

Marwat named focal person

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has appointed the member of the National Assembly, Shere Afzal Marwat, as the focal person for arranging a meeting with the detained PTI founder at Adiala jail. Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir presided over the hearing of the application against the Punjab government's order regarding the ban on meetings with the detained PTI founder at Adiala jail.

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CEC leaves for Russia

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja has departed on an official visit to Russia as a foreign observer for the presidential elections. The 8th presidential elections in Russia will continue from March 15 to 17. Sikandar Sultan Raja will monitor the presidential election along with other observers. The chief election commissioner has been invited by the government of Russia as an observer.

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# Shehbaz reviews five-year roadmap for economic progress

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a high-level review meeting on a five-year roadmap for economic progress of the country. The five-year roadmap focused on decrease in inflation, poverty alleviation, and provision of employment.

The prime minister said consultation should be held on this plan with all stakeholders of different sectors of the economy. Without wasting any time, implementation of projects for the economic stability and progress of the country should be ensured, he added. The prime minister said a schedule of implementation for the projects should be presented, adding steps should be taken on priority basis to speed up progress in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, information technology, foreign investment and small and medium industries.

He said the government would reduce its expenditure and he would not allow further waste of money of poor people. He said in the next five years, the country's economy would be stabilized to put the country on the path of progress.

The PM said tax revenue would be increased with digitalization and technology, while the per acre yield in the agriculture sector would also be increased with the use of technology. The loss-making government institutions would be privatized on priority basis, he added. The meeting was informed in detail about the

roadmap for economic progress and about proposed measures in important sectors including electricity, agriculture, livestock, exports, small and medium enterprises, taxes, information technology, small and medium enterprises, investment, and privatization.

Federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Muhammad Jehanzeb, Ahad Khan Cheema, Dr Musadiq Malik, Minister of State Shiza Fatima Khawaja, Jehanzeb Khan and high-ranking officers attended the meeting.

**Qatari envoy calls on PM:** Ambassador of Qatar to Pakistan Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater Thursday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. The prime minister thanked the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, for their warm messages of felicitations on his re-election as Prime Minister.

He said Pakistan was proud of its close, fraternal relationship with Qatar, with bilateral ties having the potential to grow even stronger and meaningful, particularly in the areas of economy, trade and investment. He highlighted that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) that was established during his previous tenure as Prime Minister, was now functioning as an efficient and productive mechanism to ensure that foreign investors were able to benefit from investment opportunities

in Pakistan's key sectors i.e. agriculture, I.T., mining and minerals as well as renewable energy.

The prime minister lauded Qatar's contribution to peace efforts in Gaza. He said it was disappointing that violence was continuing in Gaza even during the holy month of Ramadan. He fondly recalled his official visits to Qatar in August 2022 and March 2023. He also extended an invitation to the Amir of Qatar to undertake an official visit to Pakistan and said the people of Pakistan looked forward to welcoming him in the near future. The ambassador thanked the prime minister and said he would do his best to foster stronger ties between the two countries.

**PM takes notice on chairman IRSA appointment:** Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif has taken notice on the raising concerns of Sindh government on the matter of chairman Indus River System Authority's (IRSA) appointment.

According to the details, Sindh irrigation minister Jam Khan Shoro informed about the telephonic call between chief minister Sindh Murad Ali Shah and Shehbaz Sharif in which Murad told him about the concerns regarding the appointment of chairman IRSA.

However, Shehbaz affirmed to Murad Ali Shah that he will take back the notification of the appointment of chairman IRSA. Jam Khan Shoro said that Murad told Shehbaz that it is decided in a meeting that the chairman's appointment will be according to the provincial members.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif casting his vote in Senate by-elections at Parliament House.

## KP CM de-notifies 39 AAGs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has de-notified 39 law officers at Advocate General Office including Additional Advocate Generals on record and Assistant Advocate Generals, on Thursday.

According to details, CM Khyber Pakhtunkhwa de-notify Additional Advocate Generals named Muhammad Inam Khan, Adnan, Ali, Aqil Hussain, Riaz Khan Painda Khel, Azhar Rahim, Amir Zaib, Ayub Zaman, Abdul Rauf Afridi, Basharat Khan, Muhammad Asghar Khan, Ghulam Muhammad Sappal, Haq Nawaz, Shah Faisal, Kausar Ali Shah, Noroz Khan, Muhammad Bashir Naveed and Umair Azam Khan.

Moreover, the de-notified includes Assistant Advocate Generals including Arshad Azam, Taskeen-U-Din Khattak, Fazal-e-Maola, Javed Khan, Javed Ullah, Yasir Khalid, Bilal Khan, Rahmat Ali, Arbab Fakhr-e-Alam Khan, Humaira Gul, Niaz Muhammad, Jawad Ali, Aamir Khan, Shoaib Ali, Najib Ullah, Abdul Waheed, Inam Ullah Khan, Ahmad Abu Hanifa Imam, Rahim Ullah, Kamal and Naeem Khan with immediate effect.

## ECP issues election schedule for 48 Senate seats

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday issued schedule for elections on forty-eight vacant seats of the Senate.

According to the schedule, polling will be held on the second of next month from 9 am to 4 pm. The candidates can file their nomination papers with the returning officers from tomorrow till Saturday. Whereas the 19th of this month has been fixed for the scrutiny of nomination papers. A revised list of the candidates will be issued on the 26th of this month whilst the candidates can withdraw their nomination papers by the 27th of this month.

In the federal capital, members of the National Assembly will elect members of the Senate against one general seat and one seat for technocrats including Ulema. Members of the four provincial assemblies will elect Senators for seven general seats, two women seats, and two seats for technocrats including Ulema from each province, as well as one seat for non-Muslims from both Punjab and Sindh provinces.

These seats became vacant after expiration of the term of the incumbent members on the 11th of this month. It is pertinent to mention here that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced that polling for 48 Senate seats will be held on the second of the next month (April).

## PHC rejects SIC's plea on reserved seats

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A five members Peshawar High Court (PHC) larger bench headed by Justice Ishfaq Ibrahim and includes Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice SM Atique Shah, Justice Shakeel Ahmed and Justice Syed Arshad Ali dismissed writ plea seeking provision of reserved seats to Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), on Thursday.

During the hearing, Barrister Ali Zafar argued before the Peshawar High Court (PHC) that reserved seats under Article 103 Section C should be given to the Sunni Unity Council. He continued arguments before a five-member larger bench on the petitions filed on the issue of reserved seats for the SIC.

Barrister Zafar submitted that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was deprived of its symbol days before general elections. The Supreme Court upheld the decision of Election Commission (ECP) to

deprive the PTI of its election symbol after which candidates were given different symbols to contest election as independents. Yet people voted for the PTI overwhelmingly.

Barrister Zafar said that after winning the election as independents, they joined the SIC. Eighty-six members-elect of the National Assembly, 107 of the Punjab, 90 of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, nine of Sindh and one of Balochistan assemblies joined the SIC. The ECP was bound to allot 78 seats to the SIC, but it did not do so, he added.

The court inquired the counsel whether it was hearing the case of reserved seats of the entire country. Barrister Zafar replied that the petition was for the National and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies. It is worthy that PHC granted status quo against Election Commission of Pakistan orders stripping reserved seats from SIC on 7th

March till 13th March. It may be noted that the ECP had refused to give 20 reserved seats for women and three minority seats to the SIC.

Meanwhile, speaking to the media, the PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan said that they would challenge the Peshawar High Court order regarding the reserved seats in the Supreme Court. The PHC Thursday turned down PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council's plea for reserved seats in the assemblies.

He said that a rally will be held on March 23. The venue will be announced tomorrow. He also alleged that attempts were being made to defeat the winning candidates of PTI through the recounting of votes.

Gohar Ali Khan said that there will be a request from the Supreme Court to form a larger bench on reserved seats. Without these seats the parliament cannot be completed, Gohar asserted.

## KP CM vows to initiate Billion Trees Plus project

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: To enhance forest cover in the province, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur decided in principal to initial Billion Tree Plus project, and directed the quarters concerned to complete home work in this regard.

He directed for substantial increase in the fines against illegal cutting and logging of forest timber, adding that amount of the fine should be more than the value of timber harvested so as to curb the elements that cause deforestation. "CCTV Cameras be installed at all forest check posts to keep a close watch on timber smuggling and other illegal activities", he directed. The Chief Minister further directed them to come up with viable proposals and an action plan for promoting fisheries in the province.

Meanwhile the Chief Minister presided over a meeting regarding

Chief Minister directed the concerned quarter to formulate an effective strategy for enhancing revenue collection of the department and preventing forest cutting in the province.

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Meanwhile the Chief Minister presided over a meeting regarding

Peshawar-D.I.Khan Motorway. He was briefed about the progress so far made on the project, total cost of the project and proposed alignment. The Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to also consider the option of Belt Operate Transfer (BOT) mode for constructing Peshawar-D.I.Khan motorway, adding that all necessary steps should be ensured in this regard. It was informed in a meeting that 365 Km long D.I.Khan motorway would have 2 tunnels and 19 interchanges benefitting a large number of population.

The project has also been discussed in the 8th meeting of Joint Working Group of CPEC and both the sides agreed that the project would be reconsidered in the next meeting of the Joint Working Group.

## ‘Outreach good beginning’, says Zardari on KP CM-PM meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari said Thursday that the meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur was a "good beginning".

Shehbaz's government came into power this month, after his party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) formed an alliance with Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and other smaller parties. In opposition, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which has formed its government in the KP province, claims that the PML-N and the PPP secured

victory in the February 8 elections by "stealing" PTI's mandate.

The relation between these parties has for years remain strained, Gandapur, after being elected as the chief minister, saying that although he doesn't accept the PML-N's government, he would still keep a working relationship with the Centre. As part of this, he met Prime Minister Shehbaz in Islamabad on Wednesday and hailed his first engagement with the chief executive belonging to the rival PML-N as "positive".

In response, President Zardari has welcomed the interaction between the prime minister and the chief minister, a statement from the President's

Secretariat read. "It is high time we start thinking of working towards healing the divisions Pakistan has been going through," he added. The president said that he had always advocated for prioritising Pakistan above all else, and it was time we gave people hope in the democratic process by showing them it could work. "This outreach is a good beginning," he stated.

CM Gandapur, talking to journalists after the meeting, had said he stressed the need to hold political dialogue with the party's incarcerated founder, Imran Khan, who has been behind bars since August last year in different cases ranging from corruption to terrorism.

## Court grants bail to Hassan, Hussain Nawaz

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad today granted bail to Hassan and Hussain Nawaz, sons of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. As per details, both sons of the PML-N supremo surrendered before the accountability court judge Nasir Javed.

At the outset of the hearing, the judge inquired about the number of cases registered against Hassan and Hussain Nawaz. At this the counsel responded, saying that three cases have been registered against them and pleas seeking suspension of arrest warrants were filed all cases. The court approved the bail pleas filed by Hassan and Hussain Nawaz and directed them to submit surety bonds worth Rs 50,000.

Furthermore, the accountability court also removed the fugitive status of both sons of Nawaz Sharif in Panama references. Earlier this week, both Hassan and Hussain Nawaz returned to Pakistan after seven years. Sources said that CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif warmly welcomed them upon their arrival at Jati Umra where they offered prayers (Fatihah) at their late mother Kulsoom Begum's grave.

Earlier, an accountability court announced the reserved verdict and suspended the permanent arrest warrants of Hassan and Hussain Nawaz in the NAB References Avenfield, Flagship, and Al-Azizia till Thursday. It is pertinent to mention here an accountability court on July 11, 2018 issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Hussain and Hassan Nawaz, who were declared absconders in the Avenfield reference case.

Both Hussain and Hassan, who were in London at that time, were instructed to appear before the accountability court which sought to wind up references in the Avenfield reference case and other graft cases. In a major relief for the PML-N, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) earlier acquitted former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the Avenfield reference.

An accountability court on July 6, 2018, sentenced former premier Nawaz Sharif to a total of 10 years in prison and directed him to pay a fine of \$8 million after finding him guilty on different charges in the Avenfield reference.

## Ruling alliance bags five out of six seats in Senate

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The ruling alliance at the Centre managed to win the by-polls on the five out of the six Senate seats with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) securing the majority of the seats.

The polling for the six Senate seats in the National, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies began at 9am and ended at 4pm. These six seats had fallen vacant under Article 223 of the Constitution which prohibits lawmakers from holding dual membership.

The sub-section 4 of the article states: "Subject to clause (2) if a member of either House or of a Provincial Assembly becomes a candidate for a second seat which, in accordance with clause (1), he may not hold concurrently with his first seat, then his first seat shall become vacant as soon as he is elected to the second seat."

In the National Assembly, PPP's Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani managed to retain the seat he vacated after securing. Out of the 301 votes cast, Gilani, who was a joint candidate of the ruling

coalition of six parties, secured 204 votes compared to his rival Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) Ilyas Mehrban who could only get 88 votes.

Nine votes were rejected during the vote count. The seat on which the elections were held today had fallen vacant after Gillani was elected as MNA in the Feb 8 elections. The PPP leader has been tipped for the Senate chairman's slot.

In Sindh, 124 votes were cast during the polling held to fill the two vacant general seats of the upper house. After the count, PPP's Jam Saifullah Khan Dharejo and Muhammad Aslam Abro managed to get elected to the Senate by obtaining 58 and 57 votes respectively. While Nazeerullah and Shazia Sohail of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) were only able to get 4 votes each. During the count, one vote was rejected.

**RO announces Senate Election schedule for 12 seats of Sindh:** The Returning officer for Senate Elections on 12 seats of Sindh, Sharifullah has issued a schedule for submission of nomination papers.

In pursuance of the Election Commission of Pakistan's notification, the

Returning officer for the Senate Elections in Sindh, Sharifullah issued a schedule for the submission of nomination papers for 12 seats including seven general, two women, two technocrats, and one non-Muslim reserved seats from Sindh.

According to public notice, the polling for Senate seats from Sindh will be held at the Sindh Assembly building on April 2, 2024. The candidates will have to file their nomination papers with Returning Officer on 15 and 16 March, 2024. The names of the candidates will be published on March 17 and the scrutiny of the nomination papers will be carried out on March 19.

As per the given schedule, appeals against acceptance and rejections of nomination papers will be filed on March 21 and the disposal of appeals by the Tribunal will be made on March 25 while the revised list will be published by the Tribunal on March 26, 2024. The date of withdrawal of candidature is fixed as March 27 while polling will be held on April 02, 2024, at Sindh Assembly Building from 9 am to 4 pm, the public notice stated.

## Citizenship Amend Act by India: FO takes strong exception

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has taken strong exception to the implementation of controversial Citizenship Amendment Act by India. At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the legislation and the relevant rules are evidently discriminatory in nature as they differentiate amongst the people on the basis of their faith.

The spokesperson said the regulation and laws are premised on a false assumption that minorities are being persecuted in Muslim countries of the region and the facade of India being a safe haven for them.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch pointed out that the rising wave of Hindutva under the BJP government has led to rapid political, economic and social victimization of Muslims and other minorities in India. She said the discriminatory steps further expose the sinister agenda of transforming India into

Hindu Rashtra. She advised the Indian authorities to stop pre-choreographed targeting and systematic marginalization of minorities. She said only a few days ago, a group UN special rapporteurs urged corrective actions to protect human rights and attacks against minorities in the run up to India's national elections.

She urged India to take action to protect its own minorities especially Muslims who, she said, are in a very difficult situation because of rising Hindutva. The spokesperson strongly condemned the Indian decision to declare illegal Kashmir National Front in illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. With this, a total of nine Kashmiri political parties have been outlawed in IIOJK.

She said these oppressive measures reflect a vicious intent by India to stifle dissent and freedom of expression in IIOJK in complete disregard of international laws. She said India should immediately lift curbs on the

banned Kashmiri political parties, release all political prisoners and forthwith implement the UNSC resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. The spokesperson informed the media that a meeting of programming committee of SAARC was held earlier this month in Kathmandu, Nepal after a gap of three years. She said it reviewed the status of SAARC processes and activities and finalized the budget and calendar of activities of the SAARC Secretariat, specialized bodies and regional centers.

She said being its founding member, Pakistan is fully committed to advancing the objectives of SAARC as enshrined in its charter. She said Pakistan has always played an active role in SAARC processes and activities. Voicing concerns over ongoing atrocities against Palestinians by Israel, the spokesperson urged the UN Security Council to fulfill its responsibilities to bring an end to the sufferings of Palestinian people.



### Police arrest 15 for possessing illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi conducted raids in different areas and netted 15 accused for possessing weapons, ammunition, operating illegal petrol and LPG agencies and two bike lifters.

According to a police spokesman, Civil Lines police in their operation arrested four accused namely Imran, Hamza, Zafar and Khizer and recovered LPG cylinders and other items.

Rawat police arrested Muhammad Sohaib for operating an illegal petrol agency and recovered 30 liters petrol from his possession. The spokesman informed that Rattaamral, Naseerabad, Taxila and Chontra police rounded up Khalid, Habib, Umar, Hamza and others and recovered three 30 bore pistols, three Kalashnikov and ammunition.

Meanwhile, Pirwadhai police arrested two bike lifters namely Pervaiz and Husnain and recovered two stolen motorcycles from their possession. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the lawbreakers and operations against aerial firing, illegal weapon holders and illegal petrol and LPG agencies would continue.

### PSCA seminar raises awareness on ‘Crime stopper’ service

LAHORE (APP): A seminar on the ‘Crime stopper service’ was organised at Blackstone School of Law & Business, here on Thursday. Chief Law and Procurement Officer of Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) Zafar Javed Malik and Deputy Executive Officer Areeba Butt actively participated in the sessions.

The focus of the seminars, specifically tailored for women, is to educate attendees about the confidential reporting of harassment and other crimes through the dedicated ‘Crime stoppers’ numbers. The representatives of the Punjab Safe Cities Authority delivered comprehensive briefings on the services provided. Participants were enlightened about the ‘Crime stopper’ numbers and the Women’s Safety App.

Chief Law and Procurement Officer Zafar Javed Malik emphasised the integration of artificial intelligence by the Punjab Police to combat criminal activities. The designated ‘Crime stoppers’ helpline, 0 3 3 S A F E C I T Y (03372332489), is reiterated as a confidential means for reporting civil crimes, ensuring the anonymity of the informants.

He added more: the option to submit confidential information by photo or video evidence through the Safe City website, <http://www.pscagop.pk>.

Deputy Executive Officer Areeba Butt, during her briefing, said that the incorporation of new features in the Women Safety App aims to provide enhanced safety and support for women. Encouraging women to install the app, she emphasized its role in facilitating timely assistance and delivering accurate information.

## CM Maryam chairs meeting on health card relaunch

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has promised that no poor person will be deprived of his right to free treatment.

She was chairing a special meeting on relaunch of the health insurance scheme in Punjab on Thursday. She added, “We want to provide the best medical facilities to common man.”

The CM added: “Health card is a project of Pakistan Muslim League-N. We want to re-launch it in a sustainable manner.” She directed the authorities concerned to form a

working group to make health card more effective, and present a workable plan in this regard in 3 months.

Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, former Senator Pervaiz Rashid, Provincial Minister for Specialised Healthcare and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafique, Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Health Khawaja Imran Nazir, Chief Secretary, Chairman P&D, Secretary Health, Secretary Finance and other relevant officers attended the meeting.

## Surplus wheat available in market: Minister

LAHORE (APP): There is surplus wheat available in the market and the administration should keep a close watch on the supply of good quality wheat at fixed price.

The cabinet committee will soon finalize the policy regarding the distribution of ‘bardana’ per acre after which the applications for the distribution of bardana will be received. Wheat procurement campaign will be fully transparent and merit will be ensured.

These views were expressed by Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin while presiding over a meeting at the Darbar Hall of Civil Secretariat here on Thursday. Secretary Food Moazzam Iqbal Sipra,

Director Food Lt (R) Muhammad Shoaib Khan, DG Food Authority Asim Javed, Cane Commissioner Punjab Abdul Rauf were present on this occasion while all Deputy Director Foods from across Punjab participated in the meeting through video link.

Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin in his address directed that a policy regarding the wheat procurement for the year 2024 should be finalized soon, which will be approved by the Cabinet Committee.

Bilal Yasin said that PLRA, PITB and all related departments are being taken on board for the purchase of wheat and a toll-free complaint number will

be given for immediate redressal of citizens’ complaints. He informed that the Cooking Oil Association has announced a price reduction of 15 rupees per liter in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee. Similarly, the Poultry Association has also reduced the price of chicken by Rs 25 per kg.

The Food Minister said that all possible measures are being taken to provide maximum relief to the people during Ramadan. Model Ramadan Bazaars are also being fully monitored across Punjab and the representatives of all districts should ensure the implementation of the Ramadan package with full transparency, he added.

## 528 arrested in crackdown on profiteers: chief secretary

LAHORE (APP): On the directions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the authorities continued a crackdown on profiteers, arresting 528 persons and lodging 185 FIRs across the province.

The price magistrates conducted 72,000 inspections and imposed more than Rs. 6.2 million fine for overcharging.

The report on profiteers was presented in the meeting, presided over by Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman at the Civil Secretariat on Thursday.

The meeting reviewed provision of ration bags under Nigabhan Ramzan Package, price control measures and decided to develop the system of agricultural markets on modern lines for stability in the prices of vegetables and fruits.

The chief secretary directed the Agriculture Department to prepare a proposal for determining the base price in the auction process in the agricultural markets. Expressing his indignation over the

distribution of ration bags in clusters instead of delivering them to the doorsteps in Kasur, the chief secretary said that the deserving people should be delivered their right to the doorsteps in any case. He warned that no negligence in this regard would be tolerated.

The secretaries of industries and agriculture gave briefing at the meeting. They said that 2.1 million ration bags have been delivered to the deserving people so far. Yesterday, 93,000 consumers benefited from the Agriculture Fair Price Shops established in Ramzan bazaars and the number of consumers is increasing by 20 per cent every day. Potatoes, onions and besin are high in demand at these shops.

The Additional IG Special Branch, Chairman PITB, DG Punjab Food Authority and officers concerned attended the meeting while all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated through video-link.

## French delegation visits Alhamra

LAHORE (APP): A delegation from France, comprising Michel Goulpie and Guy-Alain LAFONT de SENTENAC, visited the Alhamra Arts Centre and Alhamra Art Museum to explore cultural treasures of Lahore. Chairman Alhamra Razi Ahmed, accompanied by Executive Director Tariq Mahmood Chaudhry, warmly welcomed the guests.

The French delegates embarked on a tour of the Alhamra’s Complex, immersing themselves in the rich tapestry of art and heritage. From the Alhamra Academy of Performing Arts to the Alhamra Art Gallery and the Alhamra Art Museum, they marveled at the diverse artistic expressions that adorn the city’s cultural landscape.

During their visit, the Alhamra chairman highlighted the council’s commitment

to promote cultural exchanges and fostering mutual understanding between nations. He emphasized the significance of art in transcending borders and building bridges between diverse cultures.

The delegation expressed admiration for the exquisite masterpieces housed within the Alhamra Art Museum, reflecting on the vibrant cultural heritage of Punjab. They also lauded the efforts of the Alhamra Arts Council in preserving and promoting Pakistan’s rich artistic legacy.

The visit concluded on a positive note, with both sides expressing a shared desire to strengthen cultural ties and facilitate further collaboration in the future. The delegation departed with a newfound appreciation for Lahore’s cultural vibrancy and a deepened understanding of its artistic heritage.



KARACHI: A large number of needy people are being serving Iftar at Chhipa Head Office.

## Crack down on drug dealers starting next week across Sindh

E.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has decided to fully activate the Narcotics Control Unit of the Excise Department and to crack down on drug dealers starting next week across Sindh.

Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Excise and Taxation, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, visited the



office of DG Excise and Taxation. On this occasion, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon gathered information about the problems from the office and officials and assured them of their resolution. A high-level meeting was convened in the office of DG Excise and Taxation under the chairmanship of Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon.

In the meeting, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon also received a detailed briefing regarding the performance of the Excise Department.

During the meeting, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon instructed the full activation of the intelligence unit of the Excise and Taxation Department. He emphasized that the Narcotics Control Unit of the Excise Department should be fully activated and utilized, with strict action to be taken against drug dealers across Sindh starting from next week. He emphasized the need for the eradication of all types of drugs, including ice, heroin, hashish, opium, and raw liquor. He directed the activation of 16 teams of the Narcotics Control

Unit in Karachi, emphasizing the inclusion of young veterans from the Excise Department in these teams. During the meeting, it was also decided to link the renewal of vehicles with the payment of excise duty. Additionally, it was suggested that route permits for vehicles should also be contingent upon tax payment. In this regard, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon instructed the Secretary of Excise to draft a letter to the Secretary of Transport, proposing mutual cooperation on this matter.

During the meeting, the

provincial minister was informed that fifty percent of the tax-defaulting vehicles are commercial vehicles. Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon instructed that contacts should be established with government departments that do not pay taxes, and all vehicles failing to comply with tax payments will be impounded.

He emphasized that no vehicle would be allowed to leave the showroom without registration. He further stated that amendments to the law would soon be made, leading to new legislation. Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon also addressed the issue of additional charges assigned to officers in the Excise Department, directing the immediate withdrawal of these charges from the relevant officers.

He also instructed for actions to be taken against illegal liquor stores and for measures to be implemented to prevent casualties resulting from illegal liquor consumption.

### CCPO reviews work on ongoing development projects

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Lahore Bilal Siddique Kanyana chaired a meeting at his office on Thursday to review progress on ongoing developmental schemes and welfare projects.

The meeting also reviewed establishment of 22 new police stations under the smart police stations programme and acquisition of land for construction of new smart police stations in place of dilapidated and rented buildings. Under the programme, 22 new police stations would be constructed in Wahdat Colony, Nawankot, Johar Town, Samanabad, Gujarpura, Lorri Adda, Harbanspura, Shafiqabad and Shalimar areas.

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## Turkish ambassador vows to strengthen academic collaboration with CUI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Pakistan, Mehmet Pacaci during a meeting with the officials of COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) on Thursday vowed to strengthen academic collaboration in research, faculty exchange and student mobility programmes. The meeting held at COMSATS University brought together senior management of CUI, Turkish alumni working at the university, and officials from the International Office.

The ambassador’s visit served as an opportunity to revive the association between CUI and the Embassy of Türkiye.

Both countries share a deep cultural and religious bond and have collaborated in the past through exchange programs like Mevlana and Erasmus+.

Prof. Dr. Sajid Qamar, Rector of CUI in his address said “We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with Turkish counterparts in research, faculty exchange, and student mobility programs.”

Dr. Junaid Zaidi, Founder Rector of CUI: “We need to transform our excellent research into tangible products, and Turkish collaboration can be instrumental in achieving this goal.”

During the meeting, Dr. Hammad Omer, Head of the International Office, gave a short presentation highlighting the CUI’s strengths, research output, and engagement with Türkiye.

He emphasized the need to developing concrete projects for collaboration

in areas like research, faculty exchange, and student mobility, and come up with tangible outcomes beyond signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

He also underlined that we need to explore potential for joint ventures in fields like commercialization of research, mathematics, computer science, and mountain research. Following the presentation, Mehmet Pacaci, Ambassador of Türkiye in his keynote address said “We need to move beyond signing MoUs and develop concrete projects that leverage the expertise and facilities on both sides.”

Both sides agreed to identify specific academics and projects for future collaborations with renewed commitment to strengthen educational ties between CUI and Turkish institutions.

They also agreed to identify potential areas for collaboration in various academic disciplines. There was also an agreement to go for joint research projects and exchange programs in near future.

The discussion ended up with formulation of establishing a working group to develop concrete action plan. This meeting signifies a significant step forward in the educational partnership between CUI and Türkiye. Both institutions are committed to working together to create meaningful opportunities for students, faculty, and researchers, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and mutual understanding.



LAHORE: On the occasion of Punjabi Cultural Day, women looking at the traditional dishes of Punjab at the stall in Lahore Museum.



**GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR NADRA RHO PESHAWAR**  
**CORRIGENDUM**  
**Provision of Toner & Drums (Genuine/Compatible)**  
**for Field Offices of NADRA RHO KP FY 2023-24 PPRA ID # TS533867E DATED02-Mar-2024**



Reference: PID(I) No. 5274/23 above captioned Tender Notice published in the PPRA website and Newspapers, following amendment is being incorporated: -

FOR	
Closing Time, Date & Place of receiving of qualification documents	Up to 11:00 AM, 18 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024, NADRA RHO, Peshawar.
Time & Place of opening of qualification documents	11:30 AM, 18 <sup>th</sup> March, 2024, NADRA RHO, Peshawar.

2. Prequalification Documents, containing application and detailed terms & conditions can be purchased by the interested parties from 04<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 to 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 upon a written request on official letter head addressed to the Procurement Section, NADRA Regional Head Office..... 3. The proposals, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the prequalification documents must reach at below mentioned address on or before 11:00 hours on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.

READ	
Closing Time, Date & Place of receiving of qualification documents	Up to 09:30 AM, 22 <sup>nd</sup> March, 2024, NADRA RHO Peshawar.
Time & Place of opening of qualification documents	10:00 AM, 22 <sup>nd</sup> March, 2024, NADRA RHO Peshawar.

2. Prequalification Documents, containing application and detailed terms & conditions can be purchased by the interested parties from 04<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 to 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2024 upon a written request on official letter head addressed to the Procurement Section, NADRA Regional Head Office..... 3. The proposals, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the prequalification documents must reach at below mentioned address on or before 09:30 hours on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2024.

**Regional Head Office, NADRA Plot # 31-B,**  
**EObi Building Phase V, Hayatabad, Peshawar.**  
**Phone: 091-9217840**

**(Rizwan Shamim) Assistant Director (Procurement)**

PID (I)  
5490/23



# Governor inaugurates foreign faculty hostel

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali here Thursday visited Islamia College Peshawar and inaugurated foreign faculty hostel.

Vice Chancellor Islamia College, Professor Gul Majeed and faculty members were also present on the occasion. The governor was told that hostel was constructed with the financial assistance of higher education commission with an estimated cost of Rs. 50 million. He was told that hostel has 16 rooms having all the needed facilities.

KP Governor also directed to construct the entrance gate of the college keeping in view its historic importance and announced support to beautify garden of foreign faculty hostel.

Vice Chancellor Islamia College also presented annual report of the institution and a souvenir to the governor. Governor also chaired 136th Senate meeting of University of

# PHC seeks reply in plea against artificial price hike

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprised Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad issued notices to Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as Chief Secretary for submission of reply in plea against inflation and hoarding, on Thursday.

The counsel Abbas Sangeen Khan advocate argued that administration had failed to implement

official price list issued by the authority. He added that prices of edible items including fruit, vegetable and meat have been increased by starting of holy month of Ramzan.

The administration has failed to implement official price like cow milk to be available at Rs130 and buffalo milk will cost Rs160 per kg respectively but it is impossible to obtain milk on these prices in the premises of provincial metropolis Peshawar, the lawyer argued.

The counsel Abbas Sangeen Advocate argued that officials are going to markets for photo sessions rather than ensuring good governance and implementation of law of the land.

PHC's divisional bench comprised of Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmad ordered provincial government and Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for submission of reply while adjourned further hearing till 18th March.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture Muhammad Sajjad presiding over a meeting.

# Bye polls on chairmen seats on April 25th

PESHAWAR (APP): The Local bodies election for vacant chairmen seats in different union councils of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been scheduled for April 25th.

According to the schedule, these elections will be held in union councils Drosh (Chitral), Tangi (Charsadda), Draband (Dera Ismail Khan), Katlang (Mardan), Dasu (Kohistan) and Balambat (Lower Dir).

Public notices for the election will be issued by the returning officers on March 15th while the candidates could submit their nomination papers from March 18th to 20th.

The schedule for by-election said the lists of candidates who submitted nomination papers to contest election will be released on March 21st while scrutiny of the papers will be carried out from March 22nd to 24th.

The list of cleared candidates will be issued on March 25th while appeals against acceptance or rejection of nomination papers could be heard from March 26th to 28th. Decision on these appeals would be announced on April 2.

The candidates could withdraw their nomination papers till April 4th while the final list of the contesting candidates and election symbol will be issued on 5th April.

# ‘Climate change issues need efforts to cope with’

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Environment, Climate Change, Forests and Wildlife Fazal Hakeem Khan Yousafzai has said that climate change emerged a global challenge while in this regard, strengthening the environment department and improving the system are among the top priorities of the present PTI-led KP government.

He was addressing the introductory meeting of the Environment Department at his office, Civil Secretariat, Peshawar. On this occasion, Provincial Environment Secretary Syed Nazar Hussain Shah and other section heads of the department gave detailed briefings to the provincial minister regarding their performance.

In the meeting, details were also given to the provincial minister about the ongoing and new annual development program and AIP schemes of the department.

There was also a threadbare discussion on the development projects of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's settled and merged districts.

The Forest Minister was also apprised of the progress on other important issues of the department including Fisheries, New Forests, Watershed, Guzara Forest, KP Forest Policy 1999, KP Forest Ordinance 2002 and KP Forest Carbon Trading.

Fazal Hakeem Khan underlined the need that we all have to work together as a team to meet the challenges on climate change and achieve the set national goals in this regard. The system, he said, has to be improved by making it easier for the people and in view of the importance of forests in our national economy, concrete steps have to be taken to protect and promote them. He acknowledged the fact that forests envisaged paramount importance in the stability of the economy, hence it is imperative to control environmental hazards. To fulfill the public mandate, it is essential that we have to provide maximum relief to the public in all sectors, he concluded.



PESHAWAR: JUI (F) leader Amanullah Haqani meeting with Director Regulation Capital Metropolitan Zil Haja Ilyas.

Peshawar in Governor House. The meeting was also attended by Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan, Vice Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Salim and concerned officials of finance, higher education and establishment department.

The meeting approved development budget of variety, new candidates of planning committee, statutes for management solutions, upgrading of zoology department to Institute of Zoological Sciences and experience relaxation to appoint four professors.

Participants of meeting also discussed promotion of employees from Grade 16 to 17 and appointments of deceased employees' children in light of Peshawar High Court decision.

During meeting, Governor expressed annoyance over delayed preparing of last senate meetings minutes and advised that minute must be prepared on time with complete accuracy.

# PHC directs to remove of Noor ul Haq from ECL

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court has issued directives to remove the name of former minister religious affairs Noor ul Haq Qadri from Exit Control List (ECL).

According to details, Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmed of PHC heard the petition filed against inclusion of name of PTI leader Noor ul Haq Qadri in ELC.

The petitioner's lawyer Sikander Hayat Shah Advocate said that the name of Noorul Haq Qadri has been included in the ECL.

The lawyer said that his client has been invited by Saudi Arabia and he was set to leave for KSA at 6 pm today but due to inclusion of his name in ECL, he could not leave for abroad.

The PHC hearing the arguments of the petitioner's lawyer, directed to exclude name of Qadri from ECL.

# Minister holds meeting with Secretary

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Excise and Taxation, Khaliq ur Rehman on Thursday held an introductory meeting with the Secretary and DG Excise and officers wherein a detailed briefing was given to him on the performance of the department.

At the meeting the minister was briefed by the Secretary and DG Excise regarding the administrative affairs of the department, revenue collection, recoveries, anti-narcotics efforts, illegal vehicles and ongoing reforms in the department.

On the occasion, the minister appreciated the performance of the excise department and directed for further improving the reforms process and eliminating the curse of narcotics from the society.

Khaliq ur Rehman said besides achieving the set targets, the priority of the department should be the provision of best possible services to the people. He also sought recommendation for addressing issues confronted by the Excise Department and further improving its performance.

# Gang leader arrested

PESHAWAR (INP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has apprehended the alleged leader of a gang implicated in the heinous act of sexually abusing children, police confirmed on Thursday. The arrest, carried out by the Cyber-crime Circle Peshawar, marks a crucial step in the ongoing fight against child exploitation and abuse.

According to a spokesperson for FIA on Thursday, the action was initiated following intensive efforts to curb the disturbing trend of child abuse in the region. The arrested individual, identified as Ijaz, is believed to be the ringleader of the gang responsible for perpetrating acts of sexual abuse against minors.

During the course of the operation, law enforcement officials seized several electronic devices belonging to the accused, from which objectionable videos were recovered. These videos reportedly depicted the gang members subjecting minors to exploitative and abusive situations, often under duress and at gunpoint.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur chairing a meeting regarding Peshawar-D.I.Khan Motorway.

# Minister, Senior Member of Board holds meeting

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Minister for Revenue Nazir Ahmed Abbasi and senior member Board of Revenue Ikramullah Khan chaired the introductory meeting of the Board of Revenue held in the committee room of the Board of Revenue here Thursday.

The meeting was attended by Members and Officers of the Board of Revenue. At the meeting, the members and officers of the boards were introduced to the Provincial Minister Nazir Ahmad Abbasi.

Senior Member Board of Revenue Ikramullah Khan welcomed the Provincial Minister of Revenue and elaborated on the organizational structure of the Board of Revenue, the background and functions of the Board and informed about the pending cases in the Revenue Courts. Regarding the Land Record Digitization Project, it has been informed that its phase one will be completed by June.

Speaking at the meeting, Provincial Minister for Revenue Nazir Ahmad Abbasi said that we have to work together adding that steps will be taken to bring various services online so that people can get service at their doorstep.

During the briefing, service delivery center, land record digitization in the merged districts, e-stamp, allocated budget and expenditure for the financial year 2023-24, measures and reforms for good governance and the challenges and difficulties faced by the Board of Revenue were discussed in detail. The Revenue Minister Abbasi assured complete cooperation in this regard.

# Minister hosts e-kachehri to address public concerns

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Minister of Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah presided over the first E-Kachehri live session today alongside Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir through a social media website.

While addressing the session Minister Health Said that engaging with the public through social media platforms is a sign of good governance and it bridges the gap between the government and its public. During the session, Minister Shah personally responded to queries and concerns raised by the public.

Several key officials including Director General Health Dr. Shaukat Ali, Chief HSRU Dr. Khalil, Director General Drugs Dr. Abbas, Director General IMU Dr. Ijaz, Director Public Health Dr. Arshad Roghani, CEO Sehat Sahulat Program Initiative Dr. Riaz Tanoli, and other relevant stakeholders were also present at the occasion.

The session received around fifteen questions regarding health services in KP MATIZ, most of which were addressed directly by Minister health Qasim Ali Shah, while inquiries regarding specific matters were directed to the relevant authorities.

Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir highlighted at the onset of the session that addressing public complaints through social media platforms is an integral part of their professional responsibilities.

Queries received regarding the Directorate General Health Services amounted to 20, with comprehensive responses provided by Dr. Shaukat Ali during the session.

Similarly, 15 questions pertaining to the Directorate General of Drugs and Pharmacies services were received, and responses were promptly provided by the relevant quarters.

In response to one query, Project Director Human Capital Investment Program Dr. Akram Allah disclosed that their project has initiated the Geo Tagging of private clinics under the supervision of the Health Care Commission. The Geo Tagging of approximately 34,000 clinics across the province has already commenced, including nearly 20,000 quack clinics.



PESHAWAR: Secretary Ambar Ali meeting with Special Assistant to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan.

# PESCO imposes Rs1.58 b fines, removes 49000 hooks

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company in its ongoing operations, initiated under the directives of Power Division and supervision of CEO PESCO, Akhtar Hameed Khan against power pilferers and defaulters, has so far removed over 49000 illegal connections and imposed fines amounting to over 1.58 billion.

According to the PESCO Spokesman on Thursday here, the PESCO operations has entered its 189th day in various Khyber Pakhtunkhwa circles including Peshawar, Mardan, Swabi, Abbottabad, Dera Ismail Khan, Swat, Bannu and Khyber where raids were being conducted against power pilferers and defaulters.

During the operations, carried out by the task forces of PESCO since 7th September, heavy fines were being imposed and scores of power pilferers arrested. The spokesman said so far above 5000 power pilferers have been arrested red-handed from various circles of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said apart from this over 12000 FIRs have also been registered against the power pilferers and defaulters at their respective police stations. Giving details of the removed illegal connections, the spokesman said from Peshawar circle 11775 illegal electricity connections have been removed while from Khyber Circle 8901 illegal connections and from Mardan circle, 7606 illegal connections were removed.

Likewise, he said from Swat Circle 4080, from Bannu circle 7855, from Swabi circle 2810, from Mansehra circle 977, from Abbottabad circle 386 and from D I Khan circle 3356 illegal connections have been removed during the operation continued since September 7th 2023.

# Weather to remain dry in most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): The weather will remain dry in most of the districts of Peshawar province, while it will remain cold in the upper districts, the official of the Meteorological Department said.

Light rain with strong winds and thunder in Kohistan and Mansehra and chances of snowfall on mountains, the official of the Meteorological Department said.

During the next 24 hours, the weather will remain dry in most areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while it will remain cold in upper districts and there may be light rain with thunderstorms at few places in Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan and snowfall on mountains, he added.

He said, heavy rain is expected on Thursday in Galiyat, Naran, Kaghan, Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astor, Hunza, Skardu, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch and Haveli.

In the last 24 hours, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan received rain with strong winds and thunder and snowfall in the mountains.

The highest rainfall is Dir (Upper 20, Lower 14), Patan 16, Kakol 14, Malam Jabba, Chitral 13, Mirkhani, Darosh, Saidu Sharif 12, Kalash 11, Balakot 09, Charat 06, Peshawar (City) 04, Bacha Khan (Airport), Takht Bhai, Parachinar 03, Bannu 01 mm of rain was recorded. He said 03 inches of snow was also recorded in Malam Jabba and 02 inches in Kalam.





## In brief

### Dead body of teacher found Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: The dead body of missing Primary School Teacher (PST) named Saif-ul-Amin recovered from river in the premises of Akbarpura police station, on Thursday. According to details, the deceased teacher was disappeared from 3rd March while a complaint had registered against his missing at the concerned police station on request of his nephew. The deceased was serving at Government Primary School Khushmuqam as PST. Meanwhile, the residents flayed Utility Store Cantt staff attitude as the poor people is depriving from Ramadan package by providing the subsidized items to local shopkeepers for financial benefits. The residents requested Chief Justice of Pakistan, Prime Minister, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Chief Justice Peshawar High Court for initiation of legal proceedings against Utility Store Nowshera Cantt staff.

### Two killed in encounter

ATTOCK (INP): Two accused of rape of teenage student were killed in firing of own accomplices during a police encounter here on Thursday. According to details, qingqi driver Muhammad Fiaz along with his accomplice Muhammad Kamran both hailing from Mirza Attock had kidnapped a student of tenth class and raped her at gunpoint after taking her to a unpopulated area near Bani Baba mausoleum, Attock. The culprits escaped after the incident and police registering a case started search for them. The police conducted a raid in Bhindar area, Jang police station jurisdiction to arrest the culprits and exchange of fire took place. Both culprits Muhammad Fiaz s/o Muhammad Akram hailing from Kasran Pindi Gheb and Muhammad Kamran s/o Muhammad Arshad hailing from Mirza Attock were killed. The bodies were shifted to hospital for medico-legal formalities and police registering a case into the incident started investigations.

### Shopkeepers arrested F.P. Report

KOHAT: In the light of the clear instructions of the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the administration and the food department officers conducted joint operations in various markets of Kohat district here on Thursday. The officials of the district administration have arrested many shopkeepers for violating the official price list and legal action was taken while the complaints were established to protect the people from artificial inflation. To control the artificial inflation, the district administration Kohat also mobilized teams all across Kohat and raids were conducted through an inflation cell. Public complaints were also redressed on the spot through the cell. Public circles are getting full acceptance for taking timely measures against self-inflation, hoarding and adulterated food items by the provincial government, while consumers are also playing an important role in discouraging illegal profiteering.

### FIA arrests two

FAISALABAD (INP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Thursday arrested two passengers and four agents who were traveling on fake Bosnian visas while conducting an operation in Faisalabad.

# Mayar demands release of funds under PFC Award

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mayor Mardan Himayatullah Mayar said that the provincial government has not released any funds under the PFC Award to local governments in the past three fiscal years, which has led to difficulties in providing better municipal services and severe administrative and financial problems for local governments.

Mayor Mardan expressed these concerns while addressing the monthly meeting of the City Local Council Mardan. The meeting of the City Local Council was attended by council members, government officials, and media representatives.

Addressing the meeting, Mayor Mardan Himayatullah said that the PTI government has made amendments to the system of local governments and changes in the Local Government Act, under which the grants received by local governments in the PFC Award have been terminated. Not only the previous PTI government but also the incumbent government and the newly elected provincial government have been informed about the current issues facing local governments, and voices have been raised on every platform for local governments, but no response has been received, he added.

The revenue of the City Local Government comes only from the TMAs, while the revenue of the subordinate departments belongs to the Provincial government. The lack of funding has

also put TMAs in financial crisis, as they do not have funds to pay salaries and pensions to their employees" Mayor added. He demanded that the provincial government to empower local governments administratively, financially, and politically to provide better services and to release funds for three fiscal years as per the original status of the Local Government Act and the Rules of Business 2022.

Mayor Mardan also demanded the revival of trade and profession taxes in urban and rural areas. He said that no political leader, including all Muslim rulers, is taking a stand against the genocide in Palestine. And it is regrettable that during Ramadan, we break our fast with Israeli products.

He said that in order to stand against Israeli brutality and show solidarity with Palestine, we should all boycott Israeli products. He added that tonight at 7 o'clock we will sealed KFC and instructions have been given to shopkeepers to stop buying and selling Israeli products. Instructions have been given to make announcements in the markets.

**DC inspected bazaars:** Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayaz Khan Sherpao paid a surprise visit to the price complaint desk and markets established in Takhthbai Bazar in order to provide complete relief to the people and control the prices during Ramadan. The Deputy Commissioner taking notice of the public complaints registered in the

desk, immediately inspected the vegetable, butcher and bakery shops.

The Deputy Commissioner inquired about the prices of vegetables from the public and issued instructions to take strict legal action against the shopkeepers involved in hazing, along with this the administration officers conducted operations in their respective areas. In which Assistant Commissioner Mardan Madam Ayesha Tahir inspected several grocery stores, vegetable sellers, meat sellers and poultry shops in Mardan Bazar and legal action was taken against two shopkeepers for the absence of official price list.

Additional Assistant Commissioner Junaid Khalid arrested 20 people involved in hazing in different markets in Mardan. Along with this, Additional Assistant Commissioner Aftab Alam in Rustam and Additional Assistant Commissioner Attaullah in Katlang checked the price of gas cylinders, meat, bread and other food items and imposed heavy fines. Additional Assistant Commissioner Abdul Ghaffar Gandapur and Rashid Ali impose heavy fines on many people while conducting operations in Takhthbai. Additional Assistant Commissioner Kamran Khan arrested 04 people for selling expensive goods in Ghari Kapura. Deputy Commissioner Fayaz Khan Sherpao said that no compromise will be made in providing relief to the people on a priority basis in the month of Ramadan.

# Personhood rights sought for Indus River

## F.P. Report

THATTA: Water experts and social activists of Thatta and Sujawal raised grave concerns over annihilation of Indus Delta demanding personhood rights for the Indus River. The biggest river of the country has not been dealt with as it should be by the government authorities leading to mammoth challenges mainly sea intrusion and devastation of the deltaic region.

Many countries around the world have realized the importance of rivers and are working to protect the rivers from all possible threats. In 2017 New Zealand granted personal rights to the Wanganui River. Failure to implement 1991 water accord has obliterated the ecosystem of the Indus River.

The unique Indus delta with 17 creeks is facing numerous threats; the biggest among those is sea intrusion. Sea intrusion has spread fear among inhabitants of the coastal belt in Sindh.

If the required amount of water is not released downstream the Kotri Barrage, the sea will invade areas as far up as Kotri and Hyderabad. Senior Journalist, columnist and writer Zahid Ishaque Sommo hailing from Jati town of district Sujawal warned of serious environmental crisis in the coastal region if measures are not taken for revival of Indus Delta by releasing the required quantum of water in Kotri downstream.

Sharing the devastation

caused by inadequate supply of water in the coastal areas of district Thatta and Sujawal he said that, till 1991 the Indus delta region was fertile providing vast opportunities of earning to fishermen as well as local growers. The lands of the region were fertile, he said, adding that non-release of water turned a vast area barren in the coastal area. "Several freshwater lakes in the coastal region prominent among those are Karr, Jim, Tall and Khadi perished completely following the dearth of freshwater.

Corroborating the views of Sommo, noted agronomist and water expert Obhaiyo Khan Khushik said that few rivers of India had attained personhood rights but the Indus River still awaited that status. He lashed out at IRSA for formulating faulty policies that have deprived the Indus River and the delta of its natural beauty. He opposed construction of further dams on the Indus River and demanded that it should be dealt with as a living human being.

He said that the deltaic region has suffered massive damage as per the reports issued by various international organizations adding that 32 million acres of land had been pocketed by sea in the coastal areas of Sindh while in Jhirik and other areas the sea water had penetrated into the Indus River making it dangerous for human consumption. He said that IRSA

should release at least 10 MAF water below Kotri.

A practicing lawyer and trainer Asifa A. Rasool claimed that the Climate change had caused more devastation in the coastal region than the wars could. She said that people in the coastal areas were forced to migrate owing to unavailability of resources through which they could manage their household. She urged IRSA to implement the water accord as per the jist and soul Attaullah Mirbahar a local fisherman disclosed that several fish species had become extinct amid ecological changes in the region.

## Famous TV remembered

MULTAN (INP): Famous television and film actor Mehboob Alam was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Thursday. Born on March 14, 1948, he was best known for his role in the Pakistan Television classic drama serial Waris in which he played the role of Chaudhry Hashmat Ali.

He also appeared in the pty drama Andhera Ujala (1984-1985) and Neelay Hath in 1989. Mehboob Alam also acted in 38 movies which included 12 urdu, 15 Punjabi, and 11 Sindhi movies. He died on March 18, 1994, in Karachi at the age of only 46.



QUETTA: MPA Dr. Rababa Balidi casting her vote during Senate elections in Balochistan Assembly.

## Funds shortage disturbs spring plantation drive: DFO

### F.P. Report

BUNER: Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Arshad Khan has blamed funds shortage big issue because free plants were not distributed among farmers during spring season adding delay in payment to Watchers was also due to financial restrains and claimed that cutting of mature trees at various forests were as per policy.

Talking to this scribe he shared actually shortage of funds was the reason forest department was not established own nurseries nor plants were purchased this year. He continued when there were no funds there were no package of free plants distribution in Buner like rest of districts. He told its a matter of sorrow when the watchers were yet to pay salaries but the reason behind was the same financial restrains. He defended that cutting of forests was under the policy of cutting mature trees in thick forests the dried damaged and disease hit trees just to let others healthy growth.

## Woman demands action against rapists

### F.P. Report

LARKANA: The residents of Larkana's Medina Colony protested in front of the press club for justice for a woman who was the target of alleged sexual abuse. On that occasion, Samiran Abro, a woman divorced from her husband, alleged that I took a loan from the private bank of Larkana two years ago through the employees Mansoor Memon and Abdul Karim and the third time they blackmailed me on March 3 last year.

Mansoor Memon, an employee of the bank entered the house along with his armed friends Arslan Sarhiu, Abdul Karim Khoso and others and sexually assaulted me and escaped. On the instructions of the SSP Larkana, a case was registered against the said influential people at the Women Police Station on January 1, but the police have not arrested any of the accused so far, because of which the accused attacked on the city's VI Road on February 3 and injured me.

# FC organizes cultural symposium

## F.P. Report

KHAR: In a concerted effort to safeguard the rich cultural heritage of the tribal district of Bajaur, the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North have undertaken significant initiatives. Among these, a cultural symposium titled "Da Bajawar Rangoon" was organized, aimed at preserving the regional language, traditions, and culture.

The symposium showcased a vibrant array of Pashto poetry, folk songs, regional music, local products, historical literature, handicrafts, and paintings. Eminent poets from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa graced the event, captivating the audience with poignant verses that celebrated the essence of Pashto language and culture.

Local singers enthralled attendees with soulful renditions of traditional folk music, highlighting the historical significance embedded within the fabric of Pashto heritage. Moreover,



the symposium featured an exhibition of over 75 paintings by various artists, providing a visual narrative of the region's cultural tapestry.

Additionally, stalls showcasing books, handicrafts, and local products garnered widespread appreciation from the guests in attendance. The overarching goal of the symposium was to instill a sense of pride and awareness among the youth regarding the importance of Pashto culture and its rich history. Notable figures from the district administration,

security forces, local elders, and a substantial number of youth actively participated in the event, underscoring its significance.

The chief guest of the function toured the stalls, engaging with poets, writers, and local artists, and bestowed certificates in recognition of their contributions. The local populace lauded the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North for spearheading such endeavors and expressed the desire for continued efforts in safeguarding Pashto traditions and culture.

# GQM greets Zardari for electing President

## F. P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Gujjar Qaumi Movement (GQM) chief Haji Zarin Khan Gujjar has congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on being elected as the President of Pakistan for the second time and termed his election as a good omen for country's stability and strength. He said the newly elected president would take concrete measures to reduce inflation, poverty, restore peace and order, and to end political strife and polarization. He stated this while talking to local journalists at his residence in Chakdara area of Lower Dir district.

The GQM chief expressed deep concern over the ongoing political and economic uncertainty in the country. "The tussle between the political parties in the country is not a good omen. An atmosphere of anxiety and fear is being created throughout the country through social media", Haji Zarin said.

About Malakand division the GQM chief said that it consisted of nine districts: Swat, Buner, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Lower

Chitral, Upper Chitral, Shangla, Bajaur and Malakand. He said that Malakand division should be bifurcated into Malakand East and Malakand West. He said the region should be exempted from taxes for twenty years under the agreement between the government of Pakistan and former rulers of the Dir and Swat States. He said that the conflict between all the major parties of the country had negative effects on the country's economy and social status.

"The devaluation of the rupee is continuously increasing and is ruining the economy. The politics of violence and abuse has destroyed the future of the nation", Haji Zarin said, adding that all the political parties were using tactics to crush the opponents in their current government. He said that the Gujjar Qaumi Movement was a representative party of all the deprived and victims of social oppression. He said the GQM was trying to end discrimination among tribes and nationalities, to end nepotism, corruption and injustice from politics.

Lauding the services and contribution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf, he said they had worked hard to make Pakistan a developed and a strong nation during their governments. He denounced the JUI-F and ANP for the backwardness, unemployment and usurpers of Pakhtun rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Haji Zarin alleged that both these parties had embezzled the funds meant for the 2005 earthquake in Balakot, Garhi Habibullah, Naran and Mansehra. He said that foreign aid for the earthquake affected people was usurped by the then governments. He said that the former lawmakers and ministers who had been involved in corrupt practices and usurping the wealth of the poor should be held accountable without discrimination.

**Spring plantation drive launched:** The Lower Dir district and session judge Ajmal Khan Wazir planted a Deodar sapling at the Judges' Colony in Balambat and kicked off the spring plantation drive.

# Thrips prevention strategies for early-grown cotton

## Sajid Mahmood

**FIRSTLY, cultivating cotton isn't overly challenging if farmers utilize appropriate resources at the right moments and manage it with a wise strategy. Effective management strategies are crucial for optimal cotton crop growth and yield. It's common knowledge that cotton is vulnerable to various pests and diseases.**

Early cotton cultivation presents challenges such as slow growth and susceptibility to pests like thrips. Factors like low temperatures can delay early cotton growth, sometimes requiring additional growing time, typically around 10 to 12 days or even longer. Slow plant growth coincides with the hatching of thrips, harmful insects that can significantly impact cotton crops. Thrips pose a persistent threat to cotton crops year-round, with a heightened risk to

early-grown crops.

Effective control measures are necessary to mitigate this risk. Adequate seed treatment offers protection against cotton sap-sucking insects, particularly thrips, for approximately 30 to 40 days, safeguarding plants until they develop at least three leaves. Growers should opt for a mixture of Imidacloprid + Tebuconazole, applying 10 ml per kg of seed for seed treatment. After treating the cotton seed, they should be dried in a shaded area before planting, ensuring they are lightly covered with soil. Thrips infestations are prevalent in early cotton-growing regions of Punjab and Sindh, emphasizing the importance of proactive management strategies.

It's important to note that when temperatures are very low, meaning it's cold, thrips aren't active and their impact is minimal. However, as temperatures

rise, thrips become more active and can excessively attack early cotton crops. Thrips tend to transfer from crops like okra, brinjal, tobacco, cauliflower, or cabbage to cotton crops, with research showing that onion crops are particularly prone to transmitting thrips. Thrips typically attack young cotton leaves, around 6 to 7 days old, as these are their preferred food source. This means they tend to attack more during the seedling stage of cotton growth. We need to watch out for thrips when the cotton plant develops its first or second leaf. Thrips are small insects, about 1-2 mm long, and are yellow or black-striped. Both young and adult thrips feed on the underside of young and newborn cotton leaves by sucking their juices.

During a severe thrips attack, leaves can turn silver and the plant's growth may halt, with leaves becoming twisted or

crumpled and curling upwards. These symptoms typically manifest 3 to 4 days following a thrips attack. In severe cases, the plant may shed its leaves. For small crops, such as those in the seedling stage, the economic threshold level (ETL) for thrips is 8 nymphs or adults per leaf. For larger crops, around 3 to 4 months old, the ETL is 10 adults or nymphs per leaf. It's important to note that thrips undergo between 5 to 8 generations in total. Female thrips lay eggs on the underside of leaves and tender stems, often not visible to the naked eye. Each female can lay between 60 to 100 eggs, which typically hatch within 5 to 10 days. The nymph thrips' life cycle is influenced by temperature; at higher temperatures, it completes in 10 to 12 days, whereas at lower temperatures, it may prolong. The nymph undergoes 4 instars before maturing, with each instar last-

ing 5 to 10 days.

To effectively control thrips and protect cotton crops, experts from the Department of Entomology at the Central Cotton Research Institute in Multan suggest several measures: Farmers should avoid planting thrips host plants near cotton fields, such as onion, garlic, tobacco, cabbage, bitter melon, ladyfinger, brinjal, sesame, etc. It's also crucial to manage weeds within the cotton field, as this reduces favorable habitats for thrips. Biological control methods involve using beneficial insects like predatory mites, predatory thrips, lacewings, and lady beetles to keep thrips populations in check. Additionally, biopesticides such as neem and tobacco can be applied based on entomologists' recommendations. Consulting with an entomologist can provide more insights and tailored strategies for bio-

logical control.

Crop rotation is another effective approach to control thrips populations over time by disrupting their lifecycle and reducing their preferred environments. When thrips infestations surpass economic damage thresholds (typically 8 to 10 per leaf), chemical control becomes necessary.

For instance, spraying Spinetoram (60ml) or Chlorfenapyr (125ml) mixed with 100 liters of water per acre can be effective. By implementing these integrated pest management strategies, farmers can mitigate thrips infestations and safeguard their cotton crops effectively. Cotton cultivation plays a crucial role in economic stability, providing a pathway out of financial challenges. We hope for divine blessings upon our farmers, elevating their income and fostering stability in the country's economy.





# Spanish parliament to approve amnesty for Catalan separatists

BARCELONA (AP): Spain's Parliament is set to give its initial approval Thursday to a controversial amnesty bill aimed at forgiving crimes — both proved and alleged — committed by Catalan separatists during a chaotic attempt to hold an independence referendum six years ago.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has promoted the amnesty as a way to move past a succession attempt by the then-leaders of Catalonia, a northeastern region centered around Barcelona where many speak the local Catalan language as well as Spanish. However, the bill has also met opposition from millions of Spaniards who believe that the people who provoked one of Spain's biggest political crises should face charges including embezzlement and promoting public disorder.

Sánchez has already pardoned nine jailed Catalan independence leaders, a move that helped heal wounds at little political cost. But the amnesty is proving to be much more divisive. The succession crisis erupted in 2017, when a regional administration led by Carles Puigdemont staged a referendum on independence, defying orders from the national government and a ruling from Spain's top court that doing so violated the constitution. Madrid sent in police in an attempt to stop the referendum, which were opposed by protests that turned violent.

The Catalan Parliament declared independence on Oct. 27, but it failed to

garner any international support. Puigdemont and several other senior officials later went into exile. Hundreds or thousands of people in Catalonia face the threat of prosecutions related to the referendum or protests, and Puigdemont and other leaders remain abroad. Recent court probes have accused the former regional president of terrorism for allegedly masterminding massive protests that clashed violently with police and closed roads, train lines and the Barcelona airport in 2019.

Sánchez agreed to the amnesty to secure the backing of two Catalan separatist parties, after an inconclusive national election last July turned them into kingmakers. The conservative opposition accuses Sánchez of selling out the rule of law in exchange for another term in the Moncloa Palace and has organized major street protests during recent months.

It's not clear whether the deal will allow Sánchez to govern: Junts, a separatist party led by Puigdemont, has said they would vote for Sánchez to form a government in return for the amnesty, and nothing more. If approved by the lower house, the bill would still face a number of procedural hurdles. The Senate, which has a conservative majority is expected to reject it, which would mean that Parliament's lower house will have to vote for it a second time to push it through.

Sánchez's Socialist party has had a very hard time crafting a bill that

satisfies the separatists and which will surely be highly scrutinized by the courts. Parliament rejected an earlier version of the bill in late January after Junts, saying that it didn't do enough to protect him. The bill then went back to a parliamentary committee, where it was tweaked to suit Junts' needs. Puigdemont now lives in Belgium, where he has become a European Parliament member. A fugitive from Spanish justice, he calls himself a political exile.

Thursday's vote comes a day after Catalonia's regional leader called early elections. That decision added more uncertainty to Spanish politics and led to Sánchez canceling plans for a 2024 budget because of the difficulty he would have had trying to get the support of the two separatist parties during election time. Spain granted a sweeping amnesty during its transition back to democracy following the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. But legal experts are divided over the constitutionality of an amnesty for the Catalan separatists. Its legal critics say that it violates the principle of equality among Spaniards by favoring those of one region. The government says the amnesty could help hundreds of people, while the pro-independence Catalan organization Omnium Cultural says it should benefit some 4,400 people, mostly minor officials and ordinary citizens who either helped to organize the referendum or participated in protests. The application of the amnesty will be decided by the courts on a case-by-case basis.

# Congo faces unprecedented crisis

GOMA (AP): Escalating violence in Congo's eastern region has displaced at least 250,000 people in the last month, a senior United Nations official said, describing the situation as an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

Far from the nation's capital, Kinshasa, eastern Congo has long been overrun by more than 120 armed groups seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources as they carry out mass killings. The result is one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, with about 7 million people displaced, many of them beyond the reach of aid. "It's really heartbreaking (and) what I saw is truly a horrible situation," Ramesh Rajasingham, director of coordination in the UN humanitarian office, told The Associated Press.

Rajasingham visited the city of Goma, where many are taking refuge. "Such a large number of displaced

persons in such a short time is unprecedented," he said. Amid intensified fighting with security forces, the M23 rebel group — the most dominant in the region with alleged links to neighboring Rwanda — has continued to attack villages, forcing many to flee to Goma, the region's largest city whose estimated population of 2 million people is already overstretched with inadequate resources.

While M23 has said it is targeting security forces and not civilians, it has laid siege to several communities, with about half of North Kivu province under its control, according to Richard Moncrieff, the Crisis Group's Great Lakes region director, leaving many trapped and out of the reach of humanitarian aid. "We fled insecurity, but here too, we live in constant fear," Chance Wabiwa, 20, said in Goma where she is taking refuge. "Finding a peaceful place has become

a utopia for us. Perhaps we will never have it again," said Wabiwa.

Reelected to a second five-year term in December, Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi has blamed neighboring Rwanda for providing military support to the rebels. Rwanda denies the claim but UN experts have said there is substantial evidence of their forces in Congo. Both regional and UN peacekeepers have been asked to leave Congo after the government accused them of failing to resolve the conflict.

Rajasingham said humanitarian agencies are doing their best to reach those affected by the conflict but warned that "an enormous influx of people is putting challenges beyond what we can meet right now." "There has to be a solution to the suffering, to the displacement, to the loss of livelihoods, the loss of education," he said.

# Chinese officials issue a rare apology

TAIPEI (AP): City officials in eastern China apologized to local journalists after authorities were shown pushing them and trying to obstruct reporting from the site of a deadly explosion, in a rare acknowledgment of state aggression against journalists.

The city of Sanhe, near Beijing, issued a public apology Thursday after authorities were shown harassing reporters from state broadcaster CCTV during a live broadcast near the site of a suspected gas leak explosion that killed seven and injured 27. Harassment of journalists — including foreign reporters — is common in China but almost never acknowledged by the state.

A statement on the city's official website expressed "deep regret" over the treatment of the CCTV reporters and other media workers. It said authorities were trying to remove the journalists from the site because they were concerned about a potential gas leak. "The poor communication skills of our frontline staff and their rough and simplistic methods caused misunderstandings among

journalists and doubts among the public, resulting in a negative social impact," it said. The harassment, shown live during the midday newscast, was a rare off-script moment for China's tightly controlled state media. Beijing regards media as propaganda tools and regularly issues directives about topics that are off-limits for coverage.

The All-China Journalists Association put out a statement defending the journalists' right to report from disaster sites. It fell short of explicitly condemning the Sanhe authorities' actions. Asked about the behavior in Sanhe during a regular press briefing, a Foreign Ministry spokesman referred reporters to the city's statement. Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China welcomes foreign journalists to "conduct interviews and reports in accordance with the law and regulations."

"If any problems come up, our communication channels are open," he said. Foreign journalists are often harassed, manhandled or followed by plainclothes police while reporting in China, and their sources

may be threatened, interrogated or detained. Earlier in March, a Dutch journalist and a camera operator were detained while reporting on a protest outside an investment bank in the southwestern province of Sichuan. Authorities shoved the journalist to the ground and used umbrellas to block the camera.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, a professional group in Beijing, regularly condemns such actions. However, the Foreign Ministry, which is the point of contact for foreign journalists in the country, has not in recent memory publicly acknowledged or apologized for the harassment. For Chinese journalists, refusing to toe the official line may translate into imprisonment or being pushed out of the profession. China has the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world — 44 in 2023, according to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Over the past few years, Beijing has also increasingly restricted journalists' access to politicians and officials of any kind.

# Dozens more migrants reach to Greek island

ATHENS (AP): A boat carrying 91 migrants has reached a small island south of Crete that is seeing a spike in the arrival of people attempting the long and dangerous crossing from Africa, Greek authorities said. A coast guard statement said the migrants, who were found on a beach on Gavdos island, were being taken to reception areas on Crete.

They are believed to have set off from the coast of eastern Libya, about 170 nautical miles to the south. Their nationalities were not made public. Gavdos, which lies some 27 nautical miles south of Crete, and Crete's southern coastline have seen an increase in migrant arrivals in recent months. Over the past four weeks, about a dozen boats carrying more than 600 people in total made landfall in the area or were rescued offshore.

In several cases, the Greek coast guard said they had crossed the Mediterranean Sea from the eastern Libyan port of Tobruk, having paid smuggling gangs up to \$5,000 each for their passage. The influx has put pressure on authorities on Gavdos, a summer alternative tourism destination about 29 square kilometers (11 square miles) in area that has just a few dozen residents off season.

The island's mayor has written to government officials seeking extra funding to cover arriving migrants' immediate needs for food and lodging before their transport to Crete. Greece is a major arrival point for migrants seeking a better life in the European Union. For years, most headed for the eastern Aegean Sea islands near the Turkish mainland.

But increased Greek and European Union sea patrols in the area have prompted smuggling gangs to also seek alternative routes, including from Libya to southern Crete and from Turkey to Italy round the southern Greek mainland.

# Top French school head resigns

PARIS (AFP): The head of one of France's leading universities said he was stepping down after being ordered to stand trial in a domestic violence case. Mathias Vicherat, director of the prestigious Sciences Po school in Paris, became the target of angry protests by students demanding his resignation after he and his partner Anissa Bonnefont were briefly detained in December, each accusing the other of domestic violence.

"I have been informed that my ex-partner and myself have been ordered to stand trial in a criminal court," Vicherat, 45, said in a message sent to faculty. His resignation was to "protect" the school from any fallout of the case, he said. "What counts here is not me but the institution," he said. Accusations of violence against him had been made in a "vague manner" Vicherat said, and the judiciary would "allow the facts to be established".

The criminal case was brought by prosecutors, neither Vicherat nor his former partner having filed any legal complaint against each other. The Paris prosecutors' office confirmed that a summons had been delivered to both Vicherat and his ex-partner, on charges of reciprocal domestic violence "leading to an incapacity to work of more than eight days". The case will go to trial in the autumn, added a source close to the investigation who asked not to be named.

Vicherat had already stood down temporarily in January after a preliminary investigation was launched and students blockaded the school, protesting against what they said was "impunity" for people committing "sexual and sexist violence". He insisted that he had never committed any acts of domestic violence, but acknowledged that "trust may have been damaged." Sciences Po, founded in 1872, is a hugely influential cornerstone of French elite education. Its list of alumni features leading politicians including President Emmanuel Macron and several former French and foreign leaders, as well as top names in literature, media, culture and fashion.



GAZA: Injured Palestinian men sit at al-Najjar Hospital after Israeli attack on Rafah.

# Russia election: Stage-managed vote will give Putin another term

MOSCOW (BBC): As I walk around Borovsk, two things strike me about this town 60 miles (100km) from Moscow. First, there is almost no sign of the presidential election coming up this weekend. I see few election banners or billboards and no political flyers being handed out.

Not surprising, really. The absence of election preparations mirrors the absence of drama surrounding the stage-managed event that will hand Vladimir Putin a fifth term in the Kremlin. The other thing you can't help noticing in Borovsk is the street art. It's everywhere. Much of it has been created by street artist Vladimir Ovchinnikov. All over town his work stares down from walls and buildings.

Most of his paintings are uncontroversial. Like the giant globe recounting the town's history. Or the image of a famous footballer. Increasingly, though, when Vladimir paints a picture of today's Russia, it turns out very dark. "I call this one Pinnacle of Ambition," the 86-year-old artist tells me. The painting he's showing me at home features a man in a martial arts uniform walking a tightrope over a mountain of human skulls. "This is what the ambition of someone high up in power can lead to."

More dramatic still is his image of two meat grinders mincing people - one is labelled 1937 (the year of Stalin's Great Terror); the other Special Military Operation (Russia's war in Ukraine). "We haven't learnt any lessons," concludes Vladimir. After the artist graffitied similar meat grinders on a wall, he was fined for "discrediting" the Russian army. Same outcome for his street art showing missiles falling on a girl dressed in the blue and yellow of Ukraine. Vladimir not only uses his art to comment on the present, but to shine a light on Russia's dark past - the repressions of the Stalin era. His graffiti criticising the war in Ukraine doesn't go down well with the author-

ities. It gets painted over fast.

"My paintings get people thinking: are we right or are we wrong in this conflict?" Vladimir tells me. "I believe this is a crime against the territorial integrity of a neighbouring state. I'd be condoning it if I stayed silent." "Many people do keep quiet, because they're scared of repression, of losing their jobs, and of being criticised by others." After the death in prison of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Vladimir painted Mr Navalny's portrait on a local memorial stone that honours the victims of political repression.

"The very same day someone scrubbed it out," Vladimir tells me. "But at home I'd painted a rough draft on cardboard. So later I took this and placed it by the memorial." How does Vladimir see Russia's future? "Some predict more repression," he says, "and that we're heading towards totalitarianism and full dictatorship." Vladimir Ovchinnikov tells me he never watches television.

If he did, he'd see a very different picture of Russia on state TV. Vladimir Putin's version. No mountains of human skulls. No meat grinders. No mention of Alexei Navalny. This is not a Russia aggressive abroad and repressive at home. It is a Russia with a glorious past and an equally glorious future. A Russia of heroes and patriots rallying round the flag to defend the Motherland from external aggression. And it is a Russia that loves its current leader. A few days ago Russia Channel 1's evening news bulletin showed what appeared to be adoring Putin fans greeting the president like a pop star. "Take care of yourself," cried one woman, before kissing him. "Long life!" shouted a man.

If you relied solely on Channel 1 for news, you'd probably conclude that Vladimir Putin is odds on for a landslide victory in the presidential election. But, just like with paintings,

context is important. And the context here is crucial. The Kremlin not only controls television in Russia, it manages the entire political system, elections included. President Putin faces no serious challenge as he seeks a fifth term in office. His most vocal critics have either fled into exile or been jailed at home. Mr Navalny, his fiercest opponent, is dead. But the Kremlin likes to boast that Russia has the "best democracy" in the world. So, along with Mr Putin on the ballot are three officially authorised challengers from Russia's Kremlin-friendly parliament.

I caught up with one of them recently. It was an odd experience. "Why do you think you'd be a better president than Putin?" I asked Nikolai Kharitonov, the Communist Party candidate. "It's not for me to say," Mr Kharitonov replied. "That wouldn't be right." "But do you think your manifesto is better than Putin's?" I continued. "That's for voters to decide." "But what do you think?" "It doesn't matter what I think. It's up to the voters." Instead of talking up himself, Mr Kharitonov praised the incumbent.

"Today Vladimir Putin is trying to solve a lot of the problems of the 1990s, when Yeltsin dragged Russia into wild capitalism," said Mr Kharitonov. "He's trying to consolidate the nation for victory in all areas. And this will happen!" Something tells me Nikolai Kharitonov's heart isn't in this race. One politician who'd tried and failed to get on the ballot was anti-war politician Boris Nadezhdin. "It is absolutely impossible to say about our presidential elections that they are fair and free," Mr Nadezhdin tells me. He claims he was barred from running because his anti-war message had been growing too popular. "The polls show that about 30-35 percent of people in Russia wanted to vote for a candidate, like me, who talks about peace."

# Activists behind Tiananmen vigil lose bid to overturn conviction

HONG KONG (AP): Three former organizers of Hong Kong's annual vigil in remembrance of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown on pro-democracy protests lost their bid to overturn their conviction Thursday over their refusal to provide authorities with information on the group under a national security law.

Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong were core members of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China before it disbanded under the shadow of the Beijing-imposed law in 2021. They received a sentence of 4 1/2 months last year — widely seen as part of a crackdown on dissidents following massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The alliance was long known for organizing candlelight vigils in the city on the anniversary of the

Chinese military's crushing of the 1989 protests in Beijing. Critics said its shutdown reflected that civil liberties were shrinking despite promises they would be kept intact when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. Before the group dissolved, police had sought details about its operations and finances in connection with alleged links to pro-democracy groups overseas. Police accused the group of being a foreign agent. But the group refused to cooperate, arguing police were arbitrarily labelling pro-democracy organizations as foreign agents.

Judge Anna Lai at the Court of Appeal dismissed their appeal Thursday, saying she was satisfied that there was ample evidence to support the convictions. Last December, their lawyer argued in an appeal hearing that the activists were denied a fair trial because they had not been

shown the full evidence that suggested the group was a foreign agent.

During previous legal proceedings at the lower court, some crucial details, including the names of groups that were alleged to have links with the alliance, were redacted. The court ordered a partial redaction of some information after prosecutors argued that a full disclosure would jeopardize an ongoing probe into national security cases. After reading the unredacted materials, Lai said the omission was done properly. "Their non-disclosure would not have caused any unfairness to the appellants," she wrote in her ruling.

She added the prosecution was not required to prove that the alliance was a foreign agent in this case. Under the security law's implementation rules, the police chief can request a range of information from a foreign agent.

Chow and two other former alliance leaders, Lee Cheuk-yan and Albert Ho, were charged with subversion in a separate case under the sweeping law in 2021. It was still unclear when their trial would begin. The annual vigil organized by the alliance at Hong Kong's Victoria Park was the only large-scale public commemoration of the June 4 crackdown on Chinese soil for decades. It was attended by thousands each year until authorities banned it in 2020, citing anti-pandemic measures.

After the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions last year, the park was occupied instead by a carnival organized by pro-Beijing groups to celebrate Hong Kong's handover in 1997. Those who tried to commemorate the event near the site were detained. Many others marked the day in private ways under the chilling effect brought by the tough law.

# UN seeking more than \$850m for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

NEW YORK: The United Nations is calling for more donations for Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh. In its annual response plan to the crisis, the UN appealed for \$852.4m to provide food and other aid to the mostly Muslim Rohingya refugees and their host communities.

Bangladesh has taken in more than a million members of the mostly stateless minority, many of whom fled a 2017 military crack-

down in Myanmar, where conflict continues to escalate. About 95 percent of the Rohingya people in Bangladesh remain dependent on humanitarian assistance, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement.

"International solidarity with Bangladesh and refugee protection is needed more than ever as the conflict in Myanmar escalates," it said. The UN

made a similar appeal last year, asking countries to provide \$876m to help the Rohingya, but only \$440m was provided. With the humanitarian crisis largely out of the international spotlight, the UNHCR warned that significant funding shortfalls in recent years has had "serious implications." Many of the refugees are struggling to meet their basic needs, it warned, insisting that "sustained assistance is criti-

cally and urgently needed." More than 75 percent of the refugees receiving aid are women and children, it said, adding that they are facing "heightened risks of abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence." "More than half of the refugees in the camps are under 18, languishing amidst limited opportunities for education, skills-building and livelihoods," the UNHCR said. — Aljazeera



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Politics merits norms and diligence

THE Federal government has accused the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of sending an online petition to the European Union demanding the revocation of Pakistan's GSP+ status, which grants unhindered access to Pakistani exports to the European Market. According to the details, the party had asked for revoking the GPS+ status by wrongly claiming that the basic facilities were not being provided to the incarcerated PTI founder. The government described the move as an attack on the country's economy and campaigned that personal goals were more important for the PTI than the national interest. Previously, the Punjab government enforced a two-week prohibition on public visits, meetings, and interviews at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, citing security concerns. The move drew sharp criticism from PTI leaders, who perceive it as a deliberate attempt to obstruct their access to party founder currently detained at the facility.

The newest development, if it is true, is surely heartbreaking and treacherous, wherein a political party or its leaders displayed highly irresponsible conduct and sacrificed the most important economic interest of the country in pursuit of their political agenda. At the time, the European Union was the second largest export market for Pakistani products after the United States whilst, the GSP Plus status has been an important instrument for providing greater accessibility to our products in Western market. Historically, the GSP+ status holds significant importance for Pakistan's economy. Under the GSP+ scheme, Pakistan enjoys preferential trade treatment with the European Union (EU). This accord has led to a substantial increase in exports from Pakistan to the European community. The Pakistani textile industry has benefited significantly from concessions under the GSP- Plus, whereas duty-free access to the EU market has boosted Pakistan's textile exports by 86% from Euro 3.56 billion in 2013 to Euro 6.64 billion in 2021. This increased trade translates into job creation, better working conditions, and sustainable policies. The extension of GSP+ positively impacts Pakistan's macro-economic indicators. It contributes to economic growth, stability, and overall prosperity. The GSP+ scheme will expire in 2027, and Pakistani authorities are struggling hard to retain this status for another term, which plays a crucial role in sustainability of the country's economy. The GSP plus status plays a vital role in Pakistan's economic growth and its extension holds great significance in prosperity of our nation. Although, Pakistan's GSP+ is intact upto 2027, however its implementation can be withheld/ restricted if South Asian nation fails in upholding its commitment regarding compliance with EU conventions on human rights, labour standards, good governance and environmental protection etc.

Interestingly, the PTI spokesperson has rejected the government accusations and termed it a government's strategy to defame the party. Pakistan has experienced the worst repercussions of unceasing political wrangling and animosity of its leaders and political groups over the past multiple years. This political tussle crossed all limits and violated all ethics and norms of civil society and democracy, wherein personal and party interest got preference over national sovereignty, public well-being and economic security of the country. Unfortunately, the domestic political battle has been fought in the global arenas in London, New York and Brussels alongside dragging the IMF, the European Union and the United States into domestic sensitive political and economic affairs of the country. In fact, such kind of politics and blame game seriously tarnished the country's image and spoiled our core interests at the global level. Unhealthy politics has marked far reaching negative impact on the country's development and stability and eroded public trust in political system and institutions. The selfish political dogfight conversely effected Pakistan's relations with other countries undermining country's Diplomacy, trade and regional security. At the same time, persistent political instability resulted in poor governance, economic volatility and high inflation. It is high time that treasury and opposition stop playing with the sensitive national issues and resort to their constitutional role by using their good offices for nation building and public service. Otherwise, they could not escape from the public anger and accountability in due course of time.

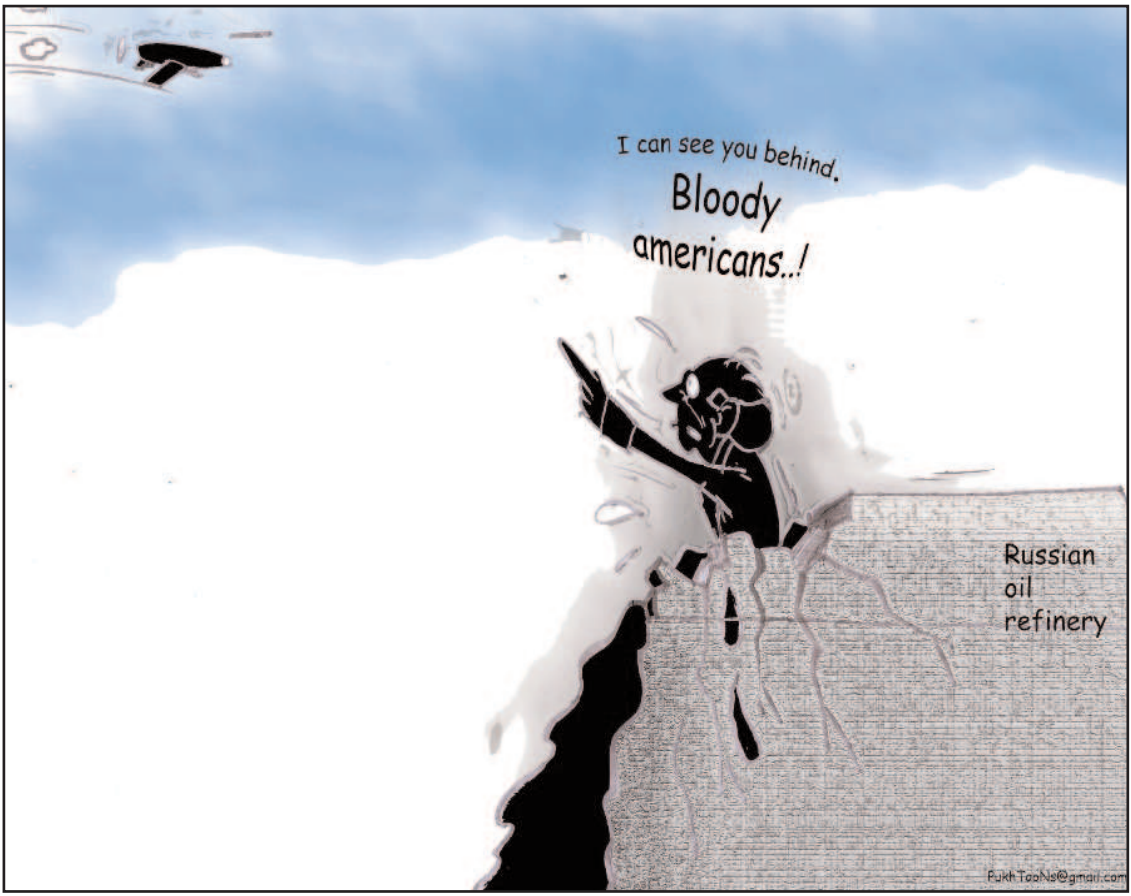
Dark aspect of nuclear energy

THE International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Rafael Mariano Grossi recently visited Japan's defective Fukushima nuclear plant and observed on going discharge of radioactive wastewater into the Pacific ocean that caused serious concerns among the global community and opposed by fishing groups and neighboring countries. The People Republic of China (PRC) banned all imports of Japanese seafood immediately after the release began a few months back. The Fukushima plant's power was hit by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011 which triggered meltdown of three reactors and causing large amounts of radioactive wastewater to accumulate. After more than a decade of cleanup work, the plant began discharging the water diluting it with seawater on Aug last year, which is likely to take decades to fully purified the plant from radioactive contamination.

Although, the IAEA Chief did not objected Tokyo's release of nuclear contaminated water in to the sea but the environmental group claims that the 1.23 million metric tons of water stored at the affected plant since of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster contains dangerous levels of the radioactive isotope Carbon-14 and other hazardous radionuclides, which would have serious long-term consequences for communities and the environment as the water is released into the Pacific Ocean. There are apprehensions that radioactive water could have negative impact on marine life while use of contaminated seafood could ultimately affect human health. Tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, cannot be removed from the contaminated water due to technological limitations which will surely destroyed seabed composition and vegetation. Presently, International organizations, NGOs, civil society groups and local residents including fishermen protesting the Japan government's decision to release the radioactive water in to the sea. Although, the IAEA declared the radio-logical risk very negligible, but years long contamination of fresh seawater might have negative affect on human and marine life in the long run. Historically, major nuclear powers have been using global waters for nuclear experiments and explosion in the past which not only massively polluted environment but perished valuable species, sea plants, and ecosystem. Hence, a controlled damage is not a trade in loss deal for both the Japanese government and the International Nuclear Agency as well. Apparently, the quote testifies its worth in this case that the leaders always owe a brutal heart in their chest that is filled with resoluteness with no dimness and apathy.

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Why West misreads new development paradigm

Sudheendra Kulkarni

IN all ancient civilizations, especially in Asia, material and socio-cultural-spiritual development progressed more or less hand-in-hand. Hence, there was generally balanced human progress, even though all the civilizations had their share of shortcomings.

A major disruption occurred with the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Spurred by new productive forces, the Industrial Revolution facilitated epoch-changing discoveries in science and innovations in technology, which exponentially raised many European nations' capability to generate material prosperity. As a result, European countries became fabulously wealthy. However, the European countries used, rather misused, the new productive forces to consolidate their hold on their colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They ruthlessly exploited and pillaged the colonies' resources, seeking to destroy native cultures and establish European civilizational superiority. Their fierce internal rivalry, though, led to two horrific world wars, which claimed millions of lives and ruined the economies of both the victims and perpetrators.

Hence, Western nations, despite their superior material wealth, became culturally, morally and spiritually impoverished. Even the birth of the United States was an outcome of the sordid history of colonization. European powers literally mass-annihilated almost all the Indigenous peoples in the Americas in their lust for land and riches. The US, in the last century, contributed to the further explosive growth of productive forces with revolutionary advances in science and technology, especially in computers and the internet, heralding the "information age".

Nevertheless, these productive forces, being at the service of an uncontrolled capitalist system, have been misused leading to the extreme concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a minority. Moreover, US administrations have abjured neither the Western instinct for global domination nor the habit of using their country's powerful productive forces to launch illegitimate

wars. The importance of the rise of "new quality productive forces" in China needs to be understood against this historical background. Many in the West have dismissed it as just another "buzzword" meant to divert the international community's attention away from China's economic slowdown. However, the concept can

use of solar photovoltaic panels and other clean and green energy products, China is far ahead of the rest of the world. In fact, China installed more solar panels in 2023 than the US has ever built, setting new standards in low-carbon footprints. Besides, there are more industrial robots in Chinese factories than in any other country. In space

ductive forces from the Western template. First, China has not become the world's second-largest economy by colonizing any other country or by exploiting or stealing other countries' resources. On the contrary, it has made much of the self-reliant technological advances despite the unlawful sanctions imposed by the US and other Western countries. Second, China has not misused its technological prowess by waging deadly wars against far-off countries. As a matter of fact, it advocates resolving disputes through dialogue.

*As a result of the huge innovation-led increases in productivity, quality and efficiency, the Chinese economy is sure to navigate its current challenges satisfactorily. However, China's new development paradigm differs from that of the West in the past in one crucial respect: Chinese leaders have time and again emphasized that China will never seek hegemony irrespective of how prosperous it becomes.*

be properly understood only in the context of the Chinese leadership's goal of developing "China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful". Seen from this perspective, the new quality productive forces, wedded to people-centric and planet-protective development, could be the harbinger of a significantly different kind of, and balanced, human development.

The rise of new quality productive forces in China will have both domestic and global impacts. It is accompanied by, and is contributing to, positive changes in the West-dominated world order. For the first time in modern history, China is surging ahead of Europe and the US in scientific research and innovations in technology, especially in deploying new technologies and innovations.

China's new quality productive forces are primarily in the areas of new energy, new materials, new hi-tech manufacturing systems, and new applications of artificial intelligence. In terms of the production and

and ocean research, too, China is advancing at a pace faster than the West. For instance, it is developing the world's first quantum communications satellite network. China now ranks No 1 in science and technology innovation clusters in the world.

While China is making rapid strides in developing its strategic industries, its agriculture and traditional industries are also becoming smarter and more innovative. As a result of the huge innovation-led increases in productivity, quality and efficiency, the Chinese economy is sure to navigate its current challenges satisfactorily. However, China's new development paradigm differs from that of the West in the past in one crucial respect: Chinese leaders have time and again emphasized that China will never seek hegemony irrespective of how prosperous it becomes. China is not trying to replace the West in global domination. Instead, it aims to help improve the world order by making it equitable, fairer, more representative and more democratic.

Five features set apart China's new quality pro-

Third, China aims to use the scientific and technological breakthroughs primarily for boosting all-round development so its vast population can lead a high-quality life and the country can achieve common prosperity. It has already lifted about 800 million people out of extreme poverty within a short span of four decades - a feat unparalleled in history. The fact that the common people are living much better lives, as I have seen during my travels across the country, shows China is committed to using its resources to enrich its human capital, an obligation many Western governments have nearly abandoned. Fourth, China is sharing its development experiences with other countries so they can learn from them and apply them, if necessary, to boost their development. As a matter of fact, the Belt and Road Initiative shows China is committed to helping build a community with a shared future for mankind. And fifth, in its 5,000-year history, China has achieved great feats in arts, culture, and science and technology, while seeking harmony in society - and in the world at large - although it has suffered many setbacks and foreign aggressions. Now that China has become a moderately prosperous society in all respects, it views its development propelled by new quality productive forces as a contributor to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and a driving force behind the creation of a better world order. Most Western observers fail to understand this civilizational wisdom guiding China's modernization.

The China Daily

Democrats' painful Biden dilemma

Yossi Mekelberg

IT would not be a massive exaggeration to argue that America's 2024 primaries, for both the Democratic and Republican parties, are predictable, uninspiring and, above all, the manifestation of a deep leadership crisis that reflects a fragmented American society.

It is hard to remember a more uneventful Super Tuesday than last week's, even though 15 states and one US territory chose a third of the delegates for the parties' respective conventions, during which they will anoint their nominees. The only excitement was among Democrats when Joe Biden lost American Samoa, a US territory in the Pacific - his one and only loss - to a completely unknown entrepreneur named Jason Palmer, which has the potential to become a tricky question in pub quizzes for years to come.

Meanwhile, among the Republicans, Nikki Haley scored Vermont to add to her only previous success in the District of Columbia, just before announcing that she would be "suspending" her campaign. Given no act of nature or, in Donald Trump's case, a judge, we are all bracing ourselves for a rerun of the 2020 presidential race, but this time with even more venom, especially from the Trump camp.

This will be an election campaign like no other, with the record-breaking combined age of the two candidates on election day being 159, with Biden leading by three years. This would not have been an issue as such, were it not for the voters themselves raising grave concerns about it, especially among the Democrats. Biden's first term has had its highs and lows, but if the phrase "it's the economy, stupid" determines how the electorate votes, Biden should win the November election - and win big. The last quarter of 2023 witnessed strong growth and the economy is expected to grow this year by 2.2 percent, at the same time as the US labor market continues to be buoyant, helped by expectations of a first interest rate cut in some time, while inflation is being kept at bay.

Biden inherited a very chaotic situation from his predecessor, but still his administration managed to guide the economy out of the depths of the pandemic-related recession and later shield it from the economic shockwaves caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, within a short time, a list of accomplishments ensued, among them being a massive investment in infrastructure and the green economy. The Biden administration has also ensured aid for veterans, brought in the first major gun-control legislation in a generation and made significant investments in the country's technological and scientific sectors to enable it to compete with China.

In the international arena, the US showed leadership in responding to Russia's aggression in Ukraine and renewed its commitment to NATO, which under Trump had reached its lowest ebb. Certainly, Biden's handling of the war in Gaza and letting it rage for so long despite the mounting casualties and devastation among Palestinians is a stain on his presidency, but would Trump have behaved any differently? For many observers of American politics, at home and abroad, a second Trump administration is a terrifying prospect.

In the words of Haley, who was appointed ambassador to the UN by Trump, his reelection would bring "four more years of chaos" that the US "won't survive."

Considering Trump's incoherent worldview, his long list of legal woes and his complete inability to think strategically, Biden should be on cruise control with victory in sight, but instead his approval ratings are abysmal. Only 33 percent of Americans approve of the president's performance in office, while 65 percent disapprove. In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, the only positive personal trait that a majority of respondents could agree on is that he is even-tempered, most certainly more so than his prospective rival. The vast majority of Republican supporters see no positive traits in Biden, which suggests they are not ready to be convinced otherwise, come rain or shine. In a different poll, a majority of those who voted for him in 2020 now believe he is just too old to lead the country effectively.

When Biden was first nominated as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate and when he later won the 2020 election, the prevailing belief was that, considering his age and also what he represented, he would be a one-term president. It was thought he would try to stabilize and heal the nation after the four frenzied years of his predecessor, especially after the Jan. 6 insurrection, and then retire gracefully. But it quickly became apparent that there was at least one person in the White House who thought differently and, mysteriously, no one within the party is challenging him, while time is running out.

Yet, last week's New York Times/Siena poll should alarm the Democratic Party from its leadership to its grassroots activists. Biden's 43 percent support lagged behind Trump's 48 percent in this national survey of registered voters and there is erosion among the segments of society that traditionally support Democratic candidates, including women, Blacks, Latinos and working-class voters. There is little time and almost impossible constitutional hurdles for the party to deal with in order to replace Biden and choose another nominee to run for president. However, considering that not doing so might mean handing Trump a second presidency, Democrats are facing a genuine and painful dilemma. Do they replace Biden for the sake of winning the forthcoming election and, by that, save the country from what might make all of us nostalgic for Trump's first term? Or do they show loyalty to a long-time and devoted servant of his party and country and, by that, risk losing the election and seeing the country take the path toward a dangerous and unpredictable future?

Rarely are there easy decisions in politics, especially when the stakes are so high, but right now they could not be higher for America. Hence, it is time, in the name of expediency and putting the country first, to say farewell to Biden, while expressing genuine gratitude for his services to both party and country. The easy way out would be to decide against this unusual course of action, but Democrats might rue such a choice for years to come if they lose this upcoming election because they did not treat the present turmoil in which their country finds itself as a crisis that calls for drastic measures.

China a true diplomatic power for Global South

Maya Majueran

THE Lowy Institute recently published the 2024 Global Diplomacy Index, which is an interactive tool that maps the world's most significant diplomatic networks. The index allows people to see where these countries and regions have invested in diplomacy, how they compare to each other in terms of their global diplomatic footprints, how their diplomatic networks have evolved over time, and where they seek to exercise those networks to expand influence.

As per the 2024 GPI, China is the world's largest diplomatic power, with a wider presence across the globe than the United States. Beijing had a total of 274 diplomatic posts, while Washington had 271, according to the report. Regionally, China has a heavier presence in geopolitically contested Africa (60:56 posts), East Asia (44:27), the Pacific island countries (9:8) and

Central Asia (7:6) than the US. As for the US, it leads in Europe (78:73), North and Central America (40:24) and South Asia (12:10). Both countries have an equal number of posts in the Middle East (17) and South America (15).

This shows China has emerged as a formidable player in the Global South. Turkey and India, too, have rapidly expanded their diplomatic networks across the world, with Turkey rising to 3rd place on the index and India to 13th. The success of China's diplomacy can be attributed to its Chinese characteristics, style and ethos, and its goal of promoting the well-being of all by building a community with a shared future for mankind. Another factor in China's favour is that, as a member of the Global South, it always stands on the side of developing countries.

China believes all countries, regardless of size, should be treated as equals in

a multipolar world, and should be able to exert their influence, while it rejects hegemonism and power politics. It also believes that true democracy should be promoted in international relations, the United Nations Charter should be adhered to by all countries, and multilateralism should be upheld. China has been reiterating that it will always try to become self-reliant but will fulfil all its international responsibilities as a responsible major country. It has also been reiterating that it will always uphold fairness and justice, help build an equitable and orderly multipolar world and uphold the equality of all countries.

The China-brokered rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March last year led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two Middle East countries after seven years, which was a diplomat-

ic victory for China. Since then, things have changed for the better in Middle East diplomacy, as evident in Syria's readmission to the Arab League in May 2023 after a 12-year suspension. China released documents titled "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" in February 2023 and the "Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" in November 2023.

China's position on the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts that they should be peacefully resolved, along with the West's double standard on the Gaza crisis, has further widened the Western world's gap with the Global South.

As a result, more and more countries, especially those in the Global South, to ensure their future is in their own hands, demand that international rules be written togeth-

er by all countries, global development benefits be shared by all. The US and its Western allies have for long been trying to impose Western values and political system on other countries in the name of promoting democracy and protecting human rights, and even bullying emerging market and developing economies to take sides. In contrast, China has always advocated and pursued win-win cooperation. Indeed, win-win cooperation is the core principle of China's diplomacy. China's diplomatic moves in 2023 show that it really wants to restore lasting peace across the world by helping end conflicts, contributing to global development, and improving the existing world order.

China also advocates that conflicts be resolved through dialogue, which gains added importance in the face of the more than two-year-old Russia-

Ukraine conflict and the five-month-long Israel-Palestine conflict that has claimed more than 30,000 Palestinian lives, the majority of them children and women. The Global South, emerging as a key player in international relations, is no longer reluctant to say how world affairs should be run so it can get its due benefits.

Like it or not, the US and its Western allies have to heed the Global South concerns, and take measures to address them by reforming the global financial architecture and improving the global governance system. Otherwise, the Global South, with BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, will lead the charge to reform the global financial structure and improve the global governance system. And China, with its unique diplomacy, will provide the leadership to the Global South in this noble cause.



# Why haven’t Russians rebelled against the war? Psychology has answers

Alexander Archagov

**T**HE onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine sparked protests ranging from rallies and solitary pickets to mass letters and anti-war statements by celebrities - but even so, only a small percentage of Russians have shown open resistance to the war. The reasons behind this go beyond the fear of political repression. It is also the product of a deep-rooted instinct for psychological self-preservation.

According to OVD-Info, around 15,000 people have been detained at anti-war protests over the past two years. It is exceedingly difficult to use this number to gauge the full scale of Russia's anti-war opposition. Moreover, sociologists like the Levada Center's Lev Gudkov assert that 74% of Russians support Putin's decisions regarding the war in Ukraine, a figure that has hardly changed over the two years since the full-scale invasion began. At the same time, 57% support immediately ceasing military actions and entering negotiations, but only if Russia can keep the Ukrainian territories it has conquered. Contemporary political science does not have a unanimous opinion on what type of political regime Russia falls under. However, many researchers agree that exercising political freedoms including freedom of speech is out of the question.

This is why sociologists like Grigory Yudin question the reliability of polling data, suggesting that most Russians either choose not to respond or to answer in a way that avoids trouble because they believe polls are conducted by the government. Yudin also claims that only about 5% of people respond to public opinion surveys. Figures claiming 74% support for Putin's decisions cannot be adequately interpreted as a result. Fortunately, we have more than just quantitative data. The Public Sociology Laboratory used focus groups and conducted over 200 interviews in the spring of 2022 and another 90 that autumn to understand which groups of citizens support the war, which are against it, and the arguments used by each group.

As a result, sociologists divided the respondents into three groups: supporters of the war, opponents, and the undecided. Based on these data, it is possible to draft emotional-psychological portraits of each group, and understand their arguments and motives. For war supporters, until the mobilization was announced, there was simply no war, and if there was no war, there would be nothing to resist. In this sense, the term "special military

operation" is brilliantly deceitful. A military operation is not a war. It's something distant, special, that requires no particular attention. In the resulting narrative, Russia is not an aggressor. Rather, it is defending itself against attacks from the sinister "collective West." Ukraine is thus being held hostage by the evil forces resisting Putin's heroism.

Interestingly, a significant portion of respondents, according to researchers, do not hold Putin responsible for the war in Ukraine. He is also perceived as a victim of circumstances, who was forced into this situation. At the same time, most of these individuals declare they are against the war. But since it seems inevitable, they feel they have to go along with it. For virtually all respondents, the war came as a shock. To avoid shattering their existing worldview, they made the war a part of it. After all, perceiving your country as an aggressor, and its people as murderers, is unbearable. It is crucial to understand that the human psyche is remarkably adaptive and malleable, allowing survival under even the most extreme conditions.

The study also indicates that war supporters downplay the number of civilian casualties in Ukraine. Russian propaganda draws direct parallels between the "fight against Nazism in Ukraine" and the Great Patriotic War, framing anti-war protest as either impossible, since "we did not start this war," or criminal, as it supports the "global evil of Nazism." In autumn 2022, the Public Sociology Laboratory conducted a second study to understand how the position of war supporters had changed. This research revealed significant shifts in public perception of the war following the announcement of mobilization: the number of staunch supporters greatly diminished, as more people demanded an end to the fighting.

The war's remaining supporters see it as a path to peace in Donbas. To them, anyone who thinks differently is unmoved by the suffering of people living in separatist regions. Thus, researchers note, a large portion of war supporters have also become its opponents. However, the perception of the war as an inevitable evil remains unchanged, rendering any actions against it seemingly pointless. Another group identified by researchers is the undecided, who do not express a clear moral judgment on the war. They are trying to act as if the war does not affect them to avoid becoming distressed from their internal conflict. Research shows that humans natu-

rally try to avoid unpleasant experiences, even if it leads to negative consequences in the future.

However, this attempt to emotionally detach from the events is not always successful. Even before mobilization, the war indirectly impacted many aspects of their lives, causing uncertainty and anxiety. Consequently, their anxiety has become nonspecific, thus not motivating individuals toward any political action. Therefore, this stance is somewhat more "normal than that of either a supporter or opponent of the war. Finally, the researchers identified a third group who were actively opposed to the war. For these individuals, the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was especially shocking as it contradicted their moral norms.

For a long time, Russians lived with the notion that war was something either relegated to the distant past or happening far away in Syria. War, it turns out, can take place close to home, affecting you and your relatives living in Ukraine or Belgorod. Day after day, watching military reports, war opponents experience anxiety, fear, and pain. These intense experiences simply exhaust people, leading to a sense of helplessness. Propaganda efforts and surveys, creating the image of a majority that supports the war, play a significant role here. Additionally, resistance does not bring about political change, only violence from law enforcement. Since the beginning of military actions in Ukraine in 2022, Russia significantly tightened legislation against anti-war statements, including adopting a law that criminalizes the dissemination of information deemed false about the actions of the Armed Forces, with penalties up to 5 million rubles (\$55,200) and up to 10 years of imprisonment. There has also been increased prosecution for "discrediting the army," leading to criminal cases, searches, and pressure on those critical of the government on social media.

The Russian state harshly punishes individuals for small-scale actions. For instance, Sasha Skochilenko, who replaced price tags in a store with anti-war messages, received 7 years in prison. Though these high-profile cases are relatively few in number, they broadcast how serious the risks of any kind of resistance can be. Moreover, the motivation of war opponents stems from moral norms of intolerance towards violence. This same moral stance also prevents them from engaging in violence against government represen-

tatives. Research shows that the human brain predicts actions based on past actions, and if actions lead to a negative outcome, repeating them seems pointless.

For example, a Socialist Revolutionary from the late 19th century could attempt to assassinate an official or even the tsar, and his comrades would see a real political result from their actions. Even if this result was negative for the revolutionaries in the long term, their brains could justify the action as successful. If someone protests against the war in Ukraine, the likely result is a police baton to the head, administrative arrest, or even a criminal case, but certainly not the cessation of the war or significant political changes. As a result, war opponents often feel in the minority and helpless, and their actions seem to bring only negative consequences for themselves. In such conditions, active anti-war protest becomes simply impossible. However, despite all this, anti-war resistance among Russians does exist. Firstly, those who have left Russia due to the war actively protest against it, as the risks of state violence for them have become minimal. Secondly, there has emerged what anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova calls "hidden" anti-war protest. Arkhipov notes a whole movement of anonymous art activism with a distinctly anti-war character. Anti-war stickers in public transport, disguised as standard signs for children and disabled seats, anonymous graffiti with red ballerinas, or even charades that reveal the phrase "no to war," are all new forms of anti-war protest Russians have turned to.

Thirdly, if one broadly understands protest against the war to include actions such as refusing to participate in anything related to the war, then the mass exodus of Russians from the country can also be seen as a form of protest. Can this situation be changed? It's hard to say. The death of Alexei Navalny showed us that we do not live in a Hollywood movie where the hero defeats the evil emperor. This war could last for many years, even without the mass support of citizens, if the majority views it as a natural phenomenon over which they have no power. Perhaps the most that war opponents can now do, without resorting to violence, is to continue reminding everyone around them that war is a human-made disaster. It is not an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. The war was not started by gods, but by flesh-and-blood people - meaning it is we, the people, who can stop it.

The Moscow Times

# Which America do you choose?

Richard Galant

record, but many others thought he rightly called out "his predecessor" for a litany of failures. "Joe Biden finally has my attention," wrote Roxanne Jones.

"Biden sounded like he's ready to go toe to toe with former President Donald Trump and win in November. "Challenging, taunting and even mocking Trump at times without mentioning his name, Biden called out Republicans for way too much talk and very little action on key issues such as immigration reform and stronger border policies."

"But it was his focus on pocketbook issues where Biden was most effective. The president spoke authentically to Americans about his solutions for the real problems we face closer to home - greedy landlords who charge exorbitant rents, the attacks on women's reproductive rights and Big Pharma's price gouging, to name a few." Will Biden's message resonate with White working-class voters? Paul Sracic noted that Biden lost White voters without college degrees by 35 points in 2020. "While the aggressive attacks on 'his predecessor' and a focus on issues such as climate change were red meat for the more progressive base of Biden's Democratic party, it's hard to see how it will win back the support of those who voted for Trump four years ago," argued Sracic. "If the party is to woo potential MAGA enthusiasts away from Trump, it is going to have to show struggling White communities that the President not only is like them, but that he is here for them - that he is, in fact, one of them," wrote Keith L. Magee. "Democrats need to do more to communicate a robust social and economic message that makes it clear that Biden grasps these very simple but essential truths: There is great dignity to be found in every kind of work, and every kind of work deserves to be rewarded."

Looking ahead to the campaign, Patrick T. Brown wrote, "It is extremely unlikely we'll learn anything new about either candidate over the next nine months. The most-committed MAGA supporters will be counting down the days to November 5. Some Democrats, worried about threats to democracy or eager to express their opposition to the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade, may also be excited about their chance to stand against Trump. But for many Americans - including a fair chunk of Republicans - the time between Super Tuesday and Election Day will be a period though which they grit their teeth." Trump's victory in nearly all the GOP primaries has united the party behind him in a way he had not achieved in 2016. The Democrats' hope that four criminal indictments and a variety of civil lawsuits might knock him out of the race has so far been unavailing, though Trump is facing hundreds of millions in court judgments against him. Last month, the US Supreme Court effectively gave the former president a delay in his Washington, DC, trial by agreeing to hear Trump's claim to immunity from prosecution, with arguments to take place April 25. And on Monday, the court rejected the attempt of some states to remove Trump from the ballot on the basis of his role in setting the stage for the January 6, 2021 Capitol riot.

Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution is "clear and unmistakable," wrote historian Manisha Sinha. "Any person who has sworn an oath of office to uphold the Constitution and then participated in or given aid and comfort to a violent insurrection against the government of the United States is barred from holding office unless pardoned by two-thirds of both houses of Congress..." "The Republican Party of the mid-19th century, the party of former President Abraham Lincoln and big government, sought to safeguard the American republic from all future insurrections after the slaveholders' rebellion that had precipitated a crisis of the Union and Civil War. Historians and legal scholars, who submitted amicus briefs to SCOTUS in Trump v. Anderson, overwhelmingly agreed on Trump's disqualification, citing copious amounts of evidence from the framers of the amend-

ment and congressional debates. In the interest of full disclosure, I signed one of the briefs and my book was cited in the other," Sinha noted. "Don't make fun of voters." That's the lesson SE Cupp said politicians and the media should have learned in 2016, when Hillary Clinton called Trump supporters "deplorable."

"On Super Tuesday, the crew over at MSNBC inexplicably did just that," Cupp pointed out. "After noting that the top issue among a plurality of Virginia GOP voters was immigration and the crisis at the border, the far-left panel thought it a good idea to mock them." "The Democratic denial of a border crisis as a real problem until very recently has undoubtedly helped Trump in his reelection bid... this problem is impacting Americans everywhere." "Just ask Democratic mayors in New York City, Chicago and Denver who are facing migrant-related crises in their non-border state cities and suburbs." February was the ninth month in a row to set an alarming climate record: it was the hottest February on record, 1.77 degrees Celsius warmer than the average February in pre-industrial times.

International Women's Day arrived last week at a fraught time, noted Kara Alaimo. "This year, women are, in many ways, less safe and have fewer rights and resources than we did just a few years ago. It's not just that progress has stalled - we're going backwards." Writing from Paris, Euny Hong observed, "America still has tremendous influence globally - though not necessarily in the way it wants. Until not long ago, plenty of places in the world wanted to model themselves after America. But after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade almost two years ago, America has, for some nations, become a model ... of what not to do." Last week, she noted, legislators made "France the first country in the world to include abortion rights in their constitution, with a vote of 780-72 in favor." "France still has its problems with sexism and misogyny, more than I could fit into a column. But compared to today's America, France looks like the version of a feminist utopia that could only be dreamed of by Greta Gerwig's Barbie universe." Jason Kelce's retirement announcement on Monday grabbed the attention of many, including sports historian Amy Bass. "Kelce was retiring after 13 seasons of professional football, stepping away from a career that included, in addition to those Pro Bowl nods, a Super Bowl win (2018) and a Super Bowl loss (2023), the latter against his brother no less, something that was not lost on him in this speech," Bass wrote. "But Jason Kelce's retirement speech gave us so much more than just a sports headline. Not only was I not alone in dropping everything to watch him, I was also not the only one - if TikTok and my sister are any indication - who had tears spilling down my face as I did so. Jason did too, and that was his gift: his speech was a master class in why all men should cry." "Ugly cry, in fact." The Barbenheimer Oscars have finally arrived. And the betting is that "Oppenheimer" will dominate the Sunday night ceremony. But as Noah Berlatsky observed, "Barbie," win or lose, has the distinction of being one of three movies directed by women to receive a Best Picture nomination, which is the first time that's happened. (Barbie is distributed by Warner Bros., which shares a parent company with CNN.) "It's not an accident that each of the three women-directed films are about the difficulty of telling women's stories in a world dominated by male power and male narratives. All three films question male conventions and genres in ways that show exactly why we need more films by, and more nominations for, women-directed films," Berlatsky wrote. "The effort to rethink old narratives and old genres is why 'Past Lives,' 'Anatomy of a Fall' and 'Barbie' are much more interesting and rewarding than last year's standard, great man Oscar-bait biopics like Bradley Cooper's 'Maestro' and Christopher Nolan's 'Oppenheimer' or the default enemies-to-friends clichés of Alexander Payne's 'The Holdovers.'" CNN

# Shameful speculation about Princess of Wales’s health has to stop

Celia Walden

**A**MONG the hours of television coverage and the acres of print that "manipulated" image prompted, one frequently expressed sentiment stood out: "The public have a right to be angry." The pomposity of this sentiment - which has been voiced by different people in different ways over the past 36 hours - is breathtaking. It stayed with me even after the Princess of Wales issued a statement apologising for what she claims to be a mundane error in judgment: Whether she was taking the blame for an error in judgement that wasn't hers, we'll never know. Certainly, the machine there to support, advise and prevent such blunders has failed her.

It's worth remembering that after a two and a half month public absence (she was last seen at Sandringham on Christmas Day, this presumably still fragile 42-year-old woman was effectively bullied into releasing a snap by the endless conspiracy theories - theories that are now 10-fold, with the conjectures currently being touted on social media running from wild - "has she left Prince William?" - to preposterous - "a case of facial surgery gone wrong?"

As a journalist who is frequent-

ly (and erroneously) assumed to be "in the know", I received so many WhatsApp messages asking me what the "real story" is, that I was forced to mute my phone. All this despite the palace's clear initial statement that after undergoing "successful" abdominal surgery in January, our future Queen would not be resuming official duties before April.

We are not yet in mid-March, I'll remind you, so at this point there is no reason to suspect anything is amiss, no basis for our gaining impatience, and no excuse for the shameful prurience being exhibited around the world on the precise state of the Princess's health. Human beings are curious by nature, it's true, yet like everything else about her - from her outfits and her make-up to her marriage and her children - we seem to have taken ownership of her mental and physical state. It is, apparently, in the public domain, ours to speculate and gossip about, with every basic rule of etiquette concerning an individual's health apparently forgotten.

Once upon a time, health matters were up there with personal finances, emotional affairs, sexual orientation and religious beliefs.

To probe into any of these areas wasn't just considered inappropriate, but appallingly rude. Even if you knew a person well, my mother explained to me as a child, after an embarrassing incident when I'd asked a dinner party guest why she was "taking those pills", you never asked why a person was taking medication, had been in hospital or what the exact nature of a procedure or operation was.

Over the years, I've watched our manners, grace and sensitivity around such intimate matters erode to such an extent that grown adults will now think nothing of asking "what those pills are for", "where that rash came from" or why women of a child-bearing age are not drinking. On one recent occasion, I even overheard a man repeatedly ask a woman who had turned down a glass of wine whether she was "up the duff" (she wasn't, as it happens - but she was in AA). Our culture of oversharing hasn't helped.

As helpful as I'm sure it has been for public figures to speak openly about their addictions, dysfunctions and health battles, to break various taboos and bust stigmas, nobody should feel under obligation to discuss such matters,

let alone become a poster-carrying, T-shirt wearing figurehead for a particular ailment or affliction. Yet again, our incivility around health is now such that I've heard public figures being criticised for not being open about their cancers, alcoholism or acne. Where women in the public eye are concerned, the pressure is still more concerted. Tell us about your infertility, your endometriosis, your menopausal woes! You owe it to all women to be open about those things.

Take that pressure, times it by a million, and you might have some idea what it feels like to be a female member of the Royal family in 2024. "The public has a right to feel angry" if the Princess of Wales doesn't share every last gory detail with them. Isn't that the takeaway from this whole sorry Mother's Day picture scenario? And what would it take to end our ghoulish speculations, to sate our rubbernecking, out of interest? Lab reports shared on Instagram and X? Live video footage from the hospital bed on TikTok? When it comes to the Princess's health - to anyone's health - we're not entitled to know a thing. We can continue to wish her well, of course, but the "rights"? They are all hers.

The Telegraph

# NATO HQ raises Swedish flag, boosting Baltic region against Russian threat

Henry Ridgwell

**S**WEDEN'S flag was raised in a ceremony Monday at NATO's headquarters in Brussels after it officially joined the Western defensive alliance last week, ending its long-held policy of military nonalignment. "We are now an ally among allies. After more than 200 years of military nonalignment, this is a historic step but also a very natural step. We've been preparing for decades and in details for the last two years," Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said at a news conference ahead of the ceremony.

"With this membership, Sweden has come home. Home to the security cooperation of democracies. Home to the security cooperation of our good neighbors. Today, I'd like to say thank you to all of our allies. We have chosen you, and you have chosen us. All for one, one for all," Kristersson added. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the alliance's 32nd member.

"Sweden's accession shows again that NATO's door remains open. No one can close it. Every

nation has the right to choose its own path, and we all choose the path of freedom and democracy. The brave people of Ukraine are fighting for these values as we speak," Stoltenberg said. Sweden and Finland simultaneously applied to join NATO in May 2022, three months after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Finland - which shares a 1,340-kilometer border with Russia - joined NATO relatively quickly, in April 2023. However, Sweden's bid was delayed by NATO members Turkey and Hungary. Ankara accused Sweden of harboring Kurdish separatists, whom it considers terrorists. The passing of a new anti-terrorism law in Sweden persuaded Turkey to ratify its accession to the alliance. Budapest appeared to object to Swedish criticisms of a perceived democratic backsliding in Hungary. A meeting between Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his Swedish counterpart last month in Budapest, and a new bilateral defense deal, overcame those dif-

ferences - and Hungarian lawmakers approved Sweden's application on February 26. After two centuries of military nonalignment, NATO membership marks a significant change for Sweden and its people. Opinion polls show most Swedes approve of the change.

"A couple years ago, I was really against Sweden joining NATO, because I was really for this neutrality policy that we have. But now ... I guess we had to take a stance, really," 24-year-old Stockholm student Carl Fredrik Aspegren told Reuters. Information technology worker Hakan Yucel, 54, agreed. "I think it feels much safer now. Before, we were outside and felt a little bit alone," he said. Sweden is due to launch a fleet of new submarines by 2028 designed to protect vulnerable subsea infrastructure in the Baltic. Its accession brings valuable military capabilities to NATO, according to Barbara Kunz, a senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

"With all Nordic countries now being members of NATO and also the Baltic states being members of NATO, that allows for real holistic planning of the defense of Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea area. Sweden is particularly qualified to operate in the Baltic Sea, which is a very special region. It's like shallow waters in which you can't really see that well, so Sweden is very good at that," Kunz told Reuters. Swedish forces are already training in the Norwegian Arctic with NATO allies, part of the military exercise Steadfast Defender 2024, the alliance's largest military drills since the Cold War, with some 90,000 troops taking part. Last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he intends to strengthen his country's military presence along its western borders to, in his words, "neutralize threats associated with the next expansion of NATO." NATO said it is a defensive alliance and highlights that it was Russia's unprovoked, illegal invasion of Ukraine that prompted Sweden and Finland to seek membership.

VOA



# PSX turns bullish, gains 1,015 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 1,015.82 points, a positive change of 1.59, closing at 65,064.27 points against 64,048.44 points the previous trading day.

A total of 315,247,601 shares valuing Rs.10.487 billion were traded during the day as compared to 252,751,968 shares valuing Rs.9.247 billion the last day.

Some 336 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 248 of them recorded gains and 72 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 16 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 42,747,519 shares at Rs 1.35 per share, Cnergyco PK with 36,111,224 shares with

5.09 per share and Kohinoor Spinning with 19,583,000 shares at Rs 4.79 per share.

Mari Petroleum Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 72.51 per share price, closing at Rs2,430.11, whereas the runner-up was Nestle Pakistan Limited with a Rs 69.12 rise in its per share price to Rs7,500.00.

Ismail Industries Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs90.00 per share closing at1,110.00, followed by Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs 18.60 decline to close at Rs710.10.

**Rupee gains 01 paisa against dollar**

Pakistani Rupee on Thursday gained 01 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.77 against

the previous day's closing of Rs278.78.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 278.9 and Rs 281.6, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 42 paisa to close at Rs 304.89 against the last day's closing of Rs 304.47, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.88, whereas an increase of 30 paisa was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 356.96 compared to the last closing of Rs 356.66.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham decreased by 01 paisa to close at Rs 75.89 and the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged and closed at Rs 74.33.

**Gold rates up by Rs.250 to Rs 228,550 per tola**

The per tola price of 24 karat gold in the local market increased by Rs.250 and was traded at Rs.228,550 on Thursday as against its sale at Rs. 228,300 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.215 to Rs195,945 from Rs. 195,735 whereas that 10 gram 22 karat gold increased to Rs.179,616 from Rs.179,420, 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 increased by \$9 and was traded at \$2,188 from \$2,179, the Association reported.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying seasonal fruit strawberry at Islamabad Fruit and Vegetable Market.

## Foreign reserves reach \$13.15b

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan reached at US\$ 13,151.3 million in the week ended on March 08, 2024 while foreign reserves held by State Bank increased to \$ 7,912.9 million.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank increased by \$ 17 million to \$ 7,912.9 million during the week under review.

Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks also increased by \$ 114.1 million to \$ 5,238.4 million, it added.

Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country, in the previous week ended on March 01, 2024, were \$ 13,020 million.

Among them, foreign reserves held by the central bank were \$ 7,895.7 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were \$ 5,124.3 million.

## Means of production prices rised

ISLAMABAD (APP): Most of the capital goods monitored by China's statistical authorities registered higher prices in early March compared with late February, official data showed Thursday.

Of the 50 major goods classified in nine categories, including seamless steel tubes, gasoline, coal, fertilizer, and some chemicals, 27 reported higher prices in this period, and 21 saw price declines, while the prices of two remained unchanged, the National Bureau of Statistics revealed. During this period, hog prices went up by 4.4 percent, according to the NBS data.

These figures, released every 10 days, are based on a survey of nearly 2,000 wholesalers and distributors in 31 provincial-level regions across the country.

## Tokyo stocks close higher

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks shrugged off early losses and ended higher on Thursday, with the market supported by gains in value stocks and heavyweights including Uniqlo's parent company.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index advanced 0.29 percent, or 111.41 points, to close at 38,807.38, while the broader Topix index gained 0.49 percent, or 13.08 points, to 2,661.59.

"The market was dragged down by Tokyo Electron and other chip shares following losses of semiconductor-related shares in the US, while traders speculate on policy changes at next week's BOJ meeting," IwaiCosmo Securities said.

"But after the sell-off, the market gradually picked up, supported by value stocks such as natural resources and materials." The dollar stood at 147.89 yen, against 147.78 yen seen Wednesday in New York.

Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing jumped 1.62 percent to 43,880 yen while SoftBank Group climbed 0.46 percent to 8,591 yen.

Nissan added 2.23 percent to 564 yen after several media reported, citing sources, that the automaker is considering a tie-up with Honda in electric vehicles.

# CCP authorizes acquisition of Pakistani Microfinance Bank

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved the acquisition of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited by a Dutch-based holding company, MNT-Halan Pak B.V. This transaction marks a significant development in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan.

MNT - Halan Pak B.V is a holding company incorporated in the Netherlands, with a presence in Pakistan through its subsidiaries, Halan Wallet (Private) Limited and Halan Finance Limited. On the other hand,

Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited is a public limited company operating in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan.

The acquisition involves the purchase of 100% shareholding of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited from Advans S.A SICAR, a Luxembourg-based financial services company.

Following a thorough review of the pre-merger application, the CCP determined that there are no overlaps between the merging parties, and the market conditions will remain unchanged post-merger.

The approval of this acquisition is significant for Pakistan's microfinance banking sector, which plays a crucial role in the country's financial inclusion agenda. According to the World Bank, the sector serves 76% of all borrowers from the financial sector and accounts for approximately a third of all outstanding agriculture advances.

Foreign investment in this sector is expected to bring in new technologies, innovative products, and improved services, benefiting both the industry and the consumers.

# MCCI appeals govt to reduce power tariff

MULTAN (APP): President Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Mian Rashid Iqbal has requested the government to reduce power tariff for industrial sector to help it come out of crisis and to ensure the industrial wheel should keep moving with full potential.

In a statement issued here Thursday, the MCCI president appealed the Prime Minister and Finance Minister to revise power tariff for industries particularly the textile sector pleading that power tariff for this sector was touching a record peak never witnessed before. He said that higher tariff was increasing the cost of production, affecting the operations of industries and can render workers jobless. Mian Rashid Iqbal said that higher tariff could also affect exports.

He said, it was heartening to note that Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif and Finance Minister have expressed their willingness to look into the issues of power tariff for industrial sector. He

# Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, LNGC Fuwairit, Khairpur and Spar Octans, carrying LNG, Gasoline and Coal, berthed at PGPCL Terminal, FOCTO Terminal and Pakistan International Bulk Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile another ship Trans Sprig with Steel Coil also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on Thursday.

A total of seven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, Olympia, Maersk Cape Town and Rhine left the Port on today morning, while two more ships, Eagle and Khairpur are expected to sail Thursday afternoon.

Cargo volume of 168,741 tonnes, comprising 132,836 tonnes imports cargo and 35,905 tonnes export cargo carried in 3039 Containers (1464 TEUs Imports and 1575 TEUs export) was handled

# Eurozone stock markets hit fresh records on rate cut hopes

LONDON (AFP/APP): The Paris and Frankfurt stock markets hit fresh record highs Thursday as investors eye interest-rate cuts from the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank as inflation cools.

Paris struck an all-time peak above 8,200 points and Frankfurt reached a new summit past 18,000.

Bitcoin hit a fresh record high at \$73,797.

"Lower interest rates are conducive to company growth and economic growth helping indices higher," noted Fiona Cincotta, markets analyst at City Index trading group.

She cautioned, however, that "inflation is sticky, and data later today will shed light on the continued resilience of the jobs market and the consumer" in the United States.

Asian traders also moved cautiously.

Hong Kong retreated for a second day after a recent rally, while Shanghai, Sydney, Jakarta and Wellington were also lower.

Tokyo rose on a weaker yen, though traders are awaiting a Bank of Japan meeting next week as speculation swirls that policymakers may begin moving away from an ultra-loose monetary policy -- the opposite issue facing most Western economies.

Singapore, Seoul, Taipei, Mumbai, Manila and Bangkok also rose.

Investors are keeping tabs on China-US tensions after the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill that would force TikTok's Chinese ByteDance owner to divest from the company or see the platform banned in the United States.

China warned the decision will "inevitably come back to bite the United States".

On Wall Street, share price pullbacks Wednesday for tech giants including Nvidia, Apple and Tesla weighed on the S&P 500 and Nasdaq, though the Dow ended slightly higher.

Italy's competition authority on Thursday fined TikTok 10 million euros (\$11 million), saying the hugely popular video app had failed to sufficiently protect minors.

That came as the European Commission sent formal requests for information to TikTok, Facebook, X and other online platforms to examine how they are countering artificial intelligence risks such as deepfakes.

The EC on Thursday additionally sent a formal request for information from LinkedIn, Microsoft's networking platform for professionals, about how users' personal information is being used for targeting advertising.

# Govt expedites implementation of 5Es framework

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal presided over a meeting here Thursday to expedite the implementation of the 5 Es Framework.

According to press statement issued by the ministry, decision to organize one day workshop was made during the meeting with top officials of the ministry, to gather recommendations from experts including from academia and the private sector.

Additionally, future agenda would also be devised for the implementation of the Export Energy, Equity, E-

Pakistan and Environment (5 Es) Framework so that long-term policies can be formulated for implementation in these sectors.

It is pertinent to mention here that during the previous government tenure, the Ministry of Planning, under the leadership of Ahsan Iqbal had formulated 5 Es Framework which was also approved by the National Economic Council (NEC).

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Iqbal said that it was top responsibility of the Planning Commission to determine the economic and developmental priorities accurately. He said that in order to move forward, there was need to increase revenues and boost exports.

Additionally, he emphasized that traditional meth-

ods needed to be transcended for achieving progress on sustainable grounds.

He said, the entire Ministry of Planning will be shifted to a digital system in next six months adding it would fully activate the e-governance system. Citing examples of Indian and Bangladesh, he reiterated that continuation of policies were prerequisites to lead the country towards stability and development.

He said, Pakistan was currently facing economic challenges and highlighted the need to increase revenues and exports.

He said the principles of development have drastically changed worldwide as artificial intelligence, big data, and automation are

taking the entire system towards new stability.

He emphasized that desired results of progress and development could not be achieved through traditional methods.

The Federal Minister for Planning stressed the importance of networking so that the best abilities of the entire nation can be utilized. He instructed officials to ensure top-level efficiency.

Ahsan directed officials to complete PC-1 in the Ministry of Planning within 15 days, while also improving the monitoring system. He emphasized the urgent need to build a human resource base to the level of Dr. Mahboob ul Haq and Sartaj Aziz for the best planning.

# KATI anticipates economic step by govt

KARACHI (APP): President of the Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI) Johar Qandhari on Thursday felicitated the recently appointed federal ministers and expressed optimism that they would steer the economy out of crisis.

In a statement issued here, Qandhari highlighted significance of formulating a cohesive economic policy and consultations with stakeholders to develop a long-term strategy. He stressed the importance of

consistency in policy implementation for five years to foster investment, industrial growth, and job creation, thereby propelling the country towards development.

He emphasized the importance of the roles held by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Science and Technology Minister Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and others in their addresses highlighted the challenges faced by the business community.

The KATI chief expressed confidence in

cabinet members' ability to steer Pakistan's economy out of crisis. He underscored the commitment of the Korangi Industrial Area's business community to collaborate with the government in pursuit of economic improvement.

As the nation looks towards these newly appointed leaders for direction, KATI remains hopeful that they will harness their full potential to address economic challenges and drive Pakistan towards prosperity.

# Economists highlight encouraging data

BEIJING (APP): Economists of multiple foreign financial institutions said recent encouraging data from warming inflation to vibrant foreign trade indicate that the Chinese economy continued to gather steam and maintained its upward trend at the beginning of the year.

China's consumer price index (CPI) rose 0.7 percent year on year in February, reversing a 0.8 percent decline in January, and the core CPI deducting food and energy prices went up 1.2 percent year on year in February, marking the largest increase in two years, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Nomura research analysts believe the CPI inflation is well above market expectations with the robust release of pent-up

consumption demand during the Spring Festival holiday, reflected in surging sales of air tickets, rental vehicle services, cinema tickets and live performance events. UBS economist Wang Tao predicted China will see a higher CPI growth rate this year than that of 2023 with a mild price recovery.

Moreover, the country's foreign trade in goods gained 8.7 percent to hit a historical high of 6.61 trillion yuan (about 931 billion US dollars) in the first two months, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Strong exports to emerging markets drove up the country's trade growth in the January-February period, according to Nomura.

Economists expressed optimism over China's eco-

nomic outlook as this year's government work report stressed efforts to promote high-quality development.

Wang said the Chinese government highlighted the ongoing structural changes and outlined structural policies to facilitate the transition, such as policies on developing new quality productive forces.

Liu Jing, chief economist for Greater China at HSBC, said China can deliver its growth target of around 5 percent this year.

An array of favorable factors, including a stabilizing property market, recovering consumer sentiments, stronger manufacturing investments driven by massive equipment upgrades, and fiscal and monetary measures, will help promote a steady recovery of the economy, Liu said.

# China issues guideline to boost e-commerce

BEIJING (APP): China has rolled out a guideline to advance the high-quality development of e-commerce in its rural areas, said the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) on Wednesday.

The guideline was jointly issued by nine departments, including the MOC and the Cyberspace Administration of China.

The move aims to ride

the emerging digital economy wave to establish a new development pattern and improve rural consumption and the income of rural residents, the MOC said.

The guideline proposes 14 detailed policies in six aspects, including building a multi-level rural e-commerce comprehensive service platform, accelerating

the construction of a modern logistics and distribution system, and fostering diversified new e-commerce entities in rural areas.

The MOC said it will help facilitate construction of county-level live streaming e-commerce bases, amid the country's efforts to comprehensively promote rural revitalization.

## Court Notice

In the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I /Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar.Suit No. 427/1 Institution 21/6/2023. Date of hearing. 16/4/2024. Saadullah VS Sahibullah. Notice to No. 5. Arshad. 20. Mst Aqbania d/o Janat Bibi. 21. Hakem Taj. 22. Sartaj. 25. Mst Fameda d/o Mst Bakht Bibi resident of Nagri in the limit Tangora Tehsil Chaghorzal district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 16/4/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



**In brief****Bahawalpur Tennis Tournament held**

**B A H A W A L P U R** (APP): Under the auspices of District Lawn Tennis Association, Bahawalpur Tennis Tournament held here at stadium in the city. According to a press release issued here, around 38 players of several clubs participated in the Bahawalpur Tennis Tournament. The tournament was played on double and single basis. In single, final match was played between Captain Arham and Chaudhary Zohaib Waraich while Waraich won the trophy. In ladies single, final match was played between Ms. Saba Ramazan and Ms. Mariam while Ms. Saba Ramazan won the trophy. In double, the match was played between the team comprising Chaudhary Sohail Iqbal and Chaudhary Zohaib Waraich and the team comprising Brig. Salman and Ali Zafar. The team comprising Iqbal and Waraich won the trophy. District Sports Officer, Aamir Hameed and other officials also watch the matches.

**Night Football Tournament**

**QUETTA** (APP): All Balochistan Haji Yousuf Khilji Ramazan Night Football Tournament started at Helper High School Satellite Town last night. The opening match was played between Young Nausar Football Club Quetta versus Great Hazara Football Club Quetta. Speaking on the occasion, the special guest of the match Haji Muhammad Yousuf Khilji emphasized the global popularity of football, calling it the national game of the world. He highlighted the enthusiasm for the sport in Pakistan particularly in Quetta, noting the region's strong talent pool. Following a match, a special guest presented a donation of 0.3 million rupees to the tournament committee. Additionally, the guest announced financial rewards for the winning team, runner-up team, and tournament referees, totaling sixty thousand rupees for the winners and forty thousand rupees each for the others. Tournament officials, including Chairman Haji Muhammad Naseem Khan Achakzai, Secretary Inamullah Khan Achakzai, and Press Secretary Bashir Ahmed Barich, expressed their gratitude towards the special guest for their support.

**Gordon, Jarrad receive first call-ups**

**LONDON** (BBC): Anthony Gordon and Jarrad Branthwaite have received their first England call-ups and Ivan Toney has been recalled for the friendlies against Brazil and Belgium this month. Forward Gordon, 23, has scored 10 goals in all competitions for Newcastle this season, while 21-year-old defender Branthwaite has impressed for struggling Everton. Brentford striker Toney, 28, features for the first time since completing an eight-month ban for breaching FA betting rules in January. Uncapped Aston Villa defender Ezri Konsa, 26, has also been named in the 25-man squad. England play Brazil on 23 March and Belgium on 26 March - both at Wembley - their final games before manager Gareth Southgate names his squad for Euro 2024. Defender Joe Gomez, who has not played for England since 2020, has been included after impressing for Liverpool at left-back, centre-back and right-back this season. Former Liverpool teammate Jordan Henderson, now at Ajax, has been selected, but midfielder Kalvin Phillips, who is on loan at West Ham from Manchester City, misses out.

## Multan Sultans sink Peshawar Zalmi to reach PSL 9 Final

**KARACHI** (Monitoring Desk): A combined bowling effort, followed by Yasir Khan's blistering half-century powered Multan Sultans to beat Peshawar Zalmi by seven wickets and qualify for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) final.

Opting to bat first, Zalmi only managed a subpar total on the board despite Babar Azam's anchoring knock.

Zalmi had a dismal start to their innings as they lost their in-form opener Saim Ayub (1) in the first over with just four runs on the board.

Following the early debacle, Mohammad Harris joined Babar in the middle and put together an anchor-

ing 46-run partnership for the second wicket before falling victim to Mohammad Ali in the sixth over.

Zalmi then sustained another blow to their batting charge when Usama Mir got rid of Haseebullah Khan (3) in the eighth over.

Meanwhile, Babar Azam stood his ground firm and kept the scoreboard ticking until Chris Jordan cleaned him up with a well-crafted yorker in the 14th over.

He remained the top-scorer for Peshawar Zalmi with 46 off 42 deliveries, laced up with five boundaries.

Following his departure, Tom Kohler-Cadmore (24) and Rovman Powell (12) made notable contributions

before Paul Walter and Luke Wood offered late fireworks.

Walter (12) and Wood added an unbeaten 15 for the eighth wicket, lifting Zalmi to go past the 140-run mark.

Wood was the core aggressor of the stand with his brisk 14-run cameo which came off just seven deliveries and featured one boundary and a six.

Usama Mir, the leading wicket-taker of the PSL 9, and Chris Jordan led the bowling attack for Multan Sultans with two wickets each while David Wiley, Mohammad Ali and Abbas Afridi struck out a batter apiece.



**KARACHI:** Usama Mir is thrilled after knocking over Haseebullah Khan.

**Lahiru hospitalised after car crash in Anuradhapura**

**COLOMBO** (Cricinfo): Former Sri Lanka captain Lahiru Thirimanne has been hospitalised after the car he was travelling in was involved in a serious head-on collision near the north-central city of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, on Thursday morning. The exact nature of Thirimanne's injury is not understood yet, but he is presently in stable condition at the Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital. At least one other passenger from the car Thirimanne was in, is also receiving care at the same hospital.

Thirimanne is understood to have been on pilgrimage when the accident occurred. Essentially the car had crashed into a lorry traveling in the opposite direction. Having made his international debut in 2010, Thirimanne played 44 Test matches, 127 ODIs and 26 T20Is. He was part of three T20 World Cup campaigns, including Sri Lanka's win in 2014, and played two ODI World Cups.

## Bangladesh set to tour USA for three T20Is ahead of World Cup

**DHAKA** (Cricinfo): Bangladesh will tour the USA for a three-match T20I series in May, ahead of the T20 World Cup. The two sides have never played a T20I against each other before and will use the series to prepare for the flagship tournament co-hosted by the USA and the West Indies.

USA will also play Canada in a five-match T20I series in April.

All the games will be hosted by Prairie View Cricket Complex in Houston, Texas.

Bangladesh have played two T20Is in the USA across their history, both against West Indies, in 2018, and with the first two games of the campaign - against Sri Lanka and South Africa - scheduled in Dallas and New York respectively - a series going into the tour-

nament will help them get used to the conditions.

"For the Bangladesh Team, this tour serves as an ideal platform to acclimatise to the conditions ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024," Nizam Uddin Chowdhury, CEO, Bangladesh Cricket Board, said.

"We recognise the significance of this preparatory phase and are committed to making the most of this invaluable experience."

Bangladesh were knocked out in the group stages of the previous T20 World Cup and will hope to put on an improved show after an indifferent ODI World Cup.

USA and Canada, who are set to feature in the tournament for the first time - will kick off proceedings in Dallas on June 2. The fives T20Is

USA have played in the last two years all came in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier in July 2022. The only T20Is Canada played in the last year were in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Americas Region Final, which they won to qualify for the World Cup.

"Ahead of the important Men's T20 World Cup, these games will be vital for our team to get their working combinations, build team cohesion, and fine-tune strategies," said Mr. Venu Pisike, Chairman of USA Cricket. Canada and USA are part of Group A - along with India, Ireland, and Pakistan - in the T20 World Cup.

Bangladesh are part of group D, and will play against Nepal and Netherlands in Kingstown in the West Indies.

## First All Pakistan Departmental Football Tournament Kohat concludes

**E.P. Report**

**KOHAT:** The ongoing First All Pakistan Departmental Football Tournament started under the auspices of Regional Sports Office Kohat in collaboration with District Administration Kohat and Dostan Coal Company, concluded at Kohat Sports Complex on Friday evening.

Regional Sports Officer Sajid Afridi was the chief guest of the event while among others Haji Yousaf Afridi, Managing Director of Dostan Coal Company, Mohibullah Shinwari, General Secretary of Football Association Kohat and a large number of football fans were present on this occasion.

Final match of the tournament was played between the Chapman and Islamabad teams which was won by the earlier by 3-1 goals. 42 renowned Football Teams from all over Pakistan including DG Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Kohat Region Dostan Club Atesh, Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Gilgit Baltistan, Islamabad and local teams were participated. Speaking



on the occasion, Regional Sports Officer Kohat said that sports are being organized as per policy of the provincial government as sports are an important means of establishing peace. Similarly, for mental and physical nourishment, holding of maximum sports events are the need of the hour, he added. He said

that the visiting teams were treated in accordance with the historical traditions and hospitality of Pakhtunkhwa.

Later, Regional Sports Officer Kohat Sajid Afridi gave away trophies and cash prizes to the winner Chaman team and Runner-up Islamabad team.

## SBP asks PCB to review its engagements with Innovation Factory, OKFX.io

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has asked Pakistan Cricket Board to review its engagements with Innovation Factory, a cryptocurrency company, and OKFX.io, a platform that facilitates foreign exchange trading. In a letter addressed to Chairman PCB, a senior official of the banking regulator has also recommended that PCB and its Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchises perform proper due diligence of all potential partners to ensure that none of them operate in the prohibited domains of cryptocurrencies, betting, and unauthorized foreign exchange trading. Referring to a last year's letter addressed to Salman Naseer, the chief operating officer (COO) of the PCB, the official said the SBP had told the PCB that the sponsorship deal with cryptocurrency would entice viewers of Pakistan to enter into the prohibited

domain of Crypto/virtual currencies.

"(The) PCB was, inter alia, sensitized about its engagement with Best Fintech Investment Coin (BFIC), a cryptocurrency, and engagement of surrogate brands of betting web-sites with franchises of PSL season 8. "In this background, it has come to our knowledge that PCB has again collaborated with Innovation Factory, as "Official Category Sponsor" for the PSL Season 9, which is, inter alia, a cryptocurrency company that has developed BFIC.

We would like to bring to your attention the regulatory stance of SBP in the matter. In terms of BPRD Circular No. 03 dated April 6, 2018, all Banks/DFIs/Microfinance Banks and Payment System Operators/Payment Service Providers have been strictly prohibited from dealing in or promoting virtual currencies.

Therefore, promoting cryptocurrencies through PSL season 9 is inappropriate as it might entice the viewers in Pakistan to enter into the prohibited domain of crypto/virtual currencies, resulting in an outflow of foreign exchange through formal channels." Similarly, it has also been observed that PCB has partnered with OKFX.io, a platform that facilitates foreign exchange trading. We would like to highlight that offering foreign exchange trading products in Pakistan without prior authorization of SBP is illegal.

Since SBP has not authorized OKFX.io to offer foreign exchange trading products and services in the country, therefore PCB's formal association with it as a sponsor in PSL season 9 is unwarranted. Such an arrangement may lure the public towards the prohibited domain of foreign exchange trading.

**LONDON** (BBC): Oliver Bearman says it was "really fulfilling" to have Lewis Hamilton, Max Verstappen and Fernando Alonso praise him after his Formula 1 debut. The 18-year-old Briton finished seventh at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix after replacing Ferrari's Carlos Sainz.

Bearman told BBC Sport: "It was a proud day for me. For them to say these kind words was really nice - especially the older guys like Fernando and Lewis.

"I grew up watching them. To share the track with them was an honour." Seven-time world champion Hamilton called Bearman "a really bright future star", two-time champion Alonso said he drove "fantastically well" and three-time champion Max Verstappen, who won in Jeddah, said he did "an incredible job".

Bearman, who is a member of the Ferrari driver academy, was needed last-minute after Sainz was diagnosed with appendicitis and needed surgery.

Bearman qualified on pole for the Formula 2 race and found out he would be driving only two hours before the final practice session. He qualified 11th and went on to score six points on his debut.

A perfectionist, he said not making

it into the top 10 shootout in qualifying after a "scrappy" session was "a big regret", and described becoming stuck behind Nico Hulkenberg's Haas for six laps early in the race as "bad decision or bad execution" and "a bit longer than necessary to overtake the guys ahead".

He said his remark after the race that Hamilton had had to help him from his car because her was so exhausted was a "joking comment". The race, he said, "wasn't that tough" physically. But he admitted it had been "difficult".

Bearman said: "When I was driving I didn't really feel too tired, but it's when the adrenaline wears off after the flag and especially when you get out of the car and there is no more fresh air coming to you - that's when I felt the heat and I needed to get my helmet off quite quickly to cool me down." Jeddah is renowned as one of the toughest tracks physically for drivers because of its high-speed nature, the walls lining the track and the heat in Saudi Arabia.

"Especially for me who wasn't used to it, it's the G-force you pull, especially in sector one in Jeddah," said Bearman. "You go from 3G in one direction straight to the other one

and then the other one again. Plus the longitudinal forces in braking - it's like five times your bodyweight.

"So you're pretty much getting thrown around in there and of course you need to stabilise your body with your core and neck to make sure your vision is correct because you need to be centimetres away from the wall to maximise the lap time.

"So all of that coupled with thick layers of fireproofs to keep you safe - it boils up. It gets really hot in there. You have an engine behind you; a lot of electronics boxes. "That's actually one thing that surprised me in F1, how hot the cockpit is compared to F2 and F3 - because of the complexity of the systems and the packaging is very tight - so there's no rest out there."

Bearman will travel to Australia this weekend in preparation for the next race on 22-24 March, where F2 again accompanies F1. It has not yet been confirmed whether Sainz will be fit to return at Ferrari, although that is the plan. Bearman, who is from Essex and started racing karts when he was eight, joined Ferrari not long after he had turned 16 and moved to Italy to begin his racing education with them.





## In brief

### Mehboob Alam remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Famous television and film actor Mehboob Alam was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Thursday. Born on March 14, 1948, he was best known for his role in the Pakistan Television classic drama serial Waris in which he played the role of Chaudhry Hashmat Ali. He also appeared in the PTV drama Andhera Ujala (1984-1985) and Neelay Hath in 1989. Mehboob Alam also acted in 38 movies which included 12 Urdu, 15 Punjabi, and 11 Sindhi movies. He died on March 18, 1994, in Karachi at the age of only 46.

### AIOU reschedules postponed exams

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has rescheduled the postponed papers in Chitral region. Due to snowfall in Lower Chitral, schools and colleges were closed from 5 to 9 March and exams were postponed. According to the notification issued by the examination department, the exams of March 5 will be held on April 16, the papers of March 6 will be held on April 17, and the papers of March 7 to 9 will be held on April 18 to 20 respectively. The roll number slips, timings, and examination centres will remain the same and previously issued roll number slips will be valid for the exams.

### ANF recovers 46 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting three operations managed to recover 46 kg drugs and arrested four accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 460 grams heroin was recovered from a passenger going to Bahrain at Karachi Airport. 20.4 kg of opium and 21.6 kg of hashish were recovered from Faisalabad while 4 kg weed was recovered from two suspects arrested from Zarghon Road area in Quetta. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

### Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered two stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Dhamial Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Aziz and Naseer and recovered two stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Saddar, Nabeel Khokhar said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

### Police carry out search operation

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Division Police here on Thursday carried out search operation in 'Dhoke Manga' and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of Saddar Baroni Police Station. According to a police spokesman, the search operation was conducted in order to maintain law and order and flush out suspects following the directions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani. He informed, senior police officers and police personnel including women police took part in the search operation.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Privatisation, Abdul Aleem Khan chairing a meeting with the financial advisors for divestment of PIACL.

## Dr. Musadiq, French Dy Head Mission discuss collaboration in energy sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister of Energy, Dr. Musadiq Masood Malik and French Deputy Head of Mission in Pakistan, Guillaume Dabouis on Thursday discussed potential avenues of collaboration in Pakistan's energy sector. During the meeting, the Deputy Head Mission expressed France's keen interest in investing in various aspects of Pakistan's energy landscape, ranging from LNG cargo provision to energy resource exploration, and projects aimed at enhancing energy trad-

ing, distribution, and transmission within the country, as per a news release.

He also expressed interest in initiatives towards reducing line losses and revitalizing Pakistan's energy sector as a whole.

The minister reiterated his commitment to dedicating significant time and effort towards addressing Pakistan's longstanding energy challenges comprehensively. Dr. Musadiq Masood Malik reaffirmed the Prime Minister's unwavering commitment to further improving the per-

formance of key sectors, including Energy, Finance, Commerce, Industries & Production, and Communication.

He emphasized that agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, and the Prime Minister is committed to modernizing the agricultural sector by integrating AI and Machine Learning technologies. To achieve the vision of the Prime Minister, the entire cabinet is determined to bring about significant changes for Pakistan's long-term growth and prosperity.

### Railways announce ticket booking office hour in Ramadan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has announced the ticket booking office hours during the holy month of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak to facilitate the passengers. According to the spokesman of Pakistan Railways, the ticket booking offices would be open from 8 am to 1 pm Monday through Thursday during the first 15 days of the holy month. The spokesman said the travelers could book tickets for the afternoon shift Monday through Friday between 1 and 6 pm. He said there would be a Friday prayer break from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. To facilitate the passenger, he said after the 15th of Ramadan, the reservation office would be open till 9 pm with Ifar break.

## Interior Minister meets Sudi Ambassador in diplomatic enclave

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Interior & Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday arrived in diplomatic enclave to meet Nawaf Bin Saeed Ahmed Al Maliki, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia.

The ambassador congratulated Mohsin Naqvi on assuming the post of Minister for Interior. He expressed his best wishes for the minister for his new responsibilities.

The ambassador appreciated the performance of Mohsin Naqvi for completing public projects in Punjab with exceptional speed and high quality in record time.

Both sides discussed the matters of mutual interest in the meeting and

resolved to promote bilateral relations and increasing cooperation in various fields.

Mohsin Naqvi thanked the ambassador for his endless cooperation with the Punjab government and said that Saudi Arabia fully supported Pakistan in every test. He said that Pakistani nation took pride in relations with Saudi Arabia as it was the second home of Pakistanis.

The minister said that Pakistan was proud of historic friendship with Saudi Arabia. He praised the ambassador's role for strengthening the relationship between the two countries.

## Commissioner visits wholesale Ramadan Bazaar to review arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP):

Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak along with Deputy Commissioner (DC), Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema here on Thursday visited the wholesale Ramadan Bazaar established near Nawaz Sharif Park and reviewed the quality and prices of essential items and arrangements made to facilitate the customers.

The Commissioner took notice on exorbitant tomato rates in the wholesale Ramadan bazaar.

The wholesaler who took illegal profit was immediately removed and imposed Rs 50,000 fine. The Commissioner

said that no one would be allowed to charge more profit than the fixed rates.

The DC gave a detailed briefing regarding the supply of essential items at the wholesale rates.

On the instructions of Chief Secretary Punjab, this wholesale Ramadan bazaar was established and activated in Rawalpindi within 24 hours.

The space for the hand-cart market in the wholesale Ramadan bazaar had also been allotted, the Commissioner was briefed and informed that in the market, essential items were available at 25 percent lower rates.

Later, Commissioner Aamir Khattak also visited Model Ramzan Bazaar

near Chor Harpal Peshawar Road.

A certificate must be taken from the Food Authority to ensure the quality of all the essential items, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak directed the officers concerned.

Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak ordered the authorities to establish a separate Rescue-1122 desk in model Ramzan Bazaar to help and guide the customers.

The Commissioner said that the stalls in model Ramzan Bazaar should be increased so that the citizens could be facilitated.

## 156,952 ration bags distributed in Rwp division

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 156,952 ration bags have been distributed among the deserving people in Rawalpindi division under Negahban Ramadan Package, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak.

He informed that 48,486 ration bags were distributed in Rawalpindi district, 47,722 in Attock, 21,310 in Jhelum, 36,438 in Chakwal and 2,996 in Murree district.

The Commissioner also instructed the officers concerned to remain busy in the field in day time and attend the

divisional coordination meeting to be held at 8 PM daily.

The purpose of holding a late night meeting is to review the every day's performance and set the targets for the next day, he added.

He further said that so far 156,952 deserving families had been provided ration bags at their door steps across the division.

There should be no complaints of cluster distribution anywhere, the Commissioner directed and said that along with the ration package distribution, the process of verifica-

tion of the rest of the beneficiaries should also be completed as soon as possible. In addition to the Ramadan model market, implementation of the official price list should also be ensured in the open market as well, he said.

In order to control the prices of essential commodities, the administrative officers themselves should participate in the bidding process in the wholesale market. The prices should be controlled by increasing supply of the essential items, Engr. Aamir Khattak added.

## PNCA hosts calligraphy art exhibition to commemorate Ramazan

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a tribute to the holy month of Ramadan, the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Thursday unveiled a captivating Calligraphy Exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Islamabad.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Ms. Humaira Ahmed a Secretary, National Heritage and Culture Division along with Director General PNCA, M. Ayoub Jamali, that witnessed a diverse audience eager to explore the profound significance of calligraphy in Islamic

This exhibition will showcase a remarkable collection of calligraphic artworks from the permanent collection of PNCA at National Art Gallery in Islamabad. The event witnessed a diverse audience eager to explore the exquisite world of calligraphy by the remarkable artists.

The art of calligraphy holds a profound significance in Islamic art and culture, serving not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a means of spiritual devotion and communica-

tion. Rooted in the rich tradition of Islamic art, calligraphy has flourished over centuries, evolving into various styles and forms across different regions. The history of calligraphy in the Islamic world dates back to the early days of Islam when the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The intricate and ornate scripts used to transcribe the Quran became a central focus of artistic expression, embodying the beauty and reverence of Islamic teachings.

In the context of Pakistani history, several prominent calligraphers have left an indelible mark on the art form, contributing to its enduring legacy. Among these luminaries is Sadequain, widely regarded as one of Pakistan's most celebrated calligraphers and artists. His dynamic and innovative approach to calligraphy, characterized by bold strokes and expressive forms, has earned him international acclaim.

Ahmed Khan is another distinguished figure in Pakistani calligra-

phy, known for his mastery of classical styles and meticulous attention to detail. His works reflect a deep appreciation for the traditional techniques and aesthetics of Islamic calligraphy.

Hanif Ramay, Ismail Gulgee, Rana Riaz, Aslam Kamal, and Amin Gulgee are also revered names in the realm of Pakistani calligraphy, each bringing their unique style and interpretation to the art form. Their contributions have not only enriched the cultural heritage of Pakistan but have also inspired generations of aspiring artists. The exhibition also includes the paintings of Mr. Elahi Bux Matee, who has over five decades of experience in the field, stands as an extraordinary calligrapher, honored with both national and international awards for his contributions to the art form.

Mr. Rasheed Butt, recipient of the Presidents Pride of Performance award, is renowned for his serenading illumination techniques, making him the first person in Pakistan to incorporate illuminations into his calligraphic works.



ISLAMABAD: CDA workers busy in planting sepals at F-9 Park in the Federal Capital.

## Poet on Punjabi Culture Day stresses promotion of mother tongue, culture values

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned poet and writer Dr. Sugra Sadaf said on Thursday that the purpose of Punjabi Culture Day was to encourage the people of Punjab to promote their mother tongues to stay connected with our traditions and values. Talking to PTV News Channel on the occasion of Punjabi Culture Day, she urged people to actively participate in these events and play their role in promoting the culture of Punjab.

While highlighting the rich culture and tradition of Punjab she said many scholars had enlightened the people with their thoughts on Punjabi language, culture, and literature. She said that Punjabi culture was the name of advancing the philanthropic traditions of Punjab, it reflects the culture of unity, love, and human respect.

Punjab's culture, festivals, food, costumes, and ancient places were filled with thousands of colors, she said, and added

that the blessed region had a history of thousands of years old civilization.

The culture of Punjab was a blend of fascinating cultural colors and was rich in the love of great Sufis like Hazrat Ali Hajveri, Baba Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, Sultan Bahu, Balhe Shah, and many others. She said the purpose of observing the day is to promote love, brotherhood, and unity as the soil of Punjab has the fragrance of affection, hospitality, and kindness. The poet mentioned that Punjabis have their own unique identity everywhere they live in the world, however, celebrating and remembering culture and traditions is a sign of the living nations that take pride in their history as cultural festivals reflect the identity and individuality of each region.

She also paid tribute to masters in the field of Fine Arts to promote love and courtesy on a national level.



Earthquake jolts Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): An earthquake of magnitude 5.3 on the Richter scale jolted Afghanistan on Wednesday night, the National Center for Seismology reported. The tremors were felt at 08:54pm, at a depth of 146 km. In a post on X, the NCS wrote, "Earthquake of Magnitude: 5.3, Occurred on 13-03-2024, 20:54:10 IST, Lat: 36.28 & Long: 70.25, Depth: 146 Km, Region: Afghanistan." There are no reports of any casualties or collateral damage due to the quake.

Ministry allocates land

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi, said in a meeting with oil refinery officials that as soon as they are ready to invest, the ministry will establish an oil and gas industrial park. In this meeting, refinery officials discussed problems regarding the Qashqari oil field and agreed that land should be provided. They said oil extracted from Qashqari needed to be refined through the standard process.

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

450 punishments implemented: IEA

KABUL (TOLOnews): After the Islamic Emirate's return, more than four hundred and fifty punishments have been carried out across the country.

Abdul Rahim Rashid, the Head of Press and Foreign Relations of the Supreme Court, noted that these sentences were carried out in public after evaluation by tripartite courts in various provinces.

"Since the Islamic Emirate's return, in various provinces, over 450 individuals have received punishments, with some well-known criminals and corrupt individuals being pub-

licly punished," Rashid added.

Some legal experts and religious scholars believe the implementation of Sharia rulings aids in maintaining order and security but emphasize that Sharia laws and international treaties should guide the execution of punishments.

"Sharia requires consideration of conditions and the existence of an Islamic system. There must be a unified system and law, with judges' decisions aligning with Sharia principles," Hasebullah Hanafi, a religious scholar, remarked.

"Afghanistan's criminal law discussions have incorporated treaties and covenants, ensuring international compliance and state civil liability," Mohammad Asif Faqiri, a legal expert, said.

According to the Supreme Court, five sentences of Qisas (retaliation) have also been carried out in the provinces of Farah, Laghman, Ghazni, Maidan Wardak, and Jowzjan, an issue that has sparked reactions of international organizations including Amnesty International and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

UNAMA not successful in fulfilling its mission: IEA

KABUL (Ariana news): The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is expected to decide on continuing the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in a day.

However, Islamic Emirate officials say UNAMA has not been successful in fulfilling its mission so far and they hope that it focuses on the key challenges of Afghanistan.

"UNAMA shouldn't always look at the issues of Afghanistan from a negative point of view, they should take into consideration issues in which we have made progress; we have achievements; we have security and stability, and that the people of Afghanistan are in a good economic condition compared to the past. UNAMA should be a partner of Afghanistan, not always be critical and always use their channel for preparing propaganda," said Zabihullah Mujahid, IEA spokesman.

"So, we ask UNAMA to change its policy regarding Afghanistan and cooperate with Afghanistan more effectively," he added.

In the last meeting of the UN Security Council on Afghanistan, the majority of the council members supported the continuation of UNAMA's work in Afghanistan because they believe that UNAMA's existence is important for delivering humanitarian aid, ensuring human rights and forming a comprehensive government.

UNAMA's mission in the country is extended annually by the UNSC members.

Meanwhile, the mission of this organization in Afghanistan will end in four days (March 17th).

Iran deported 1,000 Afghan refugees

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriates Affairs stated that more than a thousand Afghan migrants returned to the country after being expelled by Iran.

The ministry announced on Thursday, March 14, in a statement that 1,740 Afghan migrants returned to the country. According to the ministry's statement, the mentioned migrants returned to the country through the Islam Qala border in Herat province after being expelled.

According to the migrants' statement, families and individuals returned to the country by force or voluntarily.

Officials at the Ministry of Migrants Affairs also stated that 37 unaccompanied children were referred to the WARCHILD institute for identification of their families.

Iran and Pakistan have recently imposed strict restrictions on Afghan migrants, causing Afghan citizens who have sought refuge in these countries due to poverty and unemployment through illegal means to face difficulties.

Afghan returnees from countries such as Iran and Pakistan face dire challenges, particularly during the harsh winter months and amid ongoing humanitarian crises.

Interest of \$270m earned so far from frozen assets

KABUL (Ariana News): Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, a member of the board of directors of the Afghanistan Trust Fund (ATF) in Switzerland, says the fund has so far earned \$270 million in interest.

Ahady told Radio Azadi that this interest, earned from the \$3.5 billion, can be used in Afghanistan if necessary.

"Some projects, some basic expenses of the government or the government that they do not have the power to pay and are necessary for the people of Afghanistan are also used there. But in any case, four members of the board must fully agree for such expenses."

"In the last meeting, more than a month ago, on January 29, a decision was made that if the Afghan government cannot pay the loan of the Asian Bank ... and they insist that we pay, then it is possible to use this money."

"Because the Asian Bank provides humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and we do not want the humanitarian aid of the Asian Bank to be cut off. Of course, the same ruling was in the case of the World



Bank, but this loan was paid by the government itself, so there was no need for us," Ahady told Liberty radio.

At the same time, Ahady said all four board members need to agree to the spending of this money.

Turkish TRT news channel said in a report on Wednesday that the officials involved in the discussions about the spending of the money of the Afghanistan Trust Fund say for the stability of Afghanistan's ruined financial system, it is necessary to release this money.

But according to reports, the four board members, Dr. Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, Dr. Shah Mehrabi, Dr. Jay Shambaugh, and Ambassador Alexandra Baumann, could not agree on how to spend the money, almost 18 months after the establishment of the fund.

A source told TRT that while all board members agree that this money should not be touched, the interest earned should go towards helping the people of Afghanistan.

After the return of the Islamic Emirate to power in

August 2021, \$7 billion belonging to the Central Bank of Afghanistan was frozen in the United States, half of which has been invested in a Swiss trust account.

The other half is earmarked to be paid over to the families of 9/11 attacks.

The Islamic Emirate has however tried unsuccessfully to have the fund released.

During the republic, Da Afghanistan Bank, which was responsible for the country's monetary stability, kept this capital abroad as a monetary support.

Empowering Education: Khost youth's drive to enroll children in schools



KHOST (TOLOnews): On the brink of a new academic year, a dedicated group of young individuals in Khost has initiated a commendable campaign aimed at enrolling children who are eligible for school.

The purpose of this initiative, as stated by the campaign's participants, is to inspire families to prioritize the education of their children.

These young activists are offering complimentary photo printing services, essential for the school enrollment process of these children.

"We go from village to village, house to house, to reach out to children of school-going age, offering to print their photographs at no cost," Social activist Naqibullah Zaland said.

Some Khost residents

have said that the challenges posed by the remoteness of educational facilities have led to an educational gap for many children.

They asked the officials to build schools in their areas and provide more educational facilities for their children.

"We don't have a school, and the central school is 5 kilometers away. In hot and cold weather, children cannot go to school and are forced to stay home without education or profession," Wali Zang, a tribal elder said.

"Many students have been deprived of schooling because they don't have access to it," Shamsullah, a resident of Khost, said.

In a supportive stance, Mahboob Shah Qanet, the Deputy Governor of Khost,

lauded the young group's initiative to foster educational motivation among children. He affirmed the Islamic Emirate's commitment to expanding educational facilities and infrastructure.

Qanet added that they would strive to create a safe educational environment for children.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan always wants to have an educated and healthy society and always tries to ensure future generations receive education, and we support this move," he said.

As the new academic year draws near, the group reports having assisted over three and a half thousand children in their journey towards formal education, pledging to persist in their efforts.

60 people died due to cold weather: Ministry

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of State for Natural Disaster Management announced that in the past twenty-three days (the first day of Hoot in the solar calendar) at least 60 people have died due to snowfall, rain, and cold weather in the country.

Janan Saiq, the ministry's spokesman, said that 34 people were injured, and more than 177,000 livestock were lost, and over 1,600 houses were destroyed during this period.

"From the first to the twenty-third of Hoot, our ministry, in collaboration with international organizations, has provided food,

non-food, and cash assistance to 22,415 families across the country, and the process of assisting needy families is still ongoing," Saiq said.

The victims of natural disasters asked the Islamic Emirate to provide them with the necessary assistance.

"In the area we live in, a large number of livestock have died, and several shepherds have been buried under the snow," said Mohammad Halim, a resident of Badakhshan.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Works stated that due to snowfall and severe storms, the Salang Pass and

several routes in the provinces of Bamiyan, Ghor, Sar-e Pol, Nuristan, and Farah have been blocked.

Ashraf Haqshenas, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works, said: "The Salang highway has been closed to traffic from 8:30 last night due to snowfall, storms, and limited visibility."

The Meteorology Department of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation issued a warning of the possibility of snow, rain, and flooding on Wednesday and Thursday of this week in 15 provinces of the country.

Responding to Irish Envoy, Kabul says women key to trade

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Islamic Emirate, reacting to remarks made by the Irish ambassador at the United Nations, said that women play a significant role in the business sector of the country.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said that the Islamic Emirate has taken care of women's rights in the country, and the role of women has also increased in this regard.

Mujahid said: "The Islamic Emirate has paid attention to the areas where women are deprived and the retrieval of their rights from those who violate them, including in the economic sector, where

women's roles, as I reiterated, have increased in the business sector, their businesses have become more active, and our sisters who are engaged in handicrafts and various economic sectors are provided with facilities, and the Ministry of Economy has good plans and programs for them, and this area is expanding."

Earlier, the Irish deputy representative to the United Nations, referring to Afghan women, said that the imposition of work restrictions on women and preventing them from going to schools and universities has led to the stagnation of Afghanistan's economy.

Keith McBean, deputy permanent representative of

Ireland to the UN, said: "Since the takeover of the Taliban de facto authorities in August 2021, as we know the Afghan economy has plummeted due to a number of factors but one of these has been the ban on women from entering many areas of the work force and indeed the draconian degrees excluding girls from schools and universities."

Meanwhile, some women and economic analysts also have various viewpoints on this matter. "Certainly, neglecting the role of women has a direct impact on the security and lack of economic growth of the country, which is not in Afghanistan's interest," said Lima Sherzad, a women's

rights activist.

"Economic growth by women can create a trust atmosphere between the people and the current caretaker government of Afghanistan and can also ensure more peace, stability, and security in Afghanistan," said Abdul Rahman Shamal, an international relations analyst.

"Access to education equips women with the necessary knowledge and skills for economic participation and leadership roles," said Ahmad Seyar Quraishi, an economic affairs analyst.

This is while, for more than two and a half years, girls above the sixth grade have not been able to go to school.

Unruly, congested traffic annoy Herat city residents

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Residents of this capital city of western Herat province complain about unruly traffic and congestion in the city and demand a proper solution to the matter.

A resident of Herat city, Sayed Hanif Hakimi, told Pajhwok Afghan News traffic jams were the outcome of increased number of vehicles in the city. He said relevant authorities should widen the roads and create more parking lots to prevent traffic accidents and ensure order.

He said he had witnessed many traffic accidents in the city because drivers did to follow the rules or cooperate with relevant authorities.

Bismillah Poya, another resident, expressed his concern about overcrowding in the city and said the city needed more parking lots,

adding no work had been done in this regard during the past one and a half decades.

While insisting on enforcement of social regulations and laws, some experts asked relevant authorities to create necessary facilities in the city.

One expert Mohammad Muslim Marvi told Pajhwok Afghan News lack of urban order caused overcrowding so laws and facilities should be created in this regard.

Standard traffic lights must also be installed and activated in the city, he added.

While admitting some of these problems in Herat city, traffic police department officials said the increasing population was a challenge for them.

Traffic Police Department chief Ghazi Zabihullah Akbari told



Pajhwok that Herat's population was over three million and over 300,000 vehicles plyef the city roads and their management was a challenge.

"The lack of parking lots is main reason of traffic congestion and many buildings have been built during the past two decades sans parking facilities and thou-

sands of three-wheelers also operate in the city."

He said over 40,000 rickshaws operated in the city and their drivers have no driving licenses as well.

The Traffic Police department, the transport department and the municipality want to find a proper solution to the problem, Akbari added.

Heart-wrenching stories of Afghans from past wars

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some victims of the past war narrate bitter stories of the bloody conflict in Afghanistan and want the Afghans to strike unity in their ranks and never let foreign wars take a toll on the Afghans again.

The Afghans suffered a lot in one way or another in the past four decades of war, with countless children becoming orphans and women widows. Countless families were destroyed, many people rendered disabled, millions were forced to leave the country and millions more turned to drugs.

Each victim of the war has a heart-wrenching story and one will break into

tears on hearing such heart-breaking narrations.

Haji Mohammad Afzal, 70, a resident of Anark village in Dehrawood district of Uruzgan province, lost his wife and six sons in a raid of foreign forces on his house 15 years ago.

He said the massive grief broke his back and snatched smile from his face forever.

Mohammad Afzal said: "Now even if the whole world gets destroyed, I will not cry."

He said that about 15 years ago foreign forces stationed in Afghanistan raided his son's house at nighttime.

"As I entered home after the, I saw both my sons

(Hassan Nimatullah and Hassan Habibullah) lying dead in a pool of blood."

He said that five months after the incident, foreign forces again raided his house and killed his third son and two years later, American forces raided his house again, this time he lost his three more sons and wife.

He said shortly after the last attack, government forces took him first to the US forces camp in Uruzgan, then to Kandahar, and then to Bagram prison. He spent six years in Bagram prison.

Mohammad Afzal said he was tortured a lot in Bagram jail and was kept so secret that a few months

after, his family got the news of his death and they held Fatiha ceremony for him.

According to him: "I'm counting on current days of my life because I used to live in fear of raids. The past wars gifted me two widows and four orphaned grandchildren."

Mohammad Afzal said he has six other sons and now he lives with them. He says he is happy for the security in the country. He wants the Islamic Emirate to make more efforts to strengthen the security in the country and address problems of the people in other areas as well.

Abdullah, a resident of Garocho village in

Badpakh district of Laghman province, said that in 2009 he lost ten members of his family in an airstrike that injured 18 others.

"We had newly come from Pakistan. We were living in tents in a camp. It was our cousin's wedding. We went to the wedding party. Early in the morning, foreign forces came to the village. People started running in different directions when the wedding house was bombed."

He said: "Ten people from our family and three villagers were martyred and 18 others injured in the airstrike".

According to his information, the dead included

his wife, mother-in-law, two cousins, sister-in-law and other family members.

Abdullah said after the incident the then government promised to provide him land for the victims and send them to Hajj, but the promise was never fulfilled.

Nazeem Zadrán, 63, a resident of Abkhani Zadrán village in Nahrain district of Baghlan, also lost his 22-year-old son during a raid by American forces in Kunduz province in 2017.

Zadrán says his son was engaged and left behind his fiancée.

According to him, his son had nothing to do with anyone. In raids and operations, American forces

always harassed, beat and imprisoned ordinary people.

Zadrán broke into tears and said: "The pain and separation my 22-year-old son was so severe that his mother became blind from so much crying, fear and grief. Even now, her health is not good."

Nazekmir, a resident of Bagram district of Parwan province, said three years ago, he lost his uncle to the conflict and his uncle left behind seven orphans and a widow and since then he was looking after the family.

He said his uncle worked in Baghlan with the special forces of the previous government.

"The war should disappear. Many Afghans were killed one by one. We all know that Afghans worked with the previous government to support their families, my uncle was forced to take a job in the military. At last, his post was attacked at night in Baghlan."

He said his uncle's two sons went to school, but the rest of his five brothers and sisters were minors. He said that the government was giving a monthly salary to his uncle's family.

These people are happy with the current security in the country and they want the countrymen to get united and never let foreign wars are imposed on Afghans again.



# Israeli forces kill six in new attack on Gaza aid seekers

GAZA: Israeli forces have shot dead at least six Palestinians and wounded 83 in Gaza City as they were waiting for food and humanitarian supplies at the Kuwait Roundabout, an area where large groups of people gather for arriving aid trucks.

The attack on Thursday took place hours after at least five people were killed by an Israeli air strike on a food distribution centre in Rafah, southern Gaza, run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is the main humanitarian agency in Gaza. There has been an uptick in fatal assaults by Israeli troops on crowds of starving civilians lining up for aid in recent weeks. On Monday night, Israeli forces killed 11 people waiting for food aid at the same roundabout.

Reporting from Rafah, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said seeking aid has become "really dangerous" in the enclave, adding that "the Kuwaiti Roundabout is now known as a death trap". "We heard from a hungry and largely traumatised population stranded in the Gaza Strip asking what is the purpose of getting those aid trucks into Gaza and its northern area if they're getting shot at," he said.

"[The Israeli aggression] also endangers the work of aid workers on the ground," he added. The Kuwait Roundabout is between the central area of the Gaza Strip and Gaza City, linking northern Gaza to the south. More than 400 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on aid deliveries in recent weeks, according to authorities in Gaza.

Sami Abu Salim, an UNRWA employee, told Al Jazeera that he felt frustrated over Wednesday's attack on the aid centre and warehouse in the eastern part of Rafah as employ-

ees have been working around the clock to provide aid to displaced Palestinians. "This [attacking an aid centre] is forbidden. We are an international institution," Abu Salim said. "We take all of this [aid] to the elderly and the children." The facility in Rafah is one of the last operating food distribution centres in Gaza.

The UNRWA spokeswoman Juliette Touma told Al Jazeera on Thursday that the Israeli strike caused minimal damage to the supplies, adding that the agency was still distributing aid from the facility after the raid, which killed one of its workers and injured 22 others. UN facilities must be protected at all times as mandated by international law, Touma stressed.

"Too many times in this war have our facilities and personnel become a target," she added. At least 165 staff of the UNRWA have been killed in Gaza since October 7 and more than 150 facilities hit, according to the agency, which has called for an independent inquiry into the repeated Israeli attacks. Touma said the UNRWA shares the coordinates of its facilities and activities every day with all warring parties, including Israel, and that the location of the Rafah warehouse had been included in a list shared a day before it was attacked.

Rights groups say that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war against Palestinians. Agnes Callamard, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, slammed the global community for pretending the crisis in Gaza was of a humanitarian nature and not one engineered by Israel. "While the international community is busy pretending Gaza is a humanitarian crisis, Israel continues to violate international law in total impunity," she said in a post on X,

referencing Israel's attack on the UN food centre in Rafah.

"Humanitarian assistance air drop and a Gaza aid port won't address these violations. And they won't address engineered starvation," she added. The UNRWA has said Israeli authorities have not allowed it to deliver supplies to the north of the Strip since January 23. Israel, which controls Gaza's crossings, has opened just one entry point into the enclave since the start of the war and imposed "endless checking procedures" for trucks to pass through, UN agencies say.

Since February 9, the average number of trucks that entered Gaza daily was about 55, compared with 500 that used to enter before the start of the conflict, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The UN has said at least half a million, or one in four people in Gaza, face imminent famine as it highlighted the problem of getting desperately needed humanitarian relief into Gaza amid Israeli restrictions. A new report by humanitarian group Refugees International said that Israel has generated "famine-like conditions" in the Gaza Strip.

The group's research in Egypt, Jordan and Israel revealed that the Israeli government "consistently and groundlessly impeded aid operations within Gaza, blocked legitimate relief operations and resisted implementing measures that would genuinely enhance the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza". The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported on Thursday that at least 31,341 Palestinians have been killed and 73,134 wounded by Israeli attacks since October 7. In the past 24 hours, Israeli attacks have killed 69 Palestinians in Gaza, the ministry said. — Aljazeera



ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force at Air Headquarters.

## Lebanon to complain to UNSC about 'Israeli attacks'

BEIRUT: Lebanon will file a complaint with the UN Security Council to protest about a series of Israeli attacks that have led to civilian casualties in residential areas, the foreign ministry said.

"The series of Israeli attacks considered the most violent on March 11 and 12 targeted civilians in residential areas around the city of Baalbek and nearby towns, which led to casualties and injuries among civilians," a ministry statement said. Abdullah Bou Habib, Lebanon's caretaker foreign minister, said: "The concerning thing is that this escalation occurred in areas far from the southern Lebanese borders, indicating Israel's desire to expand the conflict and drag the entire region into a war that may start with such aggressive acts and turn into a regional war sought by the Israeli government as a lifeline to escape its internal predicament."

The ministry called on "the international community to pressure Israel to stop its escalating attacks." It also demanded that members of the Security Council "condemn Israeli attacks against Lebanon and fully implement Resolution 1701 (2006) for permanent stability and peace along Lebanon's southern borders." Israel violated conflict rules for the third consecutive day, in place since Oct. 8, by conducting hostile operations in the area from south of the Litani River to the north.

This is part of Israel's new approach to pursue and assassinate Hezbollah and Hamas leaders and members in Lebanon through targeted drone strikes. In the morning, an Israeli missile fired from a drone targeted a car near the northern entrance of the city of Tyre, close to the Rashidiya Palestinian refugee camp. It killed Hadi Mustafa, the logistics support officer of Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas in Lebanon, and a Syrian man on a motorcycle near Mustafa's car. Two other individuals were also wounded. Hamas said in a statement that Mustafa's mission was to "coordinate with the resistance forces in Lebanon."

This is the fourth time that Israel has targeted Hamas personnel in Lebanon. It is also the first time that the entrance of the city of Tyre, where thousands of displaced people from the southern border area have sought refuge, was targeted. — Aljazeera

## Bahrain's Commander, Air Chief discuss ties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force at Air Headquarters, Islamabad on Thursday. The meeting encompassed a detailed discussion on various significant areas of shared interest aimed at bolstering government-to-government cooperation in the realm of emerging technologies, with a distinct emphasis on drone technology and collaboration within the Cyber and Networking domains.

During the meeting, Chief of the Air Staff shared broad contours of PAF's modernization drive aimed at augmenting current operational capability in the areas of Cyber, Space, Artificial Intelligence, Electronic Warfare and Niche technologies.

He also highlighted various ongoing projects of Pakistan Air Force's operational construct, force

goals and plans for the force structure with a keen focus on future warfare. Emphasizing the enduring religious and historical ties between the two countries, the Air Chief stressed the deep-rooted brotherly relations between both nations. Chief of the Air Staff reiterated, "Pakistan highly values its robust diplomatic, economic and defence partnership with Bahrain, marked by a convergence on critical issues related to regional peace, security and stability."

The visiting dignitary praised the exceptional professionalism of PAF personnel and the remarkable progress achieved by Pakistan Air Force under the dynamic leadership of Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu. Acknowledging Pakistan's consistent efforts towards regional stability, he also pledged to contribute towards enhancing the existing bilateral military cooperation across all levels.

Commander Bahrain National Guard also visited PAF Cyber Command where he was briefed about the operational capabilities of Pakistan Air Force. Expressing

profound interest in the strides made by PAF in the Cyber domain, the visiting dignitary conveyed his intention to dispatch a specialized team to PAF with an objective to assess and address any existing gaps within the emerging technologies architecture of the Bahrain Armed Forces.

The Air Chief reassured the Commander Bahrain National Guard of PAF's wholehearted cooperation and pledged full support to work collaboratively towards fortifying the technological frameworks of the Bahrain Armed Forces. Both dignitaries also affirmed their commitment to further strengthen collaboration in various domains of training, emerging technologies and mutual engagement in the aviation sector.

The meeting between Chief of the Air Staff and the Commander Bahrain National Guard is a testament to the strong commitment of both nations to further consolidate their existing partnership through continued dialogue and military collaboration.

## EU denies PTI contact

ISLAMABAD (INP): The European Union Mission in Pakistan has refuted claims that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) contacted them regarding the country's GSP Plus status.

Samar Saeed Akhtar, a spokesperson for the EU Mission, clarified their position, stating that they haven't received any official communication from PTI on the matter. This comes after a press conference by Pakistan's Federal Information Minister, Attaullah Tarar, where he accused PTI of attempting to get Pakistan's GSP Plus status revoked by contacting the EU. He further claimed these actions were part of a "false campaign" to harm the economy.

Responding to these accusations, PTI spokesperson Raouf Hassan categorically denied them, calling them "false allegations." He emphasized that PTI neither wrote nor intended to write any letter to the EU. Hassan further criticized the government, specifically veteran Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, blaming his "incompetence and stubbornness" for causing delays in finalizing the IMF program. He pointed out that the IMF loan's second tranche was only released after approval from PTI and former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Hassan also took aim at the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, accusing them of prioritizing personal gain over national welfare. He urged them to focus on the well-being of the country and its citizens. Pakistan's GSP Plus status, granted in 2014, is an EU program offering trade benefits like duty-free access to the European market for developing countries committed to human rights, environmental protection, and good governance.

## PM led govt committed to 'charter of economy & reconciliation': Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday reiterated the government's commitment to the "charter of economy and reconciliation" for fully restoring the political and economic stability in the country.

Speaking in a talk show on private media, the minister welcomed the active participation of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the ongoing democratic process including the election of all the constitutional positions including the President and Prime Minister.

To a query, he said the meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali

Amin Gandapur held the other day in a pleasant environment and matters of mutual interest came under discussion.

The minister also hailed the subsequent joint media talk of the KPK chief minister and Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal as a good initiative for democracy. He also welcomed the coordination between the federation and the province. Tarar said it was Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who had not only passionately advocated for the charter of economy among all the stakeholders but also for the charter of reconciliation.

Until or unless there was nothing anti-state, the matters should be resolved through reconciliation, he

remarked. He also regretted the violations of the law committed by the PTI while recalling the wrong precedents set by the party during its rule.

To a query, he said independent elected members were given three days to join a party in the House while the reserved seats were only allocated to the political parties of the House. A party that had not participated in the election was not entitled to the reserved seats, he added. Had the independent candidates joined a party in the House, the situation would have been different, he said while asking whether the Sunni Ittehad Council had released any list of reserved seats before the election.



GAZA: A Palestinian woman assists an injured man outside al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah.

## Ukraine holds out despite stalled US aid, fears 'deep advances' by Russia

KYIV: Russian rhetoric has been dialled up in the run-up to President Vladimir Putin's expected re-election. Putin reminded the world of Moscow's nuclear readiness, and military reporters amplified battlefield skirmishes against Ukrainian defenders. But not all of Putin's pre-election news coverage went as planned.

Ukraine scored drone attacks against Moscow and Russian oil facilities, and anti-Kremlin fighters made their presence felt on Russian soil. Putin's nuclear threat on Wednesday – the second in as many weeks – was measured. In a pre-recorded television interview he said Russia's nuclear forces were ready "from a military-technical point of view" and touted them as the most advanced in the world. His comments, made six days after Sweden officially joined NATO as its 32nd member, were mild compared with a warning two weeks ago after French President Emmanuel Macron left open the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine.

"They must realise that we also have weapons that can hit targets on their territory. All this really threatens a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons and the destruction of civilisation. Don't they get that?" Putin said on February 29. Putin is running for a third consecutive six-year term. He has passed constitutional

amendments suspending a ban on more than two consecutive terms for himself personally. It allows him to rule until 2036 and has led both Russian and Western critics to label his continuing to hold office as illicit. In October, the Council of Europe described his presidency as a "de facto dictatorship" and urged its member states to "recognise Putin as illegitimate". Russian forces continued to make marginal advances on the eastern front for a fourth straight week after the fall of Avdiivka on February 17, but the pace of these advances has slowed considerably, suggesting Ukraine has managed to absorb Russian momentum.

On Friday, geolocated footage showed they entered the village of Tonenke and advanced towards Berdychi, both west of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region. Russian forces had already been on the edges of both settlements a week earlier. Ukraine's Tavr Group of forces, which is fighting in the area, said this front had stabilised. "The advance has actually stopped. The Russian military is making small movements in this direction," spokesperson Dmytro Lykhovyi said.

There were other minor Russian advances in Donetsk. Russian forces have been trying to roll back Ukrainian gains west of Bakhmut, and

on Sunday, geolocated footage showed they had entered the village of Ivanivske. Russian forces captured the village of Shevchenko, southeast of the city of Donetsk, on March 10 and the following day advanced in several places along the front in the area. Towards the northern end of the front, geolocated footage showed that Russian forces approached the village of Terny from the east and reached the outskirts of Synkivka, two settlements in Donetsk and Kharkiv, respectively. On the whole, though, these advances were measured in hundreds of metres (hundreds of yards), and the overall shape of the front remained unchanged.

What seems to continue to be instrumental in Russia's minor successes is the use of glide bombs. These are normally massive conventional inertial bombs carrying 675kg (nearly 1,500lb) of explosives, fitted with fins and tails to fly farther and strike with greater accuracy. The German tabloid Bild reported that Russia is now mass producing the weapons. Russian military reporters said Russia also produced an improved glide bomb design this year, including engines and satellite guidance systems that increased its range from 40-70km to 95km (25-45 miles to 60 miles). These powered bombs enable Russian planes dropping them

to fly farther away from the front, reducing their vulnerability to Ukrainian air defences, which claimed 15 aircraft in February and early March.

While holding the front more or less steady, Ukraine focused on striking deep inside Russia. On Saturday, several explosions were recorded in Rostov, less than 100km (60 miles) from the Ukrainian border, with at least one geolocated to a Beriev plant repairing and refurbishing A-50 radar and reconnaissance planes. Ukraine has targeted these planes, destroying two this year, because they spy on Ukrainian positions and give fighter-bombers their coordinates.

Russia's Ministry of Defence claimed on Saturday that it had shot down all 47 drones over four border regions, including Rostov. On Tuesday, Ukraine again sent a large salvo of drones – this time targeting energy infrastructure. Russia's Defence Ministry said it shot down 58. Ryazan Governor Pavel Malkov said one drone struck the Ryazan refinery, 180km (110 miles) southeast of Moscow and about 500km (310 miles) from the Ukrainian border, starting a fire.

Ukrainian news outlet Suspilne quoted Security Service sources as saying two further refineries had been targeted, in Rostov and St Petersburg,

as well as two airfields. There was no evidence that those attacks had succeeded. Ukraine's military intelligence said pro-Ukrainian Russian forces had staged a border incursion on Tuesday, clashing with Russian forces in border villages in Belgorod and Kursk.

The Russian Volunteer Force and Freedom of Russia Legion are anti-Putin paramilitaries that first attacked Russia in March 2023. Russian sources first denied the incursion, then claimed to have repelled it. Whether it succeeded in the past week, Ukraine has been following through on tactics that have succeeded in the past, striking oil refineries or sinking or disabling as much as half of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. But in interviews with Western media, Ukrainian fighters on the front lines are raising the alarm about shortages of ammunition as United States military aid remains frozen in a Republican-controlled House of Representatives. The latest such warning came in Germany's Der Spiegel news magazine on Tuesday when Ukrainian servicemen warned they could not hold out forever under current conditions.

Even Ukraine's new commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskii, warned on Wednesday that "there is a threat of enemy units advancing deep into our battle formations." "Ukrainian short-

ages of ammunition and other war materiel resulting from delays in the provision of US military assistance may be making the current Ukrainian front line more fragile than the relatively slow Russian advances in various sectors would indicate," wrote the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

Ukraine's European allies have been trying to make up for the US shortfall. Britain announced it would spend \$160m buying 10,000 drones for Ukraine. Czech officials said they had raised enough money from partners to buy 300,000 artillery shells from around the world for Ukraine.

The Czech Republic is leading an effort to locate 800,000 artillery shells outside Europe and deliver them to Ukraine. Germany, which refrains from sending its medium-range Taurus missile to Ukraine because Russia said it would consider it an escalation, was reportedly discussing a plan to send the missiles to Britain as replacements for Storm Shadow missiles Britain would send to Ukraine. The administration of US President Joe Biden said it was sending \$300m of urgently needed military aid cobbled together from savings in the US defence budget. But none of this makes up for the absence of \$60.1bn in military aid the US was planning to send in 2024. — Aljazeera