the two is that while the anti-Castro/communist lobby does not face organised opposition, this provisional Palestinian lobby would be taking on one of the most powerful forces in US politics: AIPAC and the rest of the pro-Israel lobby. Indeed, it is this feature of US politics that represents the most likely pitfall for Plan Michigan. Any electoral benefit that accrues to a candidate for a more pro-Palestinian position will probably be drowned out by the immense cost of taking on the AIPAC machine, which has a long history of heavy spending against perceived critics of right-wing Israeli leaders and policies. In these conditions, even politicians privately sympathetic to the Palestinian cause may rationally end up deciding that discretion is the better part of valour.

Aside from the genocide of the Palestinian people, the Gaza war has also resulted in irreparable harm to US foreign policy, its image as the leader of the so-called rules-based international order lying in tatters. As for Biden, his financial, military and diplomatic support for the annihilation of Gaza will undoubtedly be the first thing his name will be associated with by those around the world. It will be his historical legacy. But as leaders, neither Biden nor Trump - if elected in November - will be around forever. By channelling their demographic power to change the equation on the Palestine question in US politics, Muslims and Arabs in Michigan may have taken the first step to pushing the US, the only great power with leverage over Israel, to actually deploy it for a sovereign Palestine.



PSX stays bearish, loses 953 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Tuesday, shedding 953.60 points, a negative change of 1.45, closing at 64,801.70 points against 65,755.31 points the previous trading day.

A total of 321,709,242 shares valuing Rs 10.857 billion were traded during the day as compared to 548,764,652 shares valuing Rs 16.605 billion the last day.

Some 328 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 57 of

them recorded gains and 254 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 17 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Hascol Petrol with 29,322,000 shares at Rs 8.14 per share, PIAC(A) with 28,898,000 shares with 18.10 per share and Cnerygico PK with 25,500,737 shares at Rs 4.77 per share.

Shahmurad Sugar Mills Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 17.28 per share price, closing at Rs 390.28, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Services Limited with a Rs

12.35 rise in its per share price to Rs 844.00.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 97.77 per share closing at Rs 7,480.00, followed by Sazgar Engineering Works Limited with Rs 31.71 decline to close at Rs 401.15.

Gold rates dip by Rs.100 to Rs 230,100 per tola: The per tola price of 24 karat gold in the local market decreased by Rs.100 and was traded at Rs.230,100 on Tuesday against its sale at Rs230,200 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.86 to Rs197,274 from Rs197,360 whereas that 10 gram 22 karat gold decreased to Rs.180,834 from Rs180,913, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver witnessed no change and was traded at Rs2,600 and Rs2,229.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$1 and was traded at \$2,197 from \$2,198, the Association reported.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying and selling Melon to attract customers at Fruit and Vegetable Market.

Cylinder explosion occurred F.P. Report

LAHORE: A cylinder explosion occurred on Tuesday after 12 o' clock at Sehri time in Mohalla Jawadian, Haram Gate, Multan. The emergency team promptly responded to the incident, and it was observed that the building was old and in poor condition.

Notably, there was no gas leakage involved in this incident. Additionally, a fire incident was reported in Bhabra Bazar, Rawalpindi, through the emergency helpline.

Upon reaching the scene, the customer service emergency team confirmed that there was no gas line in the room where the fire originated.

The Chief Engineer (Rawalpindi) visited the site with maintenance and metering teams, revealing the presence of an LPG cylinder with a burner in a small room. The room had accumulated LPG gas, leading to fire and subsequent explosion.

Jam assumes office as Commerce Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Jam Kamal Khan officially on Tuesday assumed his duties as the Federal Minister for Commerce, marking a new chapter in his political career. He was received by Federal Secretary for Commerce, Capt. (Retd) Muhammad Khurram Agha at the Ministry, said a press release issued here.

The Minister brings a wealth of experience to his new role. During his inaugural briefing, the Ministry's scope and objectives were outlined.

Minister Khan emphasized focus on growth, investment and the need to fully facilitate both local and foreign investors, believing that Pakistan can achieve significant strides through an inclusive approach.

He expressed his commitment, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, to overcoming the country's economic challenges.

Emphasizing his dedication to enhancing trade volume, the Minister identified key sectors like mining, livestock, and textiles as areas for modernization.

He highlighted the importance of aligning with global standards and adopting modern practices.

The Minister further emphasized the need to move beyond conventional trade approaches and embrace proactive measures to improve Pakistan's position in the global market.

The Minister noted a communication received from Dr. Gohar Ejaz, the former Minister for Commerce.

Both agreed on the importance of establishing a closer relationship between the business community and the Ministry of Commerce.

Jam Kamal Khan hails from NA-257 Lasbela and served as Chief Minister, Balochistan. His political journey began with two

terms as District Nazim of Lasbela, followed by his election to the National Assembly in 2013.

He notably served as Minister of State for Petroleum & Natural Resources under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Mr. Khan's leadership qualities were evident when he was elected as the first president of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) in 2018.

Following his success at the provincial level as Chief Minister from 2018 to 2021, he now brings his extensive background in governance and commitment to public service to the role of Federal Minister for Commerce. Mr. Kamal's proactive approach signals a dynamic new era for Pakistan's commerce landscape.

With his leadership, the Ministry of Commerce is poised to steer Pakistan's commerce sector towards a future of growth and prosperity.

CCP conducts sector specific workshop for Microfinance Banks



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) held a one-day workshop on Competition Law, tailored specific to the microfinance banks that are associated to the cellular companies operating in Pakistan.

The participants included representatives from Mobilink Microfinance Bank Limited, U Microfinance Bank Limited, and Telenor Microfinance Bank Limited. The event discussed the relevant provisions of the Competition Law pertaining to mergers & acquisitions, prohibited

agreements, abuse of dominance, and deceptive marketing practices. The opening session was also attended by Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu, (Chairman, CCP) and Mr. Salman Amin (Member, CCP).

CCP has conducted numerous sessions with various stakeholders, including companies, chambers of commerce & industry, academia, and business associations. These sessions have proven instrumental in fostering awareness about competition law and promoting self-compliance. As microfinance banks play a significant role in Pakistan's economy and are expand-

ing their portfolios with new products being offered to the public, CCP organized this specialized session for them.

The participants were officials dealing with marketing, legal, compliance, risk management, investigation, branding, and financial affairs. The workshop enhanced the knowledge of the participants on Competition Law and gave them practical insights into provisions of the Competition Law. A comprehensive discussion was held on the products being offered by microfinance banks on digital platforms and the matters which need to be given due considera-

tion while marketing the products and in describing terms and conditions to the customers.

In the closing session, Mr. Athar Mehmood Asif, Ammar Bin Saqib, and M. Haroon Khan from U Microfinance Bank, Telenor Microfinance Bank, Mobilink Microfinance Bank, respectively, thanked the Commission for such a useful session with major take-aways. Mr. Salman Amin (Member) in his closing remarks expressed that Commission is committed to ensure free competition in all spheres of commercial and economic activities. He also expressed that now a country's competition index is an important factor, among other aspects, considered by international and local investors while investing or expanding their businesses in a country. The Commission is committed to promote self-compliance approach and such events are integral to that overarching endeavour of creating more awareness and an enabling environment with least regulatory interventions needs.

Aleem assumes charge as Minister BoI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Abdul Aleem Khan, recently appointed Federal Minister for Board of Investment (BOI) visited BoI on Tuesday following his oath-taking ceremony the previous day.

The minister was briefed on key initiatives and priorities of the board by Additional Secretary, Ambreen Iftakhar and Executive Director, Khushi ur Rehman, according to press statement issued by the board here.

According to the statement, Khan's extensive experience in public service and his unwavering commitment to economic development makes him a valuable addition to BOI.

His visit underscores the government's dedication to fostering investment and promoting economic growth in Pakistan, it added.

Born on March 5, 1972, in Lahore, Khan graduated from Government College, Lahore, in 1992. He transitioned from a successful businessman to a dedicated public servant and served as a Member of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab from 2003 to 2007.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge II/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar. Appeal No. 99 /13. Institution 13/9/2023. Date of hearing 13/3/2022. Samareen Khan Vs. Musharaf Khan etc. Notice to No. 9/1. Mst Sheda Bibi widow Yaqob Khan late. 9/2. Amerdad Shah. 9/4. Kherdad Shah. 9/5. Zahir Shah. 9/6. Imran Khan s/o Yaqob Khan late. 9/8. Mst Difaroza Bibi resident of Bhatat Tehsil Gadezai District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8 am dated 13/3/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Illicit cigarette sale increases to 60 per cent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Tobacco Company (PTC) shared the latest market trends and informed that the sale of illicit (smuggled, tax evaded and counterfeit) cigarettes has increased to around 60 percent in South Punjab, resulting in a loss of billions of rupees to the national exchequer.

While addressing the media in Multan, Business Development Analyst Mohsin Ali mentioned that South Punjab has been the most affected by tax-evaded and smuggled brands, which are being openly sold at retail outlets.

After successive increases in excise duties, consumers have moved to cheaper, tax evaded and

smuggled cigarette options which are illegal. The irony is that these cigarette brands are openly sold in the market as enforcement has not been able to create the desired level of deterrence.

A market visit was conducted to different areas in Multan by media personnel to overview the growing trend of illicit cigarettes and how laws are openly being flouted. It is important to note that the government of Pakistan has set the minimum price of a pack of cigarettes at Rs 127.44, which is not being enforced in letter and spirit.

Majority of the cigarette brands are being sold at prices ranging from Rs.80 to Rs.130. It was also observed that majority of

the cigarettes being sold were without Track and Trace Stamps.

Smuggled cigarettes of various brands were also available which were being sold without Graphical Health Warning. Illicit cigarette manufacturers are openly flouting rules and regulations through free cigarette packets and reward schemes among other activities.

In order to curb this growing trend of illicit cigarettes, the government must sensitize its Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) against this organized crime network and take strict action against the sale and distribution network of the tax-evaded cigarette industry.

Markets push higher as US inflation data looms

HOGN KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets mostly rose Tuesday following the previous day's sell-off, with focus on the release of US inflation data that could play a key role in the Federal Reserve's decision-making on cutting interest rates.

The broadly upbeat performance came despite a tepid performance on Wall Street, and with analysts warning the recent rally across equities could stall as investors lock in profits and assess the outlook for monetary policy.

There is a lot of nervousness on trading floors ahead of the February consumer price index report due later in the day after a surprise uptick in January that dented hopes the central bank would begin cutting rates sooner than later.

Futures traders are now betting on three reductions this year, compared with the six forecast at the start of the year.

"It is imperative to avoid a repeat of the last CPI release," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.

"Another report similar

to January's could raise doubts about the Fed's rate cut wisdom in 2024. If the inflation dragon shows up again, it will not sit well with risk appetite."

In early trade, Hong Kong pressed ahead with its recent advance, helped by fresh buying of tech firms and following above-forecast Chinese inflation data at the weekend that soothed worries about the country's economy.

There were also gains in Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei and Manila.

However, Tokyo fell again as speculation swirls that the Bank of Japan will next week shift away from its ultra-loose monetary policy that has helped strengthen the yen.

Shanghai and Wellington also fell.

Traders brushed off a broadly negative day on Wall Street, where investors have pushed equities to multiple record highs this year, and analysts suggested the rally could peter out.

"Stocks are likely overdue for some consolidation or even an extended period of modest declines at some point in the year," Anthony

Sagliambene at Ameriprise said.

"Without a meaningful shift in the fundamental picture, we suspect investors would welcome such a downdraft and treat the event as a buying opportunity."

The prospect of US interest rates coming down this year has played a role in pushing bitcoin to new record highs, with the cryptocurrency peaking at \$72,880.

Moves by US authorities and now regulators in Britain to allow exchange-traded funds (ETFs) for the unit have also provided support, opening it up to new classes of investors.

Japan's wholesale prices up 0.6 pct in February

Japan's corporate goods price index, which measures costs of goods traded between businesses, gained 0.6 percent year on year in February, the Bank of Japan said Tuesday.

According to preliminary figures from the central bank, the producer price index stood at 120.3 against the 2020 base of 100.

Tokyo shares close lower ahead of US data

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks closed lower Tuesday on profit-taking, in cautious trade ahead of US consumer inflation data.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index inched down 0.06 percent, or 22.98 points, to 38,797.51, while the broader Topix index fell 0.36 percent, or 9.59 points, to 2,657.24.

"The Tokyo market, which had been rising fast since the beginning of the year, was weighed down by the strengthening of the yen and profit-taking," Iwai Cosmo Securities said.

Investors in Tokyo also took cues from losses across global markets ahead of US inflation data that could provide fresh clues for future Federal Reserve policy.

Investors are also paying close attention to the Bank of Japan's policy meeting next week, with growing speculation it could end its negative interest rate policy.

Such a move could cool down "the arguably overheated Japanese stock market," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said.

Last week, the Nikkei broke 40,000 for the first time, having in February surpassed a record set just before Japan's asset bubble burst in the early 1990s.

Among major shares, SoftBank Group fell 0.66 percent to 8,568 yen while Toyota lost 0.66 percent to 3,475 yen.

Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing jumped 1.42 percent to 43,480 yen.

The dollar traded at 147.50 yen against 146.96 yen on Monday in New York.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal here on Tuesday reiterated that political stability and continuation of policies were prerequisites to lead the country towards stability and development.

Addressing a press conference after assuming the charge of federal minister, he lamented that political instability and discontinuation of policies had always inflicted the country and blocked the way towards sustainable progress and development.

Citing examples of various countries including India, Turkey, China, Bangladesh, and Korea, the minister said no country had achieved success without consistent policies and political stability.

He said, the last 50 year political history of Pakistan had a negative impact on the implementation and progress of development projects like Vision 2010,

Vision 2025, and other five-year plans.

He underlined the importance of making comprehensive decisions and planning for the continued success adding it was imperative to focus on creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem, promoting job creation, and ensuring the success of the youth.

He said, the planning should be made keeping in view the modern infrastructure as digital technology was having great influence on different sectors in the era we were living in.

The minister emphasized the importance of replacing outdated production resources with new ones, by embracing international tools and technologies.

This adaptation would help us foster growth in the agriculture and industry.

Ahsan Iqbal said that the government was determined to work honestly on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Phase-2 as was done in case of CPEC

Phase one where in \$25 billion investments were made from 2013 to 2018.

He underlined the need to adopt innovative financing mechanisms, especially considering the limited space in Pakistan's economic condition to ensure a strong infrastructure.

Talking about the debt situation, he said, it was previous government of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf that took highest loan in the history of Pakistan during 2018, which forced the successive government to take further loans for paying off.

Ahsan also highlighted the importance of collaboration with the private sector to boost Pakistan's exports. With a target of reaching \$100 billion in exports within 7 to 8 years, it is crucial to tap into the potential of the private sector and create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

He highlighted that the success of Pakistan depended on increasing foreign exchange reserves.

SCCI president honoured for successful WE-Exhibit

SIALKOT (APP): Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) President Dr Mariam Nouman presented a shield to Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Abdul Ghafoor Malik and Vice President Amer Majeed Sheikh in acknowledgment of the support and facilitation extended by the chamber in the successful execution of "WE-Exhibit 2024".

Dr. Mariam Nouman said that the two-day trade and industrial exhibition "WeExit 2024" was organized on 2nd and 3rd March under the auspices of the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) in which women from all over the country exhibited their products in large numbers. She said that the event

was not only an exhibition but a platform where women and youths gained real experience in customer dealing, sales and marketing. Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Abdul Ghafoor Malik said that the commercial and industrial exhibition was a message of hope for the country's economy in this difficult time.

There are 7 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Melody and Dravin

and Palm oil are expected to take berths at MW-1, EVTL and LCT are respectively on Tuesday & two more ships, Maersk Cape Town and San Francisco Bridge are due arrive at Port Qasim on Wednesday.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, MSC Aria-III, MSC Beira-IV, Fame, Kiso and Menomonee, carrying Containers, Soya bean seed, Chemicals and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal, Grain Terminal, Engro Terminal and Bulk Terminal respectively during last 24 hours.

Meanwhile two more ships, FSM and Dravin with LPGs also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on Monday. Nine ships were engaged at

PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, MSC Beira-IV and Crested Eagle left the Port on Tuesday morning, while two more ships, Yongheng Ocean and Kiso are expected to sail on same day.

Cargo volume of 128,424 tonnes, comprising 95,803 tonnes imports cargo and 32,621 tonnes export cargo carried in 1,927 Containers (425 TEUs Imports and 1,502 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

ing last 24 hours.

There are 7 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Melody and Dravin & another edible oil carrier 'Rhine' scheduled to load/offload Rice, LPG and Palm oil are expected to take berths at MW-1, EVTL and LCT are respectively on Tuesday & two more ships, Maersk Cape Town and San Francisco Bridge are due arrive at Port Qasim on Wednesday.



In brief

Tickets refund for HBL PSL 9

RAWALPINDI (APP): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will start tickets refund on Wednesday for the HBL PSL 9 washout games, which were abandoned on March 2 at the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi. The refund will start at designated TCS centres in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar and Lahore, said a press release. The refunds will take place between March 13 to 20. Any claim later than the set date will not be entitled to a refund. As communicated before, tickets purchased through TCS Express centres will require the buyers to present the original CNIC used for purchasing tickets, along with the physical tickets. Refunds for tickets purchased online will directly be credited to the buyers' respective bank accounts without the provision to present physical tickets. Tickets purchased through a corporate entity will only be refunded to the corporate entity. Given below is the detail of the designated TCS centers for tickets refund. Ticket buyers can visit them from Wednesday onwards between 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

- TCS Area Office Khanna, Rawalpindi
- TCS Saddar Express Center, Rawalpindi
- TCS Area Office I-9, Islamabad
- TCS Area Office, Peshawar
- TCS Gulberg Office, Lahore

Real Madrid sink Celta Vigo

MADRID (INP): Real Madrid sunk Celta Vigo 4-0 to extend their lead at the top of the standings in the ongoing La Liga 2023-24 at Santiago Bernabéu. Real Madrid is currently seven points ahead of second-placed Girona while defending La Liga champions Barcelona sitting in third position with a difference of meagre one point. The home team drew first blood in the 21st minute with star winger Vinícius Júnior hitting the goal from very close range following a corner. Celta Vigo managed to deny further attempts by Real Madrid to extend their lead before they shot in their own feet in the 79th minute. Celta Vigo goalkeeper, Vincente Guaita, almost saved Rudiger's header after a corner, but it rattled and bounced back down for an own goal. Their trouble did not end there as nine minutes later a mix-up between Guaita and Carlos Dominguez resulted in another own goal. With Real Madrid cruising to a 3-0 victory in stoppage time, 19-year-old Arda Guler showed his onfield prowess to score his first goal for the home team. "I'm very happy to be at Real Madrid. It's the best club in the world and, although it's difficult, I believe I have the quality and character to overcome it," Guler said after the match. Meanwhile, in other matches in La Liga, Athletic Club registered a 2-0 victory over Las Palmas, while, Villarreal edged Real Betis 3-2.

Pant declared fit for IPL return

NEW DELHI (Agencies): India wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant has been passed fit to play in the Indian Premier League (IPL) after a 14-month absence from cricket. Pant, 26, has not played since being injured in a serious car accident in December 2022. It has been confirmed that Pant will play for Delhi Capitals in the upcoming IPL season, which starts on 22 March.

Shan not satisfied with his performance in HBL PSL 9 season

KARACHI (APP): The captain of Karachi Kings Shan Masood on Tuesday expressed his satisfaction over his team's performance in the ongoing HBL PSL 9.

During a press conference after a thrilling match against Peshawar Zalmi, Masood stated that Karachi Kings played good cricket throughout the tournament.

"I am satisfied with the performance of Karachi Kings in this season. We lost two close games, which we could have won if we avoided small mistakes. But this is part of the game," said the left-handed batter.

"Our team was hit with an unfortunate situation with 13 of our players falling ill in the middle of the tournament. It dented our plans as we had to make changes to our combination."

"Meanwhile, we also had to rely on other results, but they did not go



in our favour."

Talking about his own performance, Shan Masood expressed disappointment over his batting performance.

"I admit that I could not perform at my best this season. I have given performances in previous seasons of HBL PSL and wanted to replicate them in this season, but unfortunately, it did not happen," he remarked.

Karachi Kings lost their last group match against

Peshawar Zalmi by a narrow two-run margin after a thrilling last over.

"The wicket was tricky and we made some small mistakes, while Peshawar Zalmi bowled well, resulting in their victory," said Karachi Kings' captain.

Shan Masood also appreciated young spinner Arafat Minhas for his impressive performance against Peshawar Zalmi. Arafat claimed one wicket for 11 runs in his four overs.

"Arafat [Minhas] performed brilliantly, taking full advantage of the conditions. He came into the squad this year along with 6 other players who have never played in the HBL PSL before."

"We gave chances to the youngsters according to the situation and made sure that they get the right mentorship from the senior players."

Football team training camp underway

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan National Football team has commenced its training camp in preparation for the highly anticipated FIFA World Cup Qualifiers Round 2 home match against Jordan. Under the supervision of head coach Stephen Constantine, the team was diligently honing their skills and tactics for the upcoming encounter.

Goalkeeping coaches Rogerio Ramos and Nauman Ibrahim have been dedicating their efforts to the goalkeepers, while fit-

ness coach Claudio Altieri is ensuring peak performance in preparation for the crucial match.

The training camp, currently underway in Lahore would span over the next few days before moving to Islamabad, where the team will continue their preparations. Scheduled for March 2, the home encounter would take place here at Jinnah Stadium, followed by an away fixture in Jordan on March.

Pakistan squad (Probables)-Goal-Keepers: Salman Ul Haq, Saqib

Hanif, Hassan, Ali and Abdul Basit; Defenders: Mamoon Moosa Khan, Muhammad Sohail, Junaid Shah, Umar Hayat Haseeb Khan, M. Saddam, Muhammad Hamza Munir, Kamil Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Adeel; Midfielders: Alamgir Ghazi, Rajab Ali, Ali Uzair, Moin Ahmad, Zaid Umer, M Zahid Shah and Ali Zafar; Forwards: Shayek Dost, Fareed Ullah, Muhammad Waleed Khan, Muhammad Waheed, Muhammad Adeel Younas and Yasir Arafat.

ICC Women's Player of the Month for February 2024 revealed

PERTH (INP): Annabel Sutherland became the fifth Australian player to claim the ICC Women's Player of the Month Award, joining the esteemed ranks of previous winners Alyssa Healy, Rachael Haynes, Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner.

Sutherland, who scored 229 runs and claimed seven wickets in four matches in February 2024, beat competition from the UAE duo of Esha Oza and Kavisha Egodage to win the coveted prize. The 22-year-old was thrilled to collect her maiden Player of the Month award.

"It's a massive honour to be named the Player of the Month and a nice way to cap off a successful home summer for the team," she said. "South Africa are always a strong opponent and to be able to perform against them in a home Test

is something I'm proud of.

"Test cricket is always a highlight and to have been able to contribute toward winning that match was really special." Annabel Sutherland rewrote history books with her marathon double century in the one-off Test against South Africa.

Before the Test series, Sutherland contributed to Australia's triumph in the ODI series, clinched 2-1 by the hosts. The versatile all-rounder not only secured two wickets but also made valuable runs. The shift to the Test format proved fortuitous for Sutherland.

Opting to bowl first, Australia swiftly dismissed South Africa for just 76, with Sutherland's medium-fast pace dismantling the Proteas' middle order by claiming the wickets of Sune Luus, Tazmin Brits and Delmi Tucker.

This bowling success seamlessly transitioned into an extraordinary batting performance, where Sutherland dominated the game with a rapid double century. Achieving this milestone in just 248 balls, she set a new record for the fastest double century in Women's cricket, surpassing fellow Australian Karen Rolton (306 balls).

Annabel Sutherland joined an elite group as the ninth woman to score a double hundred in a Test and the fifth Australian overall. At the age of 22, she became the second youngest double centurion in Test cricket, trailing only Mithali Raj, who achieved the feat at 19 years old.

Sutherland was eventually dismissed for 210, just three runs short of Ellyse Perry's 213*, the highest score in Women's Test cricket by an Australian.

Man Utd's Mount back in training after four-month injury absence

LONDON (AFP): Manchester United midfielder Mason Mount returned to training on Tuesday after four months out with a calf injury.

Mount has made just 12 appearances in all competitions for United since his £60 million (\$76 million) transfer from Chelsea before the start of this season. The 25-year-old last played when he came off the bench in United's 1-0 win against Luton in November.

Even when he was fit to feature, Mount struggled to make an impact, leading some to brand the England international a flop.

But Mount could still have a chance to silence the critics this season after United confirmed he was back in training, having "remained upbeat and positive throughout his rehabilitation". The playmaker's long-awaited return came just days after Erik ten Hag offered a promising update on his status.

"Mason Mount, I think

he is in a good spell now and he will return shortly," Ten Hag said on Friday. "I think after the international break," Mount is unlikely to feature in Sunday's FA Cup quarter-final against Liverpool, but could be involved when United travel to Brentford on March 30.

Mount's presence will be a welcome boost to a United side looking to keep alive their faint hopes of Champions League qualification via a top four finish in the Premier League.

United are eight points behind fourth placed Aston Villa with 10 games left.

Ten Hag expects Harry Maguire, Rasmus Hojlund and Aaron Wan-Bissaka to be back from injuries for Liverpool's visit to Old Trafford. Lisandro Martinez, Anthony Martial, Luke Shaw and Tyrell Malacia remain sidelined.

Off the pitch, United announced record second-

quarter revenues of £225.8 million on Tuesday.

The results for the period until December 31 showed the club's net profit was up 6.3 per cent to £20.4 million, although United's debt remains at £509.6 million.

Following British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's recent purchase of a 25 per cent stake, United's overall revenue in 2024 is expected to be between £635 million and £665 million.

"We delivered strong revenues during the first half of the fiscal year and have reiterated our guidance for record revenues for the full fiscal year," United's chief financial officer Cliff Baty said.

"This is an exciting time at Manchester United following the completion of Sir Jim Ratcliffe's investment, and we are all focused on working together with our new co-owners to drive the club forward and deliver success on the pitch."

Raducanu loses to Sabalenka at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): Britain's Emma Raducanu was beaten in straight sets by Belarusian world number two Aryna Sabalenka in the third round at Indian Wells.

Raducanu, who reached the fourth round in California last year, lost 6-3 7-5 to two-time major winner Sabalenka as she continues her comeback. The 21-year-old, ranked 250 in the world, was a wildcard at the tournament following an injury-disrupted 2023.

"It was a good success, I would say," Raducanu said of her week. "I think I have handled myself a lot better on the match court. I was a lot more positive and hungry to play, and that showed I think in the tennis that I did play." Raducanu's second-round victory over Dayana Yastremska, who retired with illness, was the first time the English player had recorded back-to-back wins since successfully coming through three in a row at Indian Wells 12 months ago.

The shock 2021 US Open champion made her return to the tour in January following an eight-month absence, during which she had operations on both of her wrists and surgery on her ankle. She said she was "not too concerned" about recent results - having won just three matches in the four tournaments she had played before Indian Wells - as the priority this year is to develop her game.

Testing herself against Sabalenka, who successfully defended her Australian Open title in January, Raducanu will be pleased with the progress she showed. A single break of serve in the sixth game was enough for Sabalenka to take the first set, but only after Raducanu dismissed two set points on serve before putting her opponent under pressure with three break points as she served for the set.

Sabalenka moved a step closer to victory by claiming the first break five games into set two. Raducanu produced an immediate response to stay in contention and continued to trouble the second seed by creating a break point after holding serve to lead 4-3.

Sabalenka struck what proved to be the decisive blow when she broke for a 6-5 lead, eventually serving out the contest with her fourth match point after Raducanu again missed three break points as she fought hard until the end.

The Belarusian will next play American Emma Navarro, who beat Elina Svitolina of Ukraine 6-1 4-6 6-3. American third seed Coco Gauff defeated Italian Lucia Bronzetti 6-2 7-6 (7-5) and the US Open champion will play Elise Mertens in the last 16. Belgian Mertens progressed with a 7-5 6-4 victory against Japan's four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka.

Maria Sakkari, of Greece, beat France's Caroline Garcia 6-3 6-4, while Russian Daria Kasatkina beat American Sloane Stephens 2-6 6-4 6-4 and China's Yue Yuan was a 1-6 6-4 7-6 (7-2) winner against American Caroline Dolehide.

Djokovic knocked out by lucky loser at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): World number one Novak Djokovic was beaten by 20-year-old lucky loser Luca Nardi in round three at Indian Wells.

Italian Nardi, ranked 123 in the world, had originally been knocked out in qualifying but reached the main draw after another player's withdrawal.

He hit 34 winners in a 6-4 3-6 6-3 win over the 24-time Grand Slam champion, converting match point with an ace. "It's crazy," said Nardi, the lowest-ranked player to beat Djokovic at ATP Masters 1,000 or Grand Slam level.

"I don't know [how I held my nerve], I think it is a miracle, because I am a 20-year-old guy, and beating Novak," Djokovic, 36, who was beaten by eventual winner Jannik Sinner in the semi-finals of the Australian Open, is yet to win a tournament this year.

"No titles this year. That's not something I'm used to," said the Serb, who hit 17 winners but made nine unforced errors. "I was starting the season most of my career with a Grand Slam



win or Dubai win. It's fine. It's part of the sport. You just have to accept it. Some you win, some you lose.

"Hopefully I'll win some more and still keep going. I guess every trophy that eventually comes my way is going to be great, to break the kind of negative cycle a little bit I'm having in the last three, four tournaments where I haven't really been close to my best."

Nardi, who was beaten by Belgium's David Goffin in the final round of qualifying, said it was an "amazing feeling". "I couldn't even imagine to play a match against him, and now

I also beat him," he added.

"It's such a dream come true for me. After the match, my coaches told me, Luca, everyone was cheering for you. Incredible. Against Djokovic, he's the best player ever. "I will keep it, this moment, for the rest of my life." Nardi will play Tommy Paul in the last 16, with the American progressing courtesy of a 6-4 6-4 win over France's Ugo Humbert.

Daniil Medvedev beat Sebastian Korda 6-4 5-7 6-3 and will play Grigor Dimitrov in the next round. Holger Rune, Casper Ruud and Taylor Fritz also made it through to the last 16.

James Anderson: England bowler in 'best shape' after reaching 700 Test wickets



LONDON (Agencies): England bowler James Anderson says he is "not getting any worse" but his place in the team is "not a given".

Anderson, 41, became the first pace bowler to take 700 Test wickets during defeat in the fifth Test in Dharamsala as India sealed a 4-1 series victory.

England do not play another Test until a three-match series against West Indies starts on 10 July, followed by three Tests against Sri Lanka.

"I'm really excited for the summer," Anderson told the Tailenders podcast.

"I want to make sure I'm playing well and earn my place in the team."

Anderson, who took 10 wickets in four Tests at an average of 33.5, said he bowled "really well" in India, having struggled to make an impact during last summer's home Ashes against Australia.

"I'm not getting any worse," he added. "I'm definitely in the best shape I've ever been in. "I

like where my game is at and I still have that enjoyment of turning up every day and trying to get better in the nets.

"My place in the team is not a given so I've got to work hard to prove I'm worth a place in the summer."

Anderson said England are "in a good place" going forward under captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, despite the heavy defeat by India.

"I really enjoyed this tour," he added. "I've been on tours to India before where little cracks start appearing in the team and that's not happened this time."

"We've stuck together really well, we really enjoy being together as a group and there is more to come from this team."

"Obviously we'll come in for some criticism because we did have moments where we didn't play particularly well but India are really good."

"Nothing to celebrate" about reaching 700.

Anderson, who took his first wicket on his Test debut in 2003, reached 700 by having Kuldeep Yadav caught behind in the first session of day three in Dharamsala, set in the foothills of the Himalayas.

However, the bowler said there is "nothing to celebrate" about the landmark because he "doesn't play cricket for personal milestones".

"It was a nice moment and nice to

do it at a picturesque ground," he added.

"My dad was here so I had a drink with my dad, which was nice. He was more excited than I was. "Maybe I would've felt more excited if we'd won the Test or the series." Given the demands placed on cricketers by the three formats and the overall reduction in the number of Tests played, it is unlikely another pace bowler will break Anderson's record.

But Anderson said that is "irrelevant" to him because he gets the "biggest buzz" from playing in a team and winning games. He added Kuldeep predicted he would be the England bowler's 700th wicket shortly before he was dismissed.

Anderson said: "Kuldeep edged one down to third man for a single and as he got to the non-striker's end and as I was walking back to my mark, he said, 'I'm going to be your 700th wicket'."

"He wasn't saying he was trying to get out, he was just saying he had a feeling. We both laughed at it." Anderson had moved to 699 wickets on day two by bowling Shubman Gill for 110 after exchanging words with the India batter.

"I said something to him like, 'Do you get any runs outside India?' and he said, 'It's time to retire'," added Anderson. "Then two balls later, I got him out."

Girls College City Gulbahar wins Inter-College Girls Rugby C'ship

PESHAWAR (APP): Girls College City Gulbahar clinched the trophy of the Inter-College Girls Rugby Championship organized under the aegis of Pakistan Rugby Federation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rugby Association with the collaboration of Higher Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University on Tuesday.

Deputy Director Sports and former national athlete Mariyyah Samin Jan was the chief guest at the opening ceremony in the morning while Deputy Director Youth Affairs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former international handball player Arshad Hussain graced the occasion at the closing ceremony on the same day in the afternoon.

Besides her, Organizing Secretary Najma Qazi, Secretary KP Rugby Association Hassan Khan, Director Rugby Training and Development Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Noor Aslam Afridi, Officials of the Pakistan Rugby Federation and selection committee headed by Mariyyah Samin with members comprising Afsheen Khan, Huma Gul and Najma Qazi were also present during the day long matches.

A total of five women colleges teams including Government Girls Degree College Zaryab Colony, Govt Girls Degree College Nahaqi, Peshawar, High School Auqaf, Tangai, District Charsadda

In the first match City Gulbahar defeated High School Auqaf, Tangai, District Charsadda after a tough fight by 2-1 score, followed by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University recorded victory against Govt Girls Degree College Zaryab and Govt Girls Degree College Nahaqi by a same margin of score 2-1.

It was the third position match between Nahaqi and High School Auqaf, Tangai, District Charsadda which was won by the High School Auqaf at 3-1 score. High School Auqaf also registered victory against Govt Girls Degree College Zaryab by 2-1 while the match between City Gulbahar and Nahaqi decided in favour of City Gulbahar at 3-0.

After the Pool matches, the final match was played between Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University and Girls College City Gulbahar Peshawar which was won by City Gulbahar at 3-2. The final match provided great thrill for the sitting spectators and both the teams Girls College City Gulbahar and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University gave each other a tough fight. Both the teams were locked 1-1 at the end of the first session, it was the second session in which Laiba of City Gulbahar scored two timely goals by giving a consolidated victory to her team. Laiba was later on declared as the best player of the tournament while High School

Auqaf, Tangai, District Charsadda was awarded fair play trophy.

Deputy Director Mariyyah Samin, Deputy Director Youth Affairs Arshad Hussain, Director Pakistan Rugby Training and Development Academy, Dara Adam Khail, Noor Aslam Afridi gave away trophies, medals and cash prizes to the position holders teams. Girls College City Gulbahar got the winner trophy and Rs. 7000 as cash prize while Rs. 3000 each given to runners-up team Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University and third position trophy and cash prize given to High School Auqaf, Tangai, District Charsadda. Govt Girls Degree College Nahaqi took fourth position while Govt Girls College Zaryab got overall fifth position.

Speaking on this occasion, Noor Aslam Afridi said that the selection committee short-listed 20 players who would be kept in the camp for training under the aegis of qualified coach Hassan Khan. After the 15-day camp, the team would play three matches in against Rugby Academy teams of Islamabad, Lahore and Faisalabad.

He said all our resources would be utilized to provide the best playing environment to the female players as well. He said Pakistan Rugby Federation has already chalked out a play to promote women Rugby all across Pakistan including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



In brief

Habib Jalib 31st death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 31st death anniversary of revolutionary Poet Habib Jalib was observed on Tuesday by paying glowing tributes to him for his notable services in the field of literature. According to private news channel, Habib Jalib was born on March 24, 1928, in Hoshiarpur, Indian Punjab. Habib Jalib came to Pakistan after partition and worked as a proofreader for a newspaper. His simple and appealing manner touched people's hearts, and despite being imprisoned multiple times. He was also resilient in his poems. His renowned literary works include 'Zulmat Ko Zia', 'Watan Ko Kuch Nahi Khatra', 'Main Ne Uss Se Yeh Kaha' and 'Aisay Dastoor Ko'. His most well-known poetry collections include 'Sir-e-Maqtal', 'Zikr Behte Khoon Ka', 'Gumbad-e-Bedar', 'Kulyaat e Habib Jalib', 'Is Shehar-e-Kharabi Main', 'Goshay Main Qafas K', 'Harf-e-Haqq', 'Harf-e-Sar-e-Daar', and 'Ehad-e-Sitam'. Government honored him with the Nishan-e-Imtiaz and Nigar Awards for his literary contributions. Habib Jalib died on March 12, 1993.

IIUI Rector, facilitate Muslims

ISLAMABAD (APP): International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI), Rector Dr. Dr. Samina Malik and President, IIUI, Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi have wished to the Muslims in Pakistan and around the world a blessed and peaceful Ramadan. In a joint felicitation message on Tuesday, they urged the Muslim youth to disseminate Islam's message of peace adding that fasting is all about patience, virtue and peace. They said the holy month was an opportunity to get rid of societal issues and malpractices as it made the minds, souls and actions as limpid as water. The IIUI leadership hoped that Muslims across the world would be able to make Allah almighty happy and get his blessings by practicing the true spirit of the great month. The message added that poor, ill and helpless people must not be left alone in this month of blessings and they should be given top priority. It was a month to practice patience, self-control, ethical conduct, care for the poor and needy and forgiveness, they added.

Police arrest 3 bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested three bike lifters and recovered three stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Westridge Police Station managed to net three bike lifters namely Shafiq, Abdullah and Yousaf and recovered three stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nasir Nawaz said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

08 gamblers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested eight gamblers over cock fight and recovered Rs 80,650, 10 mobile phones from their possession during crackdown here on Tuesday. According to police spokesman, Kalar Syedan police conducted raid and held those gamblers who were identified as Liaquat, Danish, Tauseef, Ghulam Murtaza, Abid, Shogid Hussain, Shah Mir and Basim Ali.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people in a queue to get flour on government subsidized rate.

HEC announces Global Korea Scholarships

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has announced Global Korea Scholarships for Pakistan/AJK students to get admission in Master and PhD programmes in Korean Universities. According to the details, Global Korea Scholarship is designed to provide international students with opportunities to study at higher educational institutions in Korea in pursuit of academic degrees, which will enhance international education exchange and deepen mutual friendship between Korea and Pakistan.

Similarly, the purpose of this program is to provide Pakistani students

with opportunities to conduct advanced studies in Master's & PhD programs at higher educational institutions in Korea.

The complete application form should be submitted to this address i.e. Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Block 13, st. 29, Diplomatic Enclave 2, G-5/4, Islamabad before 15th March 2024 via courier.

As per instructions, it is the sole responsibility of the student(s) applying for any professional degree (Medical, Engineering, Nursing, Architecture, Law, Veterinary Medicine etc.) to first get confirmed its accreditation from the respective Councils i.e.

Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planners (PCATP), Pakistan Bar Council (PBC), Pakistan Medical Council (PVMC), Pakistan Technology Council etc.

Students can apply directly to scholarship. There shall be no liability on the part of HEC, in any case, it added.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) asked the willing students to visit <https://tinyurl.com/globalkorea2024> for further details.

'Parliament to complete its constitutional term'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab's Information Minister Azma Bukhari Tuesday said that the parliament would complete its constitutional term as PML-N always believed in practical work, rather than tall claims and false promises. Talking to a private news channel, she said the PML-N leadership wanted democracy to thrive and no one would be allowed to derail the democratic process.

PML-N-led government will not allow anyone to destabilize the country, adding, opposition needs to play a constructive role to strengthening democracy despite their personal interests. She also reaffirmed the government's commitment to punish all the people involved in the May 9 incident, adding, cases registered against the miscreants would be taken to their logical conclusion.

She warned the government will not tolerate and give concession to any one who would try to destabilize the country.

PTI leadership was seeking a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) but its founder must prove his innocence in a court of law, she added.

PTI founder was spreading chaos to disrupt democratic system in the country, she said, adding, PML-N always prefers values over power and takes decisions on the national issues in consultation with other political parties.

Federal Ministers pay surprise visit utility store

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar along with Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain paid a surprise visit to the utility store at Abpara Market, G-6 Islamabad. Both the ministers visited the utility store on the directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and reviewed quality of the edibles being sold at subsidized rates under the Ramadan Relief Package 2024. The federal ministers also interacted with the public at the utility store to get their feedback in that regard.

According to Rana Tanveer, special discounts were being given to con-

sumers at utility store under the Ramadan Relief Package 2024. He said the government was making all-out efforts to ensure uninterrupted supply of food items during the holy month of Ramadan.

Prices of food items at utility stores were lesser than the market, he said, while expressing the government's resolve to maintain these rates.

Attaulah Tarar said the government was taking various measures to provide relief to the poor people during Ramadan.

He said the government had announced the Ramadan package under which the poor people were being provided subsidy on

various food items.

Special discount was given by the government on flour, ghee, sugar and other items, he added.

The federal ministers also reviewed the provision of items under the special subsidy provided by the government to the beneficiaries under the Benazir Income Support Program at the utility stores.

On the occasion, the public urged the federal ministers to increase the number of counters at the utility stores. The federal ministers directed to increase the number of counters at the utility stores and speed up the process of providing food items to the people.

Estate Office allots 1,227 govt accommodations in 2 year

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Estate Office, Ministry of Housing and Works has allotted as many as 1,227 quarters of Cat-IV, government accommodations to the federal government employees during the last two years. "The department has made all the allotments on merit by keeping view of the seniority of the government employees who are working in different ministries and divisions," an official in the Ministry told APP.

He said that the Ministry of Housing and Works also intends to modify government accommodation allocation rules to facilitate federal government employees.

The official said a proposed amendment to modify the Allocation Rules, 2002 is under consideration which will be implemented shortly. He said the ministry plans to eliminate Rule-20 of Government House Allotment. This rule currently allows a government house allocated to a

retired federal employee to be assigned to their employed son or daughter.

The official said the waiting list employees are of the view that the rule is based on injustice to transfer the government house from father to child on retirement as it deprives the right of senior employees who have been waiting for a long time.

He said the officers and employees get their son or daughter recruited before retirement and the house is allotted to them, adding that the affected employees are demanding that the allotment of houses should be done only on the principle of seniority. In this regard, he said that the Secretary Ministry of Housing and Works had also constituted a committee for reforms in the rules which has recommended that Rule-20 be scrapped. However, they said that an opinion would be taken from the Establishment Division and the Ministry of Law and Justice.

ANF recovers 125 kg drugs in 13 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 13 operations across the country managed to recover 125 kg drugs and arrested 18 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that 109 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Sharjah at Lahore Airport.

700 grams of Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Doha at Multan Airport. 241 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from the possession of 4 passengers going to Sharjah at Peshawar Airport. 4 kg opium, 7.5 kg heroin, 33.6 kg hashish, and 1 kg Ice were recovered from two accused rounded up from GT Road Gujrat. 2 kg opium, 16 kg hashish, and 1 kg suspicious material were recovered from the Dalbandin Chagai area while 13.2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of two accused arrested near

Khana Bridge Islamabad.

11 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects netted on National Highway Hyderabad. 8.4 kg of hashish was recovered from Dara Adamkhel. 7.2 kg of hashish was recovered near Express Highway Islamabad and an accused was also arrested. 1 kg opium and 5 kg hashish were recovered from a drug smuggler arrested near Qasim Chowk, Hyderabad. In the 11th operation, 4.8 kg of hashish was recovered from Attock and two accused were rounded up.

3.6 kg hashish was recovered from a woman netted near Sangiani Toll Plaza Islamabad and in the 13th operation 3 kg hashish was recovered from an accused nabbed near Jamshoro Toll Plaza.

Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

Railways earn Rs 55 billion in eight months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has earned Rs 55 billion in the first eight months of the current financial year 2023-24, despite facing a financial crisis due to floods in the monsoon season.

During the first eight months of the last financial year (2022-23), the department earned Rs 37 billion, a historic increase in revenue during the same period of the current financial year (2023-24), a ministry official told APP.

According to the data, he said that out of the revenue of Rs 55 billion, revenue was derived from passenger and freight trains while other sectors of the department also contributed to the total revenue.

The department is expecting to generate revenues up to Rs 80 billion by the end of this financial year through the consistent efforts and hard work of the Railway workers,

the official added.

At present, he said that Pakistan Railways is operating 96 passenger trains, up from the previous year when 86 trains were running. Similarly, during the previous year, on average it operated 3.75 freight trains while the number reached seven freight trains this year.

He said the department emphasized that the issue of delay in payment of salaries to employees has now been resolved and things will be more streamlined, once work on the Mainline-I (ML-I) project kicks off.

The official said that owing to inflationary pressures, led by high fuel costs, Pakistan Railways has increased its fares, both for passenger and freight segments that would help the cash-strapped corporation to fetch better revenues in the next few months. To a question, he said that Pakistan

Railways has beefed up precautionary measures to reduce passenger train accidents and only six minor accidents with no causality took place on the entire railway network in the country during the last three months.

"Only two train accidents have taken place in September, no accident happened in October and four train accidents occurred in November due to effective steps of the department," he added.

The drastic decrease in accidents has been witnessed due to the efforts being undertaken to reduce trespassing at unmanned level crossings and unauthorized locations, he added.

"Our staff is continuously monitoring the railway tracks across the country and conducting thorough inspection of the trains as the safety of the passengers is the top priority of the department," he said.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Azam Nazir Tarar assumed charge as Minister for Law and Justice at law Ministry.

Ramadan: A time of spiritual reflection, health benefits for faithful

ISLAMABAD (APP): As Muslims worldwide observe Ramzan, the significance of this sacred month extends beyond religious rituals to encompass various health benefits. Observing Ramzan involves abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn until sunset as it promotes self-discipline, spiritual reflection, and community solidarity among Muslims, while also offering potential advantages for human health. Dr. Mumtaz Ali Khan, Chief of Center for Disease Control at National Institute of Health, Islamabad, in an exclusive talk with APP, said beyond its spiritual significance, the holy month also offered potential health benefits. Fasting during Ramzan could lead to various physiological changes in the body, promoting overall well-being, he added.

The health expert said intermittent fasting, as practiced during Ramzan, can have positive effects leading to weight loss as the body utilizes stored fat for energy during fasting hours. However, he said it was essential to maintain a balanced diet dur-

ing non-fasting hours to avoid overeating and unhealthy weight loss.

He said fasting had been shown to improve insulin sensitivity and regulate blood sugar levels, which might reduce the risk of type two diabetes and metabolic syndrome. He said fasting could improve cognitive function and protect against age-related neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's.

Dr. Mumtaz said that fasting in holy month had been associated with improvements in lipid profile, blood pressure, and heart rate, potentially reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. He said giving the digestive system a break during fasting hours might improve gastrointestinal health and promote better digestion. He said fasting allowed the body to detoxify and clean itself from accumulated toxins, promoting overall detoxification and rejuvenation. To observe Ramzan as individuals or communities, he said they not only deepen their spiritual connections but also nurture their physical well-being.

Afghan aid to be reviewed

KABUL (Ariana News): UN agencies and donors will review assistance in Afghanistan with key focus on transparency and oversight. US Charge d'Affaires for Afghanistan Karen Decker announced this in a statement on X. "Afghan women are difference-makers, defenders, drivers of change," Decker said. She appreciated the "joined-up approach" of Indrika Ratwatte, Deputy Special Representative of the UN SG and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan.

The Frontier Post

Ramazan 02, 1445 — Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Ex-official faces rape charges

KABUL (Khaama Press): An Afghan man was apprehended in Prince William County, Virginia, after authorities investigated a sexual assault complaint, as per police statements. Media reports state that Mohammad Haroon Hakimi, aged 33, is charged with rape following an accusation from a 27-year-old woman. She alleges that Hakimi, whom she had recently met and visited at his Woodbridge residence, assaulted her.

75% of Afghan girls denied education

KABUL (TOLOnews): UNESCO, in its report, has stated that Afghanistan is among the ten countries where the majority of girls are deprived of going to schools and 75% of them are deprived of education.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has published a report stating that girls in Afghanistan and some African countries are facing significant educational setbacks.

"Among these ten countries, nine from Africa and Afghanistan have the highest rate of girls' lack of access to schools. Afghanistan ranks tenth in this list. At least 50% of girls cannot go to school, and in Afghanistan, 75% of girls do not have the opportunity to attend school." Reads part of the report.

"If the Islamic Emirate

does not allow our sisters to go to school this year as well, we will face a very difficult year ahead and the future of Afghanistan will be dark and in ignorance," said Zakiullah Muhammadi, a university professor.

Zahra and Maryam, who are eighth-grade students, have turned to painting since the schools' doors have been closed to girls from the sixth grade onwards.

They say that art can never replace education and the doors of schools must be reopened for girls.

"Education has its value, I want our school to start again so we can return to our lessons," said Zahra

"I should have been in the eleventh grade by now, but since the schools were closed, I am still in the eighth grade," said Maryam.

Meanwhile, several

other students also request the caretaker government to facilitate their return to schools in the educational year 1403.

"My request from the Islamic Emirate is to open the doors of schools for girls above sixth grade in the solar year 1403, so we can enjoy our rights," said Rabia, Student.

"The schools for girls should be opened as soon as possible so we can continue our education like boys," said Sana, another student.

Despite it being more than nine hundred days since the closure of schools for girls above the sixth grade and less than ten days left until the start of the new educational year, the caretaker government has not said anything about reopening the schools for these girls.

Kabul, Tehran strengthen agricultural cooperations

KABUL (BNA): In a bid to enhance agricultural ties, Afghanistan and Iran have announced an expansion of their cooperation in the agricultural sector.

An Iranian delegation, led by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, is set to visit Kabul to solidify bilateral agreements and foster collaboration.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock disclosed that Mawlawi Sadr Azam Osmani, the Deputy Prime Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, held a productive meeting with Gholam Reza Najari, the Deputy Ambassador of Iran in Kabul.

The meeting served as a platform to discuss and explore avenues to strengthen agricultural cooperation between the two neighboring countries.

The expanded cooperation is expected to encompass various areas, including the exchange of agricultural experts, joint research and development initiatives, technology transfer, and the promotion of trade in agricultural products.

United Nations announces job opportunities for women

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has announced that it has created short-term job opportunities for more than 16,000 women in Afghanistan who are heads of their households.

The organization stated on Monday, March 11, through a message on its social media platform X that single women in Afghanistan face serious challenges in meeting their needs.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the support of this organization in the area of assisting women for initial income generation will be focused.

Yesterday, the United Nations also announced its support for 40 female entrepreneurs in 20 provinces of Afghanistan to showcase their products at an exhibition in Kabul.

This comes as UN support for women entrepreneurs has increased in various sectors to further expand job opportunities in Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, this United Nations Development Programme, it has announced support for 89,000 tons, including 21,000 female farmers in Afghanistan.

Muttaqi urges world to step up engagement with IEA

KABUL (Ariana News): Highlighting the importance of stability in Afghanistan, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Amir Khan Muttaqi has called on countries to increase their engagement with the Islamic Emirate.

In a meeting with foreign ministry employees, the video of which was released Tuesday, Muttaqi noted that stability in Afghanistan benefits the region and stability in the region benefits countries beyond.

"During the last 45 years, it was experienced that neither the big powers nor the domestic political parties were able to manage Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate has controlled the situation and the whole world should appreciate this achievement," Muttaqi said.

He said that the Islamic Emirate wants positive interaction and political and economic relations with all countries.

"We are happy that today no power wants to



support the opposition. This is good news for Afghanistan. We are happy that no dissidents have been banned from entering the country because they have no place in Afghanistan,

but anyone can come home and live freely," Muttaqi said.

He expressed hope that large projects will be inaugurated in the country in the next six months.

Officials report 80 uplift projects in earthquake-affected areas

HERAT (TOLOnews): Local officials in Herat said that over 80 World Bank-supported projects worth 300 million Afs are either underway or have been completed in the Kahsan and Zinda Jan districts of Herat, which were areas affected by recent earthquakes.

The projects include water dams, a retaining wall, gravel roads, the cleaning of drains that are supported by United Nations Development Projects, and also aid initiatives from the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

"Over 300 million Afs is being spent in Zinda Jan and Kahsan district and some PDs (districts) of the city. The money is given to people in exchange for work, and also distributed as food items, but in the city, we distribute money. Each family has received 10,000 to 12,000 Afs," said Basir Ahmad Massoudi, head of CHA in Herat.

The local officials said that more than 20,000 people have been provided with employment opportu-

nities with the projects.

"If our country is built, we are very comfortable. People, especially youth, stay busy with employment," said Juma Khan, a Kahsan district citizen.

Local officials said that besides these projects, the caretaker government also aims to plan other projects in Herat. "The vehicle terminal is being made in the south of Herat, maybe around 30 or 40 million dollars will be invested in 1,000 acres of land, the new industrial town is also supposed to be constructed on 55,000

acres of land, there is the reconstruction of a dry port, for which 200 acres land are needed, there is the issue of the cement project which is a great and general interest project and the Herat-Torghundi railway project that is underway," said Noor Ahmad Islam Jar, the governor of Herat.

The World Bank-supported development projects are also supposed to be started in 17 districts of Herat which aims to provide people with job opportunities and to increase development of waterways.

Ramazan sees marketplaces bustling with activity

KABUL (TOLOnews): The food markets in the capital were busy on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

On other days the food market in the capital has not very busy; but on the first day of the month of Ramadan, people were more engaged in purchasing food items in Kabul.

"Today is the first day of the month of Ramadan; people are buying their needed items for Ramadan, therefore our business is good and there is a crowd," Samiullah, a shopkeeper in Kabul, told TOLOnews.

Some citizens in the capital are asking the caretaker government to take serious steps to prevent the increase in the price of food items during the month of Ramadan.

"We have started the first day of Ramadan well. Our request from the government is to pay serious attention to controlling the rates," said Esmatullah, a Kabul resident.

"We ask the government to pay attention to rate control because the people are impoverished and should



be able to make purchases," said Hashem, another Kabul resident.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce has said that the price of food items during the month of Ramadan in the capital will be reviewed.

Nooruddin Azizi, the acting Minister of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), in a meeting with members of various trade unions,

pledged to provide more facilities and support for business people.

Azizi said: "There is no low-quality material and high prices in Afghanistan today. Today, neither water is mixed with oil nor oil in water, which is a grace of God. If we also have some factories, they are under control."

Nematullah Barakzai, an official of the municipality, on controlling the prices,

said: "For about a month, there has been no significant change in the prices of raw materials and a very small percentage, perhaps two or three Afghans in the prices of fuel and in the price of food items by fifty or a hundred Afghani; but we are aware."

Every year with the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan, the price of food items in the country's markets increases.

Roof collapse kills four during heavy rain



HERAT (Ariana News): Four members of the same family were killed when the roof of a house collapsed on them during heavy rain

in Herat province, medics said. The incident happened in the 11th district of Herat city.

According to medics, the

dead include a woman and three children.

Herat has been affected by heavy rain, ongoing, since Monday night.

Switzerland donates \$1.7m to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recently announced that Switzerland has contributed an additional \$1.7 million to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

On Tuesday, March 12, OCHA posted on its social media platform X that Switzerland has donated \$19.7 million to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund since 2016. OCHA has not provided details on which sectors this funding will be allocated to.

Previously, Switzerland had also contributed to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

Switzerland's donation to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund comes as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recently announced that this year, 23 million people in Afghanistan need humanitarian aid, with women making up 52% of this number.

The return of Afghan refugees and a harsh winter have exacerbated an

already dire humanitarian crisis in the country. Thousands of Afghans have returned to their homeland from neighbouring countries, facing a lack of housing, food, and healthcare.

The harsh winter conditions have further aggravated their plight, making survival increasingly difficult for those without adequate shelter or resources. Humanitarian agencies are stretched thin, struggling to provide necessary aid to the growing number of people in need amidst the challenging weather conditions.

Afghan CSO launches education TV channel to support schoolgirls



KABUL (Khaama Press): The Begum Organization for Women (BOW) announced the official launch of Begum TV, an educational television channel aimed at providing learning opportunities to Afghan schoolgirls and students who have been deprived of education under the Taliban regime. The launch coincides with Women's International Day and underscores BOW's commitment to empowering women through education.

Begum TV will broadcast 24/7 in Afghanistan via satellite, offering video courses covering the entire Afghan school curriculum

from 7th to 12th Grade in both Dari and Pashto languages. The programming includes fixed-time daily sessions tailored for different grade levels, allowing students to attend classes from home and engage with their favourite teachers for thirty minutes of intensive courses.

To accommodate students who may miss the morning sessions, all video courses are rebroadcast in the afternoon and late evening. This ensures widespread accessibility to educational content, particularly for those facing logistical challenges or

time constraints.

The initiative builds upon the foundation laid by Begum Academy, a free digital platform launched in November 2023, which hosts over 8500 video courses covering the same curriculum. By combining television and internet broadcasts, Begum aims to provide almost all Afghan schoolgirls and students with access to free education, significantly impacting educational equity in the region.

In addition to academic content, Begum TV features a three-hour daily prime-time slot targeting a

family audience. This segment aims to raise awareness of crucial issues such as health problems, psychological traumas, gender issues, domestic violence, and women's rights. Through a blend of education and entertainment, the channel seeks to engage both children and parents, fostering a supportive environment for girls' education.

Two daily educational talk shows, "Tabassoom" (Healing) and "Matab" (The Clinic), serve as flagship programs during prime time. "Tabassoom" focuses on mental health and well-being, offering insights from psychotherapists based in Paris and Kabul who address viewers' questions and concerns. Meanwhile, "Matab" aims to popularize medical information and provide health counselling and tele-consultations, addressing gaps in the Afghan health system.

Meanwhile, the launch of Begum TV represents a significant step towards promoting education and empowerment for Afghan women and girls. Through innovative programming and deliberate partnerships, BOW continues to champion gender equality and access to education in Afghanistan.

Almost half of Badakhshan and Daikundi schools without buildings

FAIZABAD (Pajhwok): Nearly half of the state-run schools in northern Badakhshan and central Daikundi provinces are without buildings and the students of these schools study in the open air, according to local officials.

Enayatullah Sahar, head of the Daikundi Education Department, told Pajhwok Afghan News total of 431 schools existed in the province out of which 170 schools in different districts were without buildings.

He said the construction of two school buildings had been completed and would be opened in the coming days, the construction of 30 more school buildings were in the plan for the next year and the contracts of 17 buildings had been signed so far.

Enayatullah said the non-availability of school infrastructure was one of the challenges faced by the students in the province, adding that some students study in the open air due to

which their studies had been affected.

He stressed the Education Department worked hard to provide quality education opportunities for the people.

Faizullah, one of the class-tenth students, said: "Our school is without a building and sometimes we study in the Mosque, sometimes the Education Department provides a tent and we study inside the tent which is very difficult for us."

He said: "For several years, we studied together with students from more than six classes in a hall under one umbrella, and because of the noise of students from other classes, we could not learn the lesson properly."

Qaim Ali, another school student in Daikundi, said due to the non-availability of school buildings, they sometimes study in the open air, and if the students have a suitable educational environment, their interest in

education will increase.

According to local officials in Daikundi, 133,000 students — 71,000 boys and 61,000 girls are enrolled in schools.

Separately, local officials in Badakhshan province said most of the 646 schools in 27 administrative units of the province were without buildings and other essential facilities and the students have to study in the open air.

Abdul Ghani Abid, deputy head of the Education Department Broadcast Department, said as a result of the past wars most boys and girls schools in Yafjal Payan, Joram, Wardoj, Tashkan, Raghistan, Shuhada and Baharak districts are fully destroyed or partially damaged and required an urgent rehabilitation. He said over 225,000 boys and 183,000 girls are getting education in 646 high, intermediate and primary schools.

These students are imparted education by

11,100 teachers, including 3,895 women teachers.

He said the buildings of some schools had been destroyed during past wars which needed 13 million afs for rehabilitation.

Ghulam Mohammad Atashpour, a civil society activist in the province, said The Islamic Emirate, along with other fundamental works it has done, should focus on the reconstruction of schools destroyed by wars so that students can continue their studies in a safe environment.

Ahmad Yasir, 14, a resident of Farghamero village of Joram district, said he and his other class fellow study in open air because there is no building for the school.

He said the heat of the sun in the summer season and the monsoon rains sometimes prevent them from going to school, but they have to afford the sun and the rain and study for the sake of their bright future.

KP CM writes to federal govt for chief secy's removal

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Tuesday sought the removal of the chief secretary. As per details, the KP CM in a summary forwarded to the Shehbaz Sharif-led government, sought removal of the Chief Secretary Nadeem Afzal Chaudhry. Gandapur has sought the appointment of Shahab Ali Shah as the new chief secretary.

According to Gandapur, the proposed replacement is expected to bring fresh perspectives and innovative strategies to the role, thereby contributing to the overall development of the KP province. This decision underscores Gandapur's commitment to ensuring effective governance and administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The KP CM said KP IGP Akhtar Hayyat will continue discharging his duties as a decision for his removal has not been taken yet. Separately, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to raise the issue of the province's receivable finances against the federal government. A meeting chaired by KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur discussed financial issues of the province related to the federal government.

The chief minister directed concerned officials to devise a line of action to

Shahab's appointment as CS a step towards administrative revitalization

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a significant development aimed at bolstering governance and administrative efficiency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the provincial government has put forth the nomination of Shahab Ali Shah as the new Chief Secretary, eliciting widespread support and optimism among local communities.

The proposed appointment of Shahab Ali Shah, renowned for his exemplary administrative acumen and dedication to public service, has been hailed as a decisive move towards addressing the longstanding challenges confronting the province. With a distinguished background in key administrative roles, including a notable tenure as Additional Chief Secretary for Planning and Development, Shahab Ali Shah emerges as a beacon of hope for KP's administrative landscape.

While the provincial government's initiative has been met with overwhelming approval from the populace, some individuals have sought to sensationalize the matter, attempting to portray a rift between the federal and provincial governments. However, such assertions are unfounded, as both entities remain committed to upholding the principles of cooperative federalism and collaborative governance.

It is pertinent to note that the process of Shahab Ali Shah's appointment is undergoing routine formalities and any insinuations of discord between federal and provincial authorities are baseless, as both entities continue to work in tandem towards the shared goal of advancing the welfare and development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As the province embarks on a new chapter of administrative revitalization, Shahab Ali Shah's nomination symbolizes a collective commitment to fostering progress, prosperity, and inclusivity. With a focus on efficient governance and citizen-centric policies, KP is poised to overcome its challenges and emerge as a beacon of hope and opportunity for its residents.

raise the matter with the federal government. Gandapur directed the officials to complete paper-

work to take the matter of provincial finances effectively with the federal government.

PTI founder's sisters bail extended

F.P. Report

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court on Tuesday extended the interim bail of 34 accused including sisters of PTI founder Aleema Khan and Uzma Khan in the Jinnah House attack case.

The duty judge of the anti-terrorism court conducted hearing of the interim bail pleas of 34 accused including Aleema Khan and Uzma Khan. The court adjourned the hearing, issuing orders of interim bail extension till April 20. Talking to media after appearing in the court, Aleema Khan said what did the deal mean? Deal meant to keep mum. "We have been contacted by many people that if we keep quiet they will take PTI founder out of jail," they said.

She said cases of terrorism had been registered against them. "We have come to the court, but there is no judge, no investigation officer, even there is no judge. People are being harassed for nine months. Still the investigation is incomplete," she added. She further said PTI founder and Bushra Bibi were fine. PTI founder had pain in intestine. "Superintendent should have told us so that we could arrange our doctor. The superintendent says we have to take permission from high-ups," she said.

Indian troops begin Maldives pullout

NEW DELHI (AFP): India has begun withdrawing military personnel operating surveillance aircraft in the Maldives after the new pro-China president ordered them to leave, local media reported Tuesday. The Mihaaru newspaper reported that 25 Indian troops deployed in the southernmost atoll of Addu had left the archipelago ahead of March 10, the official start of the withdrawal agreed by both sides.

President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in September on a pledge to kick out Indian security personnel deployed in the Maldives to patrol its vast maritime border. Following talks with New Delhi, the two sides had agreed to complete a withdrawal of 89 Indian troops and their support staff from the nation of 1,192 tiny coral islands by May 10.

Mihaaru said the three Indian aircraft — two helicopters and one fixed-wing plane — will be operated by Indian civilian staff, who have already arrived. There was no official confirmation from either the Maldivian or Indian authorities, but Mihaaru said the Maldivian National Defence Force confirmed the Indian withdrawal had begun. Last week, the Maldives signed a "military assistance" deal with China as the Indians prepared to leave.

The Maldivian defence ministry said the deal was to foster "stronger bilateral ties" and that China would train its staff under the pact. India is suspicious of China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and its influence in the Maldives as well as in neighbouring Sri Lanka. Both South Asian island nations are strategically placed halfway along key east-west international shipping routes.

Relations between Male and New Delhi have chilled since Muizzu won elections in September. New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence, but the Maldives has shifted into the orbit of China — its largest external creditor. Muizzu, who visited Beijing in January where he signed a raft of infrastructure, energy, marine and agricultural deals, has previously denied seeking to redraw the regional balance by bringing in Chinese forces to replace Indian troops.

India last month said it was bolstering its naval forces on its "strategically important" Lakshadweep islands, about 130 kilometres north of the Maldives. The Indian naval unit based on the island of Minicoy will boost "operational surveillance" of the area, the navy said.



KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari laying floral wreath at Mazar-i-Quaid to pay respect to father of the nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Punjab home dept bans meetings with PTI founder in Adiala Jail

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has been barred from holdings meetings inside Rawalpindi's Adiala jail for two weeks, media reported on Tuesday.

According to a notification issued by Punjab's Home Department, all kinds of visits, meetings and interviews have been restricted in Adiala Jail due to security alert. The notification instructed the authorities that barbed wires should be installed outside the jail premises. A fresh security audit of the officials of the special branch of the police, Intelligence Bureau and the jail staff be done within a single day.

No person would be exempted from body search in the jail premises and a clearance operation would be carried out in and around the jail, it added. Security clearance of government contractors working inside jails was also sought.

Expressing severe concerns over the abrupt ban on Khan's meeting in Adiala jail, PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan feared that the former prime minister's life was in danger. Addressing a press conference outside the jail, Gohar said that they were barred from meeting the incarcerated PTI founder. He said that the authorities did not inform anybody

about the two-week ban on Khan's meeting.

The authorities gave "terrorism" as a reason for the move, he added. Gohar demanded immediate meeting and consultations with the incarcerated PTI founder. He also sought the details about Khan's health.

The development comes as Khan, who was moved to the Adiala jail in September 2023 from Attock jail, is serving an accumulative sentence of 31 years in various cases and has been engaging his lawyers, party leaders and family members during his imprisonment as previously the authorities had allocated Monday and Thursdays for meetings. The ex-prime minister, along with former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, were handed down a sentence of 10 years each in the cipher case in January for publishing contents of a secret cable sent by the country's ambassador in Washington to the government in Islamabad.

This was followed by another 14-year sentence awarded to Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, by an accountability court in the Toshakhana reference for misusing his 2018 to 2022 premiership to buy and sell gifts in state possession that were received during visits abroad and worth more than Rs140 million (\$635,000). The court also handed down a fine of

Rs1.57 billion — Rs787 million each — to the couple.

Subsequently, Khan and Bushra were also sentenced to another seven years, along with a Rs500,000 penalty each, in the "un-Islamic nikah" case for marrying each other before the completion of the 90-day iddat period following the latter's divorce. Furthermore, the PTI founder along with his wife were indicted in the the £190 million case during the jail trial that was conducted in the Adiala jail as well.

Khan's party and associates in recent months have time again demanded his release from "fabricated" cases while raising concerns for the former premier's safety inside the prison. Last week, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) claimed to have arrested three terrorists and recovered a map of Adiala Jail, a hand grenade and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) from their possession. Rawalpindi City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Hamdani said police recovered automatic weapons and ammunition from the terrorists who hailed from Afghanistan. Before that in November, police had found a suspicious bag laden with an explosive device near Adiala Road in Gorakhpur, Rawalpindi, just one kilometre away from the facility.

UN envoy in UNSC demands immediate ceasefire in Gaza

NEW YORK (AP): The UN envoy focusing on sexual violence in conflict warned Israel that the finding of "clear and convincing information" that some hostages taken by Hamas during its Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel were subjected to sexual violence "does not in any way legitimize further hostilities."

"In fact, it creates a moral imperative for a humanitarian ceasefire to end the unspeakable suffering imposed on Palestinian civilians in Gaza and bring about the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages," Pramila Patten told the UN Security Council where Israel's foreign minister was also sitting and listening. "Continuation of hostilities can, in no way, protect them," she said. "It can only expose them to further risk of violence, including sexual violence."

Patten was speaking at a council meeting sought by Israel and called by the United States, United Kingdom and France to focus on her recent report, which also found "reasonable grounds" to believe Hamas committed rape, sexualized torture, and other cruel and inhumane acts against women during the Oct. 7 attack that killed about 1,200 people and led to 250 others being taken hostage. She told the council that the 134 hostages still in captivity and the more than 2 million civilians in Gaza "share a common fate. For their common sake, there must be a humanitarian ceasefire now." Israel's ongoing offensive against Hamas has killed over 30,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz said he came to the council "to protest as loud as I can against the crimes against humanity" committed by Hamas in order to deter and scare Israeli society. He strongly criticized the Security Council's failure in over 40 meetings since Oct. 7 to condemn Hamas' actions, saying the UN's most powerful body should declare the extremist group a terrorist organization and pressure it to immediately release the hostages.

In a statement that surprised some diplomats, Katz noted that Monday was the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and said: "Let me take this opportunity to bless our Muslim brothers: Ramadan Kareem." That means have a blessed or generous Ramadan. "Hamas is not speaking on behalf of the Muslim world," Katz said, "and we are asking you to condemn the sexual violence crimes that these barbarians committed in the name of the Muslim religion."

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian UN ambassador, told the council that Muslims around the world are celebrating Ramadan but "in Gaza, death and suffering can be found everywhere. Food and hope can be found nowhere." He told the council that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't want a ceasefire because his "political survival requires for the onslaught to continue."

Israel's objective, Mansour said, "remains the forcible displacement of our people by making Gaza unlivable." He expressed hope that the Security Council, which showed an "unprecedented" reaction to Patten's

report by convening a meeting within a week, would respond equally to reports of sexual assault against Palestinian women and girls, men and boys. Patten's key recommendation is to encourage Israel to grant access to the UN human rights chief and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Palestinian territories and Israel "to carry out full-fledged investigations into the alleged violations" by Hamas.

Mansour said the Palestinians would welcome these investigations and challenged Israel "to make a similar declaration of welcome." He also invited Patten to visit Gaza and see for herself the plight of Palestinians. Patten told the council that when she visited the West Bank she didn't receive any reports of rape, but instances of sexual violence during the detention of both Palestinian men and women were raised.

These included invasive body searches, unwanted touching of intimate areas, beatings in the genital areas, threats to men of rape against their women family members, "and inappropriate strip searches and prolonged forced nudity of detainees," she said. Patten said she raised these reports with Israeli authorities, who provided her with information on their protocols to prevent such acts and "indicated willingness to investigate any alleged breaches." She expressed disappointment "that the immediate reaction to my report by some political actors was not to open inquiries into those alleged incidents, but rather to reject them outright via social media." She did not name any of these "political actors."

US preparing new weapons package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The United States is preparing a new military aid package for Ukraine that could be worth as much as \$400 million, two US officials told Reuters on Tuesday, the first such move in months as additional funds for Kyiv remain blocked by Republican leaders in Congress. The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said an announcement was expected later on Tuesday.

One of the officials said that the funding for this package is from credits refunded to the Pentagon for recent purchases and is expected to contain artillery. The US Army, in particular, has been making huge purchases of munitions and vehicles to replenish stocks sent to Ukraine. The last drawdown was in December 2023 when funds to replenish stocks fell to zero.

The White House has been scrambling to find ways to send more military assistance given the situation on the battlefield and the resistance to the

funding from Republican hardliners. US officials have also looked at options for seizing some \$285 billion in Russian assets immobilized in 2022 and using the money to pay for Ukraine weaponry. The announcement is set to come as Poland's president and prime minister meets President Joe Biden at the White House later on Tuesday to talk about ways to bolster support for Ukraine. The new weapons package was first reported by Reuters earlier on Tuesday.

Using the funds that have been returned to replenish stocks opens a narrow window to urgently allow more aid to be sent from existing stocks as the Biden administration waits for supplemental funding to be passed by lawmakers. Biden, a Democrat, has backed military aid to Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, while his likely Republican opponent in the Nov. 5 US election, former president Donald

Trump, has a more isolationist stance. Republican House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, an ally of Trump, has so far refused to call a vote on a bill that would provide \$60 billion more for Ukraine.

The measure has passed the Democratic-run Senate, and both Republicans and Democrats in the House say it would pass if the chamber's Republican leaders allowed a vote. Leaders of US intelligence agencies urgently pressed members of the House of Representatives on Tuesday to approve additional military assistance for Ukraine, saying it would not only boost Kyiv as it fights Russia but discourage Chinese aggression. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Monday that the situation along the front of the country's war with Russia was the best in three months, with Moscow's troops no longer advancing after their capture last month of the eastern city of Avdiivka.

Polio virus detected in sewage samples

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Health has confirmed the presence of the poliovirus in sewage lines spanning the four provinces of Pakistan. Twelve districts across the country have tested positive for polio in sewage samples, as revealed in a technical report received by the Ministry of Health. This brings the total number of polio-positive sewage samples for the current year to 46.

Polio testing samples were collected from 11 cities between February 13 and 20. Among the confirmed cases, sewage from the Urban Environmental Site of Okara, Orangi Nala in Karachi, Kemari, Muhammad Khan Colony

in Karachi, and Haji Murid Goth in Karachi Central were found to be infected with the poliovirus. Additionally, sewage samples from cities including Karachi, Okara, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Jacobabad, Islamabad, Kohat, Quetta, Peshawar, and Sibi have also tested positive for polio.

Further analysis identified polio-positive sewage in specific locations such as the Jacob Pumping Station in Hyderabad, Jacobabad Sadar Pumping Station, Sukhramka Pumping Station, Sibi Ganda Nala in Balochistan, Jatak Clay in Quetta, and Faqir Abad in Kohat.

The Ministry of Health emphasizes the urgency of addressing the polio threat,

especially given the rise in cases. Previous reports had confirmed polio in sewage samples from Islamabad and three provinces. The ministry reported a record 14 sewage samples testing positive for polio in seven cities across Sindh, KP, and Balochistan, bringing the total for 2023 to 112. Cities such as Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and Sukkur continue to harbor the poliovirus in their sewage.

The recent findings underscore the persistent challenges in eradicating polio from Pakistan. Efforts to contain and eliminate the virus remain crucial, with the Ministry of Health urging continued vigilance and comprehensive vaccination campaigns to protect communities nationwide.

Preparations for Senate polls completed

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will announce the schedule for the election on Senate vacant seats on March 14. As per details, the preparations have been completed for the polling for 48 Senate seats, scheduled to take place on the second of the next month (April).

After the merger with KP, the elections on the four FATA seats will not be held. "These seats have been abolished after the merger of tribal areas into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) under the 25th Amendment of the Constitution," the ECP said in its statement.

Nomination papers about the Senate elections can be obtained from the Election Commission Secretariat Islamabad as well as the provincial elections commissioners of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Candidates can submit their nomination papers to their respective Returning Officers on Friday and Saturday (March 15, 16). Earlier, 52 senators retired on March 12 after completing their six-year tenure.

According to the ECP, the Senate polls will be carried out on seven general seats, two women seats, two technocrat seats and one minority seat in Punjab. It added that the elections will be contested on 12 seats in Sindh as well in the aforementioned denomination while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the polls will only be carried out on 11 seats.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Upper House (Senate) became dysfunctional for

three weeks, as 52 lawmakers, more than half the strength of the upper house, retired including Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, Deputy Chairman Mirza Afridi.

The schedule for Senate elections will be issued on March 14 while the nomination papers for elections can be obtained from Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) head office and four provincial secretariats.

While the nomination papers can be submitted to concerned ECP offices during March 15 and 16. As per law, the term of 52 Senate members, including Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, Deputy Chairman Mirza Afridi, Leader of the House Ishaq Dar, Leader of the Opposition Dr. Shahzad Waseem and Senator Raza Rabbani, ended on Tuesday. The term of 11 senators supported by PML-N, 13 by PPP, 7 by PTI, and two each from JUI-F, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), and National Party have ended.

Four senators supported by Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), along with one senator from Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), MQM-P, and Pakistan Muslim League-F, (PML-F) have also retired.

Those who retired include, Moulana Bux Chaudhio, Farogh Naseem, Dr Musadik Malik, Faisal Javed and Azam Khan Swati. Asad Ali Junejo and Mushahid Hussain Sayed representing Islamabad, have also retired from Senate. After the general elections, 6 Senate seats got vacant after the Senators won MNA seats. By-elections to fill these vacant seats will take place on March 14.

The term of a senator is

six years and half of them retire every three years. The elections of new Senators normally take place days before the expiry of the senators' term, but this time that could not happen. The new situation appeared came about due to the delay in holding general elections, in the absence of an electoral college caused by the failure of the ECP to hold timely general elections.

Meanwhile, the nine candidates including, Alia Hamza from PTI and Kamran Michael from PML-N, have received nomination papers for participating in Senate election from Punjab.

Senate elections are set for 12 seats in Punjab on April 2. Alia Hamza's nomination papers for the Senate candidacy in Punjab were submitted to the Election Commissioner's Office by her husband, Jameel Malik. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Alia Hamza and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Kamran Michael received nomination papers from the Provincial Election Commissioner.

In Punjab, elections are being held for 7 general seats, 2 women seats, 2 technocrats' seats, and one minority seat. The schedule for the Senate elections will be announced on March 14. Candidates interested in contesting the elections have been asked to obtain nomination papers from the Election Commission headquarters and provincial election commissioners of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Nomination papers can be deposited with the relevant returning officers on March 15 and 16.