

**Earthquake jolts Swat**  
ISLAMABAD (APP): An earthquake measuring 4.6 on the Richter scale jolted Swat and its adjoining areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday. According to a private news channel, the National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC) confirmed that tremors were felt in various parts of the province, and also the federal capital, and adjoining areas.

 @thefrontierpost

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

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI No. 56 Regd. No. 241 RAMAZAN 07 1445 -- MONDAY, MARCH 18 2024 PESHAWAR EDITION 12 PAGES PRICE. 30

# Country's future links with well educated youth: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that the country's future hinged upon well educated and skilled youth of the country and for the provision of quality education, the federal government would facilitate the high achievers with scholarship schemes to get education in the well reputed global educational institutes. The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Ikramullah, a student from Balochistan province, who is now studying in the 9th class at Lawrence College Murree.

Under the prime minister's direction, the student from 2022 flood affected area of Qila Saifullah was provided with a facility to get education at the country's prominent educational institute.

The prime minister recalled that he met the desperate student in the Khasnood camp in Qila Saifullah when floods had caused destruction

in Balochistan province during 2022. He said that he had assured the student of the provision of quality education, adding that it pleased him a lot that the student was now studying in Lawrence College.

The student thanked the prime minister for giving him an opportunity to meet him.

Congratulating the prime minister, he said that he prayed for Shehbaz Sharif for his kind gesture.

The student also expressed his resolve to achieve the goal and serve the country in the future.

The prime minister advised him to serve the nation and country by working hard and concentrating on his studies. He assured that all his educational expenditures would be borne by the government as the students were the future and hope of the country. The prime minister said that when he had visited the flood affected area, the student was in a protest mood but now he was showing a discernible

change. He mentioned that in Punjab province, they had sent the high achievers to get education at the best European and Scandinavian countries who later returned completely transformed and full of confidence.

The prime minister also welcomed the principal and housemaster of Lawrence College and gave away gifts to the student including a pen and tablet, expressing the hope that it would help him in pursuance of his studies. Ikramullah also presented a set of books to the prime minister.

The prime minister personally saw off the student from the Prime Minister's House.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was called on by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khawaja Saad Rafique here on Sunday.

The PML-N leader congratulated Shehbaz Sharif for assuming office as prime minister and expressed best wishes for him.

## Nomination papers scrutiny for Senate elections set for Tuesday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The scrutiny of nomination papers for the eagerly anticipated Senate elections, encompassing forty-eight vacant seats, is scheduled to take place this Tuesday, March 19.

As per the electoral schedule, the revised list of candidates vying for these seats will be unveiled on March 26. Candidates will have

until March 27 to withdraw their nomination papers.

In the federal capital, members of the National Assembly will exercise their voting rights to elect Senate members, including one for a general seat and one for technocrats, including Ulema.

Meanwhile, members of the four provincial assemblies will play a

pivotal role in determining the Senate composition.

They will elect senators for seven general seats, two women seats, and two seats designated for technocrats, including Ulema, from each province.

Additionally, one seat each for minorities from both Punjab and Sindh provinces will be filled.

## Elements behind campaign against martyrs to face stern action: Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday the government was fully aware of the challenges facing the country and steps were required to tackle economic problems.

Addressing a press conference here at the PML-N Secretariat, he said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had shared his agenda aimed at stabilizing the country's economy.

He said the Premier had taken up all matters seriously, including reducing government expenses, privatisation of certain state-owned entities, "Restructuring of the Federal Board of Revenue and tax reforms are major initiatives the government is undertaking to increase the tax net. All these measures are being taken to reduce the burden on poor people and to bring elites in the tax net," he maintained.

He said that international economic journals like Bloomberg had termed the appointment of the Finance Minister a good step, adding that international journals had acknowledged that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had a potential to overcome economic challenges through reforms. He said: "Political stability leads to economic stability and sincere efforts are being made in this regard."

He strongly condemned the terrorist attack in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan, in which seven soldiers, including two officers, were mar-

tyred. He said that Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar was also martyred, who was the only brother of five sisters. He said how painful and tragic it was for his family. "Law enforcement agencies, the people of Pakistan, politicians and almost every segment of society have rendered a lot of sacrifices in the war against terrorism," he added.

Attaullah Tarar paid tribute to all martyrs of Mir Ali including Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar and strongly condemned the malicious campaign launched by social media accounts associated with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

"The PTI is involved in disrespecting martyrs," he said, citing some examples such as May 9, when state institutions came under attack, martyrs' memorials were vandalised, and the Lasbela helicopter crash was ridiculed. The Federal Minister for Information said that the smear campaign against martyrs was not acceptable and it had not only hurt the sentiments of families of martyrs but also the entire nation. He said those who were behind the vile campaign were being identified and stern action would be taken against them. He said that accounts involved in the malicious campaign had been reported to relevant platforms but unfortunately the accounts were still operational.

He said, "One can resort to politi-

cal criticism but for God sake, stop promoting an anti-Pakistani agenda."

He said, "Martyrs are the pride of the country and a guarantee of its survival." Attaullah Tarar said that it was a high time to get united in the larger interest of the country and certain red lines should not be crossed at all.

The minister alleged that some political elements wanted to harm the national economy for their vested interests through negative tactics like writing a letter to the International Monetary Fund. He said it was a mission of the government to ensure development in the country besides making the lives of people prosperous. He said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf should have openly condemned those who had demonstrated outside the IMF building and made online petitions to revoke Pakistan's GSP plus status. "There is a need to promote national harmony. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif talked about a charter of reconciliation just to put the country on track to real development," he added.

He said that anything against the country's integrity was not acceptable, adding that all political parties should condemn such actions and make collective efforts to strengthen the country. To a question, he said that many accounts involved in the vile campaign were being operated from outside the country but some followers of the accounts were also in Pakistan.

## Law and order to be maintained at all costs, says Gandapur



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Sunday, reached Dera Ismail Khan on his first visit after assuming the charge of Chief Ministership of the province.

On his arrival at Dera Ismail Khan, party workers and the general public warmly welcomed the Chief Minister. Talking to media on this occasion, Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur said that being chief minister of the entire province, it is his first responsibility to maintain law and order, ensure development and welfare of the people across the province.

"The very first responsibility of incumbent provincial government is to maintaining law and order", he

remarked and said that a viable plan has also been finalized in this regard. He further said that Sehat Insaf Card suspended for the last one and half years, has been restored. Apart from this, initiatives would be taken to improve services delivery in government hospitals of the province; and very soon, people will have all the facilities in government hospitals and they would not need to go to private hospitals. He made it clear that since the PTI elected government at centre was overthrown through conspiracy, the economic conditions of the country began to deteriorate with each passing day and as a result, skyrocketing prices of daily commodities have made the life of common man miserable anywhere in the country.

Keeping in view the prevailing

economic situation and its adverse impacts on the life of general public, incumbent provincial government, despite the numerous challenges, has decided to give relief to the people, he said and added that 8,50,000 deserving households would be provided with Ramadan package in a dignified manner; People will get their right at their doorstep and will not be humiliated. He maintained that shelter homes have been made functional and all facilities are available there.

The Chief Minister said that making the province economically self-sufficient is also one of the priority areas of his government adding that concrete measures would be taken to ensure food security of the province. Similarly, he said that self-employment opportunities will be provided to the youth and women by imparting them digital and skills training in line with the demands of modern market.

Besides this, steps would also be taken to enhance the revenue of the province in addition to taking revolutionary steps that will make Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a model province. He further stated that issue regarding payment of outstanding dues of the province has been taken up with the prime minister, adding that it is the matter of the rights of our people; federation would have to provide it; we would continue to fighting for the rights of the people, and no stone would be left unturned in this regard.

# The Frontier Post

### NAB's deputy director arrested

KARACHI (INP): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Sunday arrested its Deputy Director for allegedly facilitating the accused persons nominated in embezzlement cases in exchange for money. According to the details, the NAB Karachi and Islamabad chapters in a joint action arrested its Deputy Director Imran Shaikh on the charges of taking bribes from the accused arrested on charges of corruption and embezzlement.



RAWALPINDI: Funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar Shahed who embraced martyrdom while defending their motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan District, were offered at Chaklala Garrison.

38 candidates in run for 11 Senate seats from Balochistan

QUETTA (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan issued a preliminary list of candidates vying for Senate elections from Balochistan.

As per the details, the Election Commissioner Balochistan issued a list according to which 17 candidates have submitted nomination papers for seven general seats of the Senate from the province.

According to the preliminary list, eight candidates are in the run for two women seats while 13 candidates are vying for two technocrats seats.

Former Caretaker Prime Minister former Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, Aaimel Wali Khan, former Caretaker Provincial Minister Amanullah Kanrani, former Senators Kohida Babar and Naseebullah Bazai, while former Federal Minister and Maulana Abdul Wasi and others are among those who submitted the nomination papers.

The deadline for submitting nomination papers for the Senate elections has ended as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is all set to hold the polls on April 2.

Fifty-two seats in the upper house of parliament will become vacant, but elections will only be held for 48 senators.

The reduction is due to the abolition of four reserved seats for the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) following the 25th constitutional amendment.

The election commission will scrutinise the nomination papers, and the process will conclude by March 19, 2024, setting the stage for the next stage of the electoral journey.

On March 26, 2024, the eagerly awaited final list of candidates vying for Senate seats will be unveiled.

## Funeral prayers held for 2 army officers martyred in North Waziristan

### F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed (age: 39 years, resident of Karachi) and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar Shahed (age: 23 years, resident of District Talagang) who embraced martyrdom while defending their motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan District, were offered at Chaklala Garrison Rawalpindi.

Honourable President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of Army Staff, Senior serving Military and Civil Officers, relatives of Shuhada and locals of the

area attended the funeral. "Pakistan Army has consistently upheld the ideals of Faith, Unity and Discipline. Guided by these enduring principles, Pakistan Army has always endeavoured to set higher benchmarks of professionalism and loyalty in its unrelenting fight against terrorism.

This noble sacrifice stands as another glorious testament to the unflinching resolve of our gallant sons, who have never hesitated to offer the ultimate sacrifice for the defence of our Motherland. The whole nation stands in solidarity with our Armed Forces", President said. The bodies of Shuhada have been taken to their native home towns where they will be laid to rest with full military honour.

**President Zardari resolves to wipe out terrorism from Pakistan:** President Asif Ali Zardari, attended Namaz e Janaza of Shaheed Lt. Colonel Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader who had been martyred in Mir Ali, North Waziristan during a terrorist attack on Saturday. On the occasion, the president paid tribute to shuhada and reiterated the resolve to respond to terrorist activities with full force, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release, on Sunday.

He said that the people of Pakistan and its armed forces were united and would face terrorism in unison. He also expressed the resolve to make the terrorists accountable for blood of each martyred jawan, adding their brave brothers, sons and friends had been protecting the borders.

## Trump hails election as 'most important date' in US history

VANDALIA (AFP/APP): Donald Trump told a rally in Ohio on Saturday that November's presidential election will be the "most important date" in US history, painting his campaign for the White House as a turning point for the country.

Days after securing his position as the presumptive Republican nominee, the former president also warned of a "bloodbath" if he is not elected -- though it was not clear what he was referring to, with the remark coming in the middle of comments about threats to the US auto industry. "The date -- remember this, November 5 -- I believe it's going to be the most important date in the history of our country," the 77-year-old told rally-goers in Vandalia, Ohio, repeating well-worn criticisms that his rival, President Joe Biden, is the "worst" president.

Criticizing what he said were Chinese plans to build cars in Mexico and sell them to Americans, he stated: "They're not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected. "Now if I don't get elected it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole, that's going to be the least of it, it's going to be a bloodbath for the country. That'll be the least of it. But they're not going to sell those cars." As Trump's comment gained traction on social media, Biden's campaign released a statement calling the Republican a "loser" at the ballot box in 2020 who then "doubles down on his threats of political violence."

"He wants another January 6 but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge," the campaign said, referring to the deadly attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters in 2021.

Later, Biden spoke at a dinner in Washington, where he also warned of "an unprecedented moment in history." "Freedom is under assault... The lies about the 2020 election, the plot to overturn it, to embrace the Jan. 6 insurrection pose the greatest threat to our democracy since the American Civil War," he said. "In 2020, they failed, but ... the threat remains." The 81-year-old, who has waved off concerns that he is too old for a second term, leavened his rhetoric with humor. "One candidate's too old and mentally unfit to be president," he said of the presidential race. "The other guy's me." Earlier this month Trump and Biden each won enough delegates to clinch their party nominations in the 2024 presidential race, all but assuring a rematch and setting up one of the longest election campaigns in US history.



ISLAMABAD: Mr Ikramullah, hailing from Qila Saifullah Balochistan, who is currently 9th class student at Lawrence College, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.





**PESHAWAR:** Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali being briefed about the online system after inaugurating Shifa Digital Clinic.

## Ramesh Singh warmly welcomed by his Narowal constituency

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Religious Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora reached his native Narowal constituency on Sunday where people warmly received him.

Ramesh Singh Arora arrived in his constituency for the first time after assuming office, where he was garlanded with flowers and paraded around the constituency in a chariot to the beat of drums. While thanking the people, he assured that the sense of deprivation among religious minorities would be eradicated.

The minister said that the PML-N government was ensuring the protection of the rights of religious minorities, while Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz had made it clear on the first day that she was the chief minister of all, while having a great respect for religious minorities in her heart. He said that it was a great honor for the community that a Sikh had become the provincial minister for the first time and he would set a new record of prosperity and development in his five-year tenure.

## SSUET organizes counselling session

KARACHI (APP): Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology (SSUET) here on Sunday organized a counselling session that was attended by religious scholar Mufti Tariq Masood, the Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Wali Uddin, Registrar Cdre. (R) Syed Sarfraz Ali, Deans, HODs including a large number of faculty members and students.

Addressing the session, eminent religious scholar Mufti Tariq Masood said that the digital camera was a copy of the human eye. In favor of Darwin's theory, would you believe that the digital camera came into existence automatically as a result of millions and billions of years of evolution? When the human intellect finds it difficult to digest this logic, is it possible eye has appeared spontaneously through the process of evolution? The fact is that neither we emerge automatically, nor do we make ourselves, but Allah has created all of us, so God knows well what we are here for.

## 2087 square feet of streets to be paved in UC 10 Korangi

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that 2087 square feet of streets will be paved in UC 10 Korangi at a cost of Rs 80 million and, development work will be done in all seven districts.

He expressed these views while inaugurating the community support program's pavement and renovation works in Korangi Town, said a statement.

He said that dental surgery, orthopedic and diabetes treatment will be done in Sarfaraz Rafiqi Hospital during the next one week. Karachi Institute of Heart Disease is starting a nursing school in which 130 male and female students of Karachi will be able to take a certified course, he said On this occasion, Member

Provincial Assembly Farooq Awan, Mayor Karachi Spokesperson for Political Affairs Karamullah Waqasi, UC10 Chairman Habib, Korangi District President Javed, City Councilor Afsheen Shah and other local leaders were also present.

The Mayor Karachi while addressing the ceremony held after starting the development works said that the federal, provincial and local governments are now on the same page so it should be expected that there will be no hindrance in the development works.

In the next three and a half years, Karachi will see a significant change and will provide maximum facilities to the citizens of Karachi by completing several projects of infrastructure, water, sewerage, street lights, bridges and flyovers, he said.

He said that the 16000 road of Korangi was also built and the flyover at Korangi number 2 1/2 was also built by the PPP government. Mayor Karachi said that Mehru Nisaa Hospital Road UC-10 will also be constructed for which PC-1 has been prepared.

He said that several projects are underway for the supply of clean water for the city, work is also being carried on the project of desalination of sea water and in the next two years the supply of clean water will be much better than before.

He emphasised for the speedy work on the K4 project, which was delayed for years, and said should be completed as soon as possible.

## Punjab police sign MoU with private hospital

LAHORE (APP): On the direction of Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, measures are being taken to provide best medical facilities to Punjab Constabulary personnel, in continuation of which an MoU has been signed between the Punjab Police and a private hospital group (Farooq Group).

Commander Battalion-V, PC, Abbas Lines, SSP Mian Afnan Ameen visited Farooq Group of Hospitals, Commander Battalion-V, PC, Abbas Lines, SSP Mian Afnan Ameen and CEO Dr Sabir Ayaz Malik

signed the MOU.

Under the MOU, Farooq Hospital PC Lahore will organize medical camps along with medical experts on awareness and treatment of medical problems in PC offices. Commander Battalion-V, PC, Abbas Lines, SSP Mian Afnan Ameen said that Punjab Constabulary officials will be provided special discount on laboratory tests and bed expenses at Farooq Hospital. A 100% free treatment facility will be available at Akhtar Saeed Teaching Hospital for the families of police martyrs.

Free treatment facilities will be provided to PC Lahore personnel as per hospital policy. This MoU will be applicable to DHA, Iqbal Town, Westwood Colony and Rawalpindi branches of Farooq Hospital. Under Sahet Saholat program Treatment facility will be provided at Westwood Colony whereas Hemodialysis facility will be available in all branches under the health facility programme. The IG Punjab appreciated the MOU with Farooq Group and said it will prove an important step in the health welfare of the force.

## Bilal inspections lead to disposal of 2,500 kg of spoiled meat

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin led a comprehensive inspection drive with Punjab Food Authority (PFA) teams in markets in the provincial capital here on Sunday.

The vigorous scrutiny resulted in the disposal of a staggering 2,500 kilograms of spoiled, substandard, and expired meat, bringing a sense of relief to Lahore's residents. Under the vigilant eye

of the provincial minister, the PFA teams descended upon Moghulpura Market, meticulously inspecting meat shops in the vicinity. In addition to swiftly disposing of unfit meat, strict warnings were issued to violators of food safety regulations.

Talking to media, Food Minister Bilal Yasin revealed that immediate action was taken to seize substandard and expired meat from the shelves of meat shops. He lamented the discovery of foul-smelling meat in unhygienic freezers, underscoring the urgency of situation. During the inspections, Bilal Yasin noted deficiencies in cleanliness and the presence of pests, urging for swift rectification.

The food minister directed the PFA teams to ensure the comprehensive traceability of meat supplied across Punjab, including Lahore. He reiterated his commitment to providing safe and hygienic food to the people, particularly during Ramadan. In line with directives from the Punjab Chief Minister, a concerted crackdown against counterfeit mafia is underway, with PFA inspection teams fully mobilized throughout the province.

Encouraging citizen participation, Bilal Yasin called upon the people to collaborate with the Punjab Food Authority in eradicating adulteration and counterfeiting in food.

## PHA unveils cutting-edge running track at Jilani Park

LAHORE (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Lahore has laid a new running track at Jilani Park (formerly Racecourse), tailored specifically for fitness enthusiasts.

Brightly coloured, the 550-meter-long track is made of Ethylene Propylene Diene Monomer (EPDM), a rubberized, artificial surface designed for track athletics, chosen for its durability, high elasticity, and resilience for greater cushion. A

spokesperson for the PHA said on Sunday, the EPDM was resistant to weathering, UV radiation, and heavy use, making it capable of withstanding foot traffic and exposure to various weather conditions with little wear or deterioration.

Made from recycled rubber, EPDM granules offer an eco-friendly solution, contributing to waste reduction and sustainability, aligning with PHA's "Clean and Green Lahore" mission.

## Lahore most polluted city in the world

LAHORE (APP): The provincial metropolis was ranked first in the list of the most polluted cities in the world on Sunday.

Experts attributed it to a sudden change in the weather as the sun shines brightly in the day and light cold winds continue to blow in the night.

Experts have instructed citizens to take precautionary measures. According to the Meteorological Department, the maximum temperature is likely to go up to 25 degrees. The humidity in the air was 70 per cent. The mean air quality index was 262. The rate of pollution on the Quaid-e-Azam Highway was recorded at 259, in Phase 8 of DHA 293.

On the other hand, according to the meteorological analyst, the intensity of heat has started increasing in the plains of Sindh including Karachi. The temperature may go up to 38 degrees in the central and eastern parts of Sindh.

The weather will remain dry in most parts of the country, while the forecast will remain partly cloudy in the upper and central regions.

## IG rewards officials

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar awarded certificates of appreciation to officers and officials for arresting suspects of drug trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and other serious crimes.

DIG Operations Lahore Ali Nasir Rizvi, SSP Operations Ali Raza, SPs Canton and City Division Lahore were among those who received letters of appreciation.

The IG Punjab awarded certificates of appreciation, cash prizes to SHOs, officials of City Division and Cantonment Division. SHOs Amir Shehzad, Muhammad Tahseen Najam, Sub Inspector Shehryar, Inspector Ghulam Bari, ASI Ashiq Ali, SHO Ali Zaib Dastgir, Sub Inspector Allah Ditta, Constable Ali Shehzad, SHO Ravi Road Faryad Ashraf, Constable Asad Ali and Nadeem received the appreciation letters and prizes.

The IG Punjab gave the task to Lahore police officers to further control crime. He said that along with the security for Ramadan, special attention should be given to crime control measures and crackdown against organized crimes. All the officers and officials expressed their gratitude on receiving the awards and reiterated their determination for better performance in future.

## 27 kite sellers arrested

LAHORE (APP): Iqbal Town Division police on Sunday arrested 27 kite sellers by conducting various operations. According to the details, special teams are active in the limits of all the police stations of the provincial metropolis, while special teams have arrested 27 kite-flyers.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Akhlaqullah Tarar said in a statement that the accused were engaged in selling kites at night. He said that strict legal action will be taken against them. Dozens of kites, chemicals and metal wheels have been recovered from the accused.

## All set for Visakhi Mela

LAHORE (APP): The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) has completed arrangements for the Visakhi Mela 2024. ETPB Chairman Arshad Farid Khan will review security, accommodation, transport, medical and other arrangements for pilgrims. According to Additional Secretary Rana Shahid, the Shrines Branch has made foolproof arrangements in consultation with the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Perbandhak Committee, Federal and provincial institutions will fulfill their responsibilities in the best way so that the pilgrims return with good memories and bring a good name to Pakistan, he added.

Board officers and security staff will be available day and night to serve the pilgrims. The main event of the Visakhi Mela will be held at the Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hasanabdal, in which political and religious leaders will participate.

## Ramazan package delivered to over 2.8m houses

LAHORE (APP): On the direction of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the digital monitoring of the Ramadan Nigheban relief package is going on.

Under the package, delivery to 2,832,000 households has been completed, which has also been digitally verified. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has directed that the process of delivery to the needy families under the package should be sped up, and transparency should be ensured. On the direction of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the campaign against inflation has also been intensified across the province. While 1271 price control magistrates are taking action against profiteers.

According to the official

sources, checking was done at 773,000 places in 15 days, 1682 FIRs were registered and 4,858 people were arrested.

**PML-N Ulema wing praises Ramadan package:** PML-N's Ulema and Mashaikh Wing in Punjab have praised the Nigheban package introduced by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. The initiative aims to benefit 6.5 million individuals in the province and is seen as a demonstration of the government's dedication to the people's welfare, particularly in light of rising food prices.

In a joint statement issued on Sunday by Pakistan Muslim League-N's Ulema-o-Mashaikh wing General Secretary Sahibzada Hafiz

Muhammad Amjid and Media Coordinator Hafiz Muhammad Tayyab Qasmi highlighted the government's resolve to address inflation and unemployment as top priorities. Expressing condolences for the recent martyrdom of Pakistan Army personnel in a terrorist attack in North Waziristan, the statement emphasized the nation's solidarity in combating terrorism and honoring those who sacrifice their lives for the country.

Sahibzada Hafiz Muhammad Amjid affirmed the government's commitment to taking strict action against those responsible for artificial inflation, ensuring accountability for those who betray the trust of the underprivileged.

## Qanoongo Tank evades accountability; SMBR urged to take action

PESHAWAR (APP): A cunning and notorious Qanoongo in district Tank has been evading accountability for the last three and a half years by employing various delaying tactics.

The affected family has urged the Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) to hear the case against the accused personally and decide their case based on facts, awarding exemplary punishment to Qanoongo Israr Shah.

Qanoongo Israr Shah has so far managed adjournment of at least five MBR-1's court proceedings against him in Dera Ismail Khan by employing delaying tactics.

Israr Shah was allegedly involved in tampering with revenue records in a case involving his brother Miram Shah, titled "Dalil Shah vs Miram Shah".

The petitioner Dalil Shah's family had forwarded an application to the Deputy Commissioner Tank against the manipulation of the revenue records by Qanoongo Israr Shah.

In an inquiry ordered by DC Tank, the Additional

Assistant Commissioner Revenue, in the record tampering case, the accused was proven guilty of the accusations.

To further verify the inquiry report, the DC ordered another inquiry by the Assistant Commissioner Tank, who also reported forgery committed by Israr Khan and the illegal incorporation of three marlas water channel in the revenue records.

Based on the inquiry reports, the Deputy Commissioner ordered the correction of the records, but the crafty accused filed an appeal to the Additional Deputy Commissioner Dera Ismail Khan against the decision of DC Tank instead of the Commissioner Dera, as he had previously worked as Tehsildar in Tank with the former and hoped for favor.

The then ADC Dera suspended the orders of DC Tank's decision on the grounds that the accused was not heard personally. The applicant submitted written arguments with MBR-1, and when the MBR asked him to also

submit written arguments before the court, Qanoongo Israr Shah put an application to SMBR and nominated the MBR-1 as biased.

When the SMBR rejected his application against MBR-1, he put another application to MBR-1 stating that they have no trust in him and they would go to Peshawar High Court.

Qanoongo Israr Shah also violated the stay order of MBR-1 and included a red entry in the revenue records again despite the stay order. It is worth mentioning here that the notorious Israr Shah Qanoongo also wrote another fake 'Rapat' without the sellers' signatures and thumb in May 2008 in Tank.

He was also already sentenced to jail by the Anti-Corruption Establishment in a fake widow Intikal case in April 2014, while also managing to get bail from the Peshawar High Court in a murder case.

The applicant Dalil Shah's family has requested SMBR to take notice of the delaying tactics and hear the case personally and issue decision on record base.

## LESCO detects 64,732 power pilferers

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 64,732 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) in 185 day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Sunday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 63,185 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 20,052 accused have been arrested. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 82,340,553 detection units worth Rs 3,131,550,101 to all the power pilferers.

Grand anti-power theft operations against electrici-

ty thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice.

The spokesman added, the LESCO found 403 customers stealing electricity through various means and 205 cases have been registered against the accused during the last 24 hours.

On the 185th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, he mentioned that large commercial consumers were found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections, he explained, 07 were commercial, 01 agricultural and 395 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 280,204 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 10.758 million.

Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he mentioned that LESCO charged Rs 200,000 detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Johar Town; Rs 175,000 detection bill to a power pilferer in Aalabad area; Rs 170,000 fine in the form of detection bill to a customer stealing electricity in Shahdara Town area, and Rs 130,000 to another power pilferer also in Shahdara Town.

Similarly, Assistant Commissioner (AC) City Rai Baber visited Model Ramzan Bazaars in Sabzazar and Tokar Niaz Baigh and inspected prices, facilities and cleanliness arrangements in the market.

Similarly, AC Raiwind Zainab Tahir inspected facilities and implementation of official rates at Model Ramzan Bazaar, Mian Plaza Johar Town. She directed the bazaar management to increase the number of sales counters for onions and tomatoes in order to improve public convenience.

**DIRECTORATE OF MEDICAL STORES, EME, HEALTH & SUPPORT**  
**TENDER NOTICE**

Dte of Medical Stores, EME, Health & Support requires sealed bids / quotations for supply of Medicines, X-Ray Items (including X-Ray / MRI / CT Scan Films & Chemicals), Lab items (Including Kits / Reagents and Chemicals), Surgical Disposables, PPEs & Medical Gases to all PAF Medical Setups for Fiscal Year 2024-25 on the basis of "Closed Framework Agreement" as per PPRA Rules to meet day to day/Urgent / Emergent requirements.

Tender documents, List of items and IT conditions can be obtained from MSD Badaber on payment of **Rs. 3000/-** (Non-refundable). Last date of submission of bids is **03 April 2024**, till 1000 hrs. The Quotations will be opened on the same day, at 1200 hrs, in the presence of bidders or their representatives. Director MEH&S has the right to accept or reject any bid(s), on technical grounds, as per PPRA Rules. This tender is also available at PPRA's website. Further details and more information can be obtained from the undersigned, during working hours.

**DIRECTOR MEH&S (AHQ PESHAWAR)**  
**C/O MSD BADABER**  
**PH: 091-9210888, 0323-9403707**



# All tourist sites to open for world soon: Zahid

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Zahid Chanzeb, Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture, Museums and Archeology, Sunday revealed that the tourism industry generates 30 billion dollars revenue to our national economy, that is 6% of the country's GDP. "Nature has generously blessed our province with the world's best hill stations and tourist destinations and only focusing on this sector can revolutionize the economy of the province that can ameliorate the quality of life of the poor over here and the present PTI-led KP government is quite serious to exploit all such vital sectors on crash grounds", he added. Trillion of rupees income can be obtained from the tourism sector to spend on ameliorating lot of the poor and contribute in restoration of the economy and infrastructure of the province, he maintained. He expressed this during his visit to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) headquarters in Peshawar Cantt wherein he went round various sections and got acquainted of its

working. An introductory meeting was also held on this occasion. Zahid Chanzeb while chairing the meeting said that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has made it clear in his first policy statement that all due rights and financial resources of the province will be obtained from the federation, while simultaneously the rich mineral and natural treasures existed on our soil will also be explored and exploited with renewed spirit, among which the tourism sector is at the top, he exhorted. "We will open the attractive touristic, ecological and religious places and archeological sites in the province to the tourists and researchers from across the globe so that our tourism industry get flourished with leaps and bounds opening new vistas of income and employment opportunities for our educated youth. Similarly our such candid steps will also enhance our soft image in the comity of nations all over the world, he added. The CM's aide on Tourism and Culture clarified that in the recent past, terrorism and unrest had tarnished our national face

at the international arena, however he said that the matchless sacrifices of our valiant nation and armed forces have yielded fruits wherein peace and harmony reigns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as else in the country and we have to benefit from it. "Our focus now will be to ensuring the rule of law, merit and improving our fragile economy so that the people feel a sense of security in all respects and all sectors and institutions including tourism are developed and strengthened with accelerated pace", he revealed further. Zahid Chanzeb reiterated the pledge that he himself will burn the mid nights oil to ensure the use of every forum at the national and international level in order to promote tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on solid footings globally. Earlier, on arrival at the KPCTA headquarters, Director General Barkatullah Marwat briefed him on the performance of the authority besides the progress made so far towards achieving the set goals in this respect. The Adviser Tourism eulogized performance of KPCTA and expressed the confidence that the authori-

ty will vigour its efforts in searching out new tourist spots, improving road infrastructure, registration of hotels and tour operators, increasing tourism investment, maximize income resources and ensuring timely and quality completion of all ongoing schemes including new cable car and chair lift installation projects in various hill stations and snow bound areas. Similarly he further pledged that KPCTA will emerge as part and parcel of the current PTI government agenda of prosperity and implementing people-friendly and public welfare policies in letter and spirit. He assured that concrete measures will be taken to increase investment avenues in the tourism sector, while all the obstacles in the way of tourism investment will be removed on priority basis, for which, he assured that he will hold separate meetings and consultations with the heads and experts of all the concerned sectors. Also he will keep the Chief Minister constantly abreast with the progress thus made in tourism sector and seek his guidance as well, he concluded.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to CM on Tourism and Culture Zahid Chanzeb being briefed by DG KPCTA Barkatullah Marwat on his visit to KPCTA headquarters.

## Officials of Health Card not available

PESHAWAR (APP): The general public have registered their complaint about the missing of the concerned staff in the three general hospitals including Hayatabad Medical Complex, Hayat Teaching Hospital and Lady Reading Hospital. There were separate complaints of absence of staff at the health card counter of Hayatabad Medical Complex along with two other general hospitals Hayat Teaching and Lady Reading Hospital. In this connection, Secretary Health of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken strict notice about the absence of the concerned staff at the health card counter. Citizens kept waiting to get health cards at the health card counter in the hospital but the staff was absent and no one was there in the hospital to guide them regarding the health card. Looking after the complaints on social media, Secretary Health has ordered the immediate suspension of the relevant staff and an inquiry in the connection has been directed. A letter has been issued to the insurance company to conduct an investigation against the concerned staff. An inquiry should be made and a report sent immediately on the negligence of duties, Secretary Health said in a letter.

## VC opens Health Center

PESHAWAR (APP): Vice Chancellor of FATA University Prof. Dr. Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan inaugurated the University Health Center including Psychology Clinic, Assessment and Counseling Center and Microbiology Laboratory. Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan inaugurated the University Health Center including Psychology Clinic, Assessment and Counseling Center and Microbiology Laboratory with faculty members and students from the Departments of Psychology and Microbiology in the University were also present. Administrative officers, faculty members and students were also present on the occasion. Vice Chancellor FATA University Professor Dr. Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan said that these centers would provide various health services including mental health services to the local community at their doorstep.

## Competition in KP tough in Senate polls

PESHAWAR (APP): The competition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is also tough in the Senate elections with a total of 42 candidates having submitted nomination papers for eleven seats of the Senate, an official of the Provincial Election Commission said here Sunday. He said that there will be a contest between 10 candidates for two posts of Technocrat, 25 candidates for 7 general seats submitted their nomination papers, and 7 candidates have submitted their nomination papers for two reserved seats for women. The official of the Provincial Election Commission disclosed that Azam Khan Swati, Qazi Muhammad Anwar Advocate, Waqar Ahmed Qazi, Dr.

Hamad Mahmood Cheema, Khalid Masood, Fazal Hanan, Dilawar Khan, Qaiser Khan, Noorul Haque Qadri and Syed Irshad Hussain are candidates for the Technocrat seat. Irfan Saleem, Muhammad Talha Mehmood, Dilawar Khan, Faisal Javed, Mirza Muhammad Afridi, Azhar Qazi Mashwani, Niaz Ahmed, Waqas Orkazai, Fazal Hanan, Asif Iqbal, Azam Khan Swati, Murad Saeed, Faizur Rehman, Khurram Zeeshan, Attaul Haq, Masoodur Rehman, Shafqat Ayaz, Asif Rafiq, Mahmood Khan, Noorul Haq Qadri, Muhammad Naseem, Sajjad Hussain, Taj Muhammad Afridi, Ahmed Mustafa, and Fida Muhammad are also candi-

dates for the 7 general seats, said the official of the Provincial Election Commission. Mehwish Ali Khan, Ayesha Bano, Rubina Naz, Rubina Khalid, Shazia, Syeda Tahira Bukhari and Hamida Shahid have submitted their papers for 2 women's seats. The elections for 7 general, 2 technocrats and scholars and 2 reserved seats for women will be held on April 2, Provincial Election Commission said. Scrutiny of nomination papers will be done by March 19 and appeals against acceptance and rejection of papers can be filed till March 21 and appeals will be decided by March 25, Provincial Election Commission said.

# IG FC honors Squash Champion Ibrahim at Bala Hisar Fort



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan's rising star in squash, Muhammad Ibrahim Mohib, was warmly received at Fort Balahisar by Inspector General Frontier Corps

North, Major General Noor Wali Khan. This meeting celebrated Mohib's remarkable achievements in the sport, bringing pride to Pakistan on the international stage. Major General Noor Wali Khan commend-

ed Muhammad Ibrahim Mohib for his outstanding contributions to squash and for elevating Pakistan's reputation globally. Additionally, he extended his congratulations to Mohib's participation in the

upcoming U-19 Championship scheduled in Australia this April 2024, expressing his best wishes for success. As a token of appreciation, IGFC presented Muhammad Ibrahim Mohib with a cash prize, acknowledging his dedication and talent. Notably, Mohib holds the esteemed position of Pakistan's No-1 in the U-17 category, having represented the nation in numerous international tournaments. During the meeting, Inspector General Frontier Corps North emphasized the importance of athletes like Muhammad Ibrahim Mohib in promoting the positive image of Pakistan and specifically highlighted the role of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in fostering sporting talent. Muhammad Ibrahim Mohib expressed gratitude for the recognition and pledged to continue striving for excellence, aiming to bring further glory to his nation in the realm of squash.

# KEF playing remarkable services in eradication of blindness

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Eye Foundation (KEF), a charity organization is playing remarkable services in eradication of blindness, converting disabilities and contributing to poverty alleviation. Talking to this scribe, Obaid Ullah Siddiqui, a focal person of the foundation said that beside eradication of blindness, convert disabilities, the foundation currently is also actively engaged in various other projects in order to fulfill its mission. The organization is renowned for holding free eye camps in Peshawar and its surrounding areas, regu-

lar basis and provides medicines and spectacle glasses free of cost. The doctors employed at the hospital of the foundation examine 250 to 300 patients daily in OPD (Outdoor Patients Department) and also performing 40 to 45 cataract surgeries per day, free of cost for poor (Musthakeen-e-Zakat). Since establishment, the KEF Hospital has so far examined 1028,772 patients in OPD and also conducted 83,940 Cataract Surgeries. The hospital was started in 1998, marking the foundation stone of the Khyber

Eye Foundation Hospital in 1996, by then Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Mahtab Ahmad Khan. To acquire land for the hospital, late Senator Haji Mohammad Adeel requested to the Chief Minister Sardar Mahtab Ahmad Khan, through whose efforts the hospital came into existence. The chief minister generously provided the land for hospital construction and also gave a grant of Rs.2 million towards the cause. The entire construction of the hospital was carried out under the supervision

of Mr. and Mrs. Suleiman Shah (late), with active participation from all members of the Board of Directors, aiming to offer free eye care facilities to the under-privileged residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Foundation has evolved into a leading organization in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, registered as a Charity Organization. It holds certification from the Charitable Commission, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Health Care Commission, Directorate of Social Welfare KP, and Certificate of Registration of Societies Act XXI of 1860.

# Ramazan: The month of patience, compassion for all

PESHAWAR (APP): Ramazan, the 9th holy month of Islamic Calendar teaches Muslims to practice self-discipline, sacrifice and empathy by helping the under-privileged besides encouraging acts of generosity and compulsory charity for socioeconomic empowerment of poor people. Famous for countless blessings, Ramazan is the holy month in which Muslims from across the world show exceptional endurance, patience and empathy besides seeking forgiveness and mercy keeping them modest and disciplined in life. From dawn to dusk, Ramazan's 30-day fasts abstain Muslims from all kinds of sinful actions, negative behaviors, and smoking. It teaches immense virtues and tolerance besides helping the needy,

vulnerable and oppressed segments of society. "In islam, patience means to endure or persevere in the face of any difficulty or hardship for Allah only. It requires us to tolerate any trial realizing that whatever we are going through is according to Allah's divine will, and He is the One to take us out from all difficult circumstances and challenging situations," said Muhammad Tayyab Qureshi, Chief Khateeb of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while talking to APP. He said Allah Almighty has repeated the word, 'Sabr' (patience) almost 75 times in the Holy Quran which indicates its significance for humanity. The Holy Qur'an says, "O you who believe! seek help in patience and As-Salat (the prayer), Truly! Allah is with As-Saabireen (the

patient ones). "As devoted servants of Allah Almighty, we have an obligation to be grateful when we earn Allah's bounties. Similarly, we should deal with all calamities and difficult situations with forbearance, self-control and humbleness," he added. "The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had also laid great emphasis on mercy, kindness and sympathies with the needy and poor people besides persons with different abilities during Ramazan and declared that the rewards of enduring patience in hard times are manifold in this world and in the hereafter. KP Chief Khateeb said, "Never a believer is stricken with a discomfort, illness, grief or mental worry but Allah Almighty will expiate his sins on the account of immense

patience and compassion during Ramazan." He said a believer, who socializes with people and tolerates their mistakes with sympathy and gentleness would have greater rewards than the other believers, who do not do so. In another Hadith on the reward of fasting, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whosoever fasts during Ramazan with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven." The first Ashra of Ramazan is seeking mercy of Allah, the middle one for forgiveness and the last one to get liberation from the hellfire. "In Ramazan, there was a night of Laylatul Qadar (the Night of Power) and according to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), every Muslim who prays on Laylatul Qadar with faith

and sincerity, all his/her past sins would be forgiven. Eminent psychiatrist, Prof. Dr. Khalid Mufti who also served as Principal of Khyber Medical College Peshawar said that research studies had shown that Ramazan has immense medical and psychological benefits for a 'Roazadar' (fasting persons) including tolerance, compassion and empathy which last for the rest of the year. He said Ramazan helps Muslims to overcome their anxiety, depression and hypertension, besides getting rid of worldly desires. Dr. Khalid said impatience, anger and rash behaviors can adversely affect an individual's social life and physical well-being while compassion and tolerance increase the self-esteem of people and leads to better outcomes in one's

life. Abdul Ghafoor, former Director Sheikh Zayad Islamic Centre Peshawar and Member of the Central Reut-e-Hilal Committee said that Ramazan was the month when people could earn maximum virtues by contributing generously to the poor and deserving persons. "Ramazan promotes interfaith harmony and national cohesion besides cementing bonds of brotherhoods, fraternity and friendship among Muslims and minorities by bringing them closer through Iftar parties," he added. Shahid Khan alias Lala, who was holding Iftar Dastarkhwan at historic Qissa Khawani bazaar especially for fasting Muslims and poor and deserving minorities community said that he was

holding this noble practice for the last 11-year that gives him inner peace and satisfaction. "The Iftar Dastarkhwan where minorities were also served would continue till Chand Raat," he said. Jatinder Singh, Chairman KP chapter of the National Peace Council for Interfaith Harmony told APP that all prophets and founders of all religions had promoted peace, forgiveness, patience, love and tolerance through their universal teachings, actions and deeds. "Without winning hearts and minds, we can't come closer to each other and develop a society whose inhabitants enjoy equal rights and respect for each other's beliefs," he said. He said big Iftar parties were planned by the Sikh community members for their Muslim brothers in the

last 10-day of the holy month besides distribution of edible packages among fasting people at their doorsteps. "Arranging iftar parties and Ramazan camps for Muslims are not a new practice for them. Our forefathers did the same thing to express warmth, love and friendship to our Muslims brothers of Peshawar during Ramazan," he added. He said the establishment of a common study centre at Peshawar for followers of all religions where they could interact and understand each other's beliefs and organize iftar parties to bring people of all faith closer. The experts said that people should give charity to those in need besides reputable charity organizations with clean accounts and service records.





## In brief

### Police arrest murder accused

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The Tank police on Sunday claimed to have arrested a murder accused within three days of crime scene. According to police spokesman, one Pir Bilal Shah was killed and his father Zulfiqar Ali Shah was injured when accused Shabbir son of Raza Muhammad opened fire at them here in Sheikhana wala Mohallah of Tank City on March 13, 2024. After the incident, District Police Officer (DPO) Ifikhar Ali Shah had formed a special team led by SP Investigation Haji Nasir Khan and comprised of DSP Rural Sharif Ullah Khan, SHO City Police station Rehmat Khan and others to arrest the accused murderer. The police team, using modern scientific techniques, traced and arrested the accused Shabbir within three days. Further investigation from the arrested accused was underway.

### Brothers kill sister

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): In a heinous incident, brothers kill their sister and her paramour in honor in the suburbs of Bahawalnagar, police said on Sunday. According to police, the incident occurred in Chak Amro in Bahawalnagar where three brothers found their sister and her paramour in objectionable condition and killed them on the spot with choppers and escaped from the scene. Police shifted bodies to nearby hospital for post-mortem and started investigation of the incident. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam took notice of alleged abuse of a woman by police constable in Bahawalnagar and sought report from Regional Police Officer Bahawalpur.

### Man mistakenly shoots daughter

DADU (INP): A man in Sindh's Dadu 'accidentally' shot his young daughter to death on Sunday. The incident occurred in the Dadu's village Soomar. The deceased girl has been identified as Fatima Chandio, who was only six-years-old. According to police, the father was cleaning his pistol when it accidentally went off and killed the child.

### FIA arrests two outlaws

MULTAN (INP): FIA claimed to have arrested two alleged outlaws in a fraud case related to work visas. According to official sources, the arrested outlaws are identified as Tariq Hussain and Anwar ul Hassan residents of Burewala. The alleged outlaws took money from a citizen on the promise of sending him to Bahrain on a work visa. However, the outlaws neither returned the money nor sent him a work visa. The aggrieved citizen approached the FIA Multan.

### Cash, gold looted

ATTOCK (INP): Armed bandits looted two gold traders at gunpoint depriving them from gold and cash in Hassanabad on Sunday and fled away successfully. Muhammad Akbar reported to Hassanabad Police that he, along with Muhammad Waseem, had collected gold from various jewelers in Attock city. They had reached Hassanabad Chowk to hire a vehicle bound for Attock when five armed bandits, wielding weapons and sticks, arrived in a passenger van. The bandits forcibly bundled them into the vehicle at gunpoint. Subsequently, the armed bandits assaulted them inside the vehicle, snatching cash amounting to Rs.0.6 million and gold valued at Rs.4.50 million before abandoning them near Gharshchen.

# Business and education sectors: Pakistan, Korea to embrace cooperation

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Pakistan Boys Scouts Association (PBSA) Commissioner Sardar Waqar Shahzad, welcomed Ambassador of Korea Park KiJu to the picturesque Swat Valley, marking a significant step towards enhancing bilateral relations between Pakistan and Korea.

The meeting, sparked discussions on fostering business opportunities, educational scholarships, banking collaborations, employment prospects, tourism initiatives, and strengthening people-to-people contacts.

Against the backdrop of Swat Valley's breathtaking beauty, Sardar Waqar Shahzad and Ambassador Park engaged in fruitful deliberations aimed at exploring avenues for mutual growth and cooperation.

During the meeting, Sardar Waqar Shahzad and Ambassador Park emphasized the importance of forging stronger economic ties, particularly in the realms of trade and investment.

Discussions centered on the potential for expanding bilateral trade, leveraging respective strengths in vari-

ous sectors, and facilitating business partnerships to unlock new opportunities for growth and development.

Furthermore, both dignitaries underscored the significance of educational exchange programs and scholarships to empower youth and foster cultural understanding between Pakistan and Korea. They discussed initiatives aimed at promoting academic collaboration, providing scholarships to deserving and diverse students, and enhancing educational opportunities for the youth of both nations.

In addition to economic and educational cooperation, both dignitaries explored the possibility of establishing Korean banks in Pakistan to facilitate financial transactions and promote investment activities. This initiative is poised to facilitate smoother business operations and further strengthen economic ties between the two countries.

The meeting also addressed the potential for creating employment opportunities through joint ventures and collaborations in various sectors, highlighted the importance of

job creation to address socio-economic challenges and drive inclusive growth in both nations.

Moreover, discussions centered on promoting tourism exchanges to showcase the rich cultural heritage and natural beauty of Pakistan and Korea. Both dignitaries expressed their commitment to enhancing tourism infrastructure, facilitating travel, and promoting cultural exchanges to boost tourism between the two countries.

Sardar Waqar Shahzad and Ambassador Park reaffirmed their commitment to fostering people-to-people contacts and enhancing bilateral relations between Pakistan and Korea. They expressed optimism about the potential for collaboration in various fields and vowed to work closely to translate their shared vision into tangible outcomes for the benefit of both nations.

As the sun set over the majestic mountains of Swat Valley, Sardar Waqar Shahzad and Ambassador Park departed with a renewed sense of optimism and determination to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between Pakistan and Korea.



MINGORA: Pakistan Boys Scouts Association Commissioner Sardar Waqar Shahzad meeting with Ambassador of Korea Park KiJu.

## Search operation continued

KOHAT (APP): Kohat police continue their search and strike operation on Sunday as part of efforts to uphold law and order in the area.

A spokesman for Kohat police disclosed that under a special plan, search and strike operations were carried out in different areas within the Muhammad Riaz Shaheed police station jurisdiction.

Eighteen suspects were apprehended during the operation, including facilitators of proclaimed offenders.

During the operation, law enforcement recovered three pistols, one repeater, dozens of cartridges, 1200 grams of hashish, 45 grams of ice, and five bottles of alcohol from the possession of the arrested individuals.

The search operation saw the active participation of a heavy contingent of police, led by ASP Muhammad Talha Arif and Station House Officer (SHO) Muhammad Riaz Shaheed Asif Hayat.

Furthermore, targeted search operations in various areas led to action against unregistered tenants and suspects.

The police remain committed to maintaining law and order in Kohat through proactive measures aimed at curbing criminal activities.

## Gas pipeline gets leakage in Bahawalpur

BAHAWALPUR (INP): A gas pipeline got six-inch wide leakage in Bindra Puli area of Bahawalpur city. However, the technical teams of experts have overcome the leakage and repaired the pipeline.

Regional Manager, Sui Northern Gas Company Limited, Bahawalpur Office, Shehzad Ahmad said that they received information about leakage of gas pipeline passing through Bindra Puli area of Bahawalpur city.

"Soon after receiving information, the technical team of experts of Sui North Gas Company Limited rushed to the scene and started work to overcome the leakage and repair it," he added.

He said that gas pipeline had been repaired. He further added that gas supply to the areas affected due to leakage had been restored. Investigation to ascertain cause of the leakage was underway.

## Suthra Punjab drive in full swing

NAROWAL (APP): Deputy Commissioner Narawal Syed Hassan Raza said on Sunday that garbage was being picked up in cities, towns and rural areas of the district under the Suthra Punjab campaign.

Drainage and sewerage were being cleaned and streetlights were being restored due to which the residential areas were looking clean and beautiful, says a handout.

The Deputy Commissioner said that according to the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, the fruitful results of clean Punjab campaign had started reaching the common citizens and their streets, villages, towns and cities had started to become clean.

# TMO inspects prices of food items

DARA ADAM KHEL (APP): Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) Dara Adam Khel Malik Mujtaba paid a surprise visit to Darra Bazar and inspected the rates of various food items including checking the presence of official rates list in various shops.

During his visit, there was no official price list, many butchers arrested for high prices.

He said according to the orders of the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr.

Azmatullah, on the occasion of Ramadan, Tehsil Municipal Officer Dara Adam Khel Malik Mujtabi, Tehsildar Dara Adam Khel, in Dara Adam Khel subdivision, conducted surprise visits to Dara Bazar and inspected various shops in Sheni Clay Bazaar, Akhorwal College Market, Bazi Khel Market.

During the inspection, many butchers, fruit sellers, vegetable, fruit and poultry shops were fined on the spot for not following the official price list. Complaints of Dara Adam Khel administration in the

absence of the Dara Adam Khel.

They also established points for registering public complaints in Dara Adam Khel bazar and told the people that immediate action will be taken on their complaints.

He said, those violating the official price list of various food items, they would be sent to jail besides imposition of heavy fines. Therefore, he said, in this blessed month, no one will be allowed to rob the people and hoard and the shopkeepers should follow the official list.

## Kidney trafficking scheme:

# Gang member arrested by police

MULTAN (INP): Gulshan Iqbal police in Lahore successfully apprehended a member of a criminal gang engaged in the illicit trade of human kidneys.

The arrested individual, identified as Nadeem, was captured along with his associate, Shoaib, following an intensive operation led by SHO Gulshan Iqbal, Syed Qamar Abbas, and his dedicated police team.

Reports suggest that Nadeem and Shoaib orchestrated a scheme wherein they targeted unsuspecting individuals from impoverished backgrounds, enticing them with promises of work opportunities in various localities. One such victim, Salim, a laborer by profession, was lured into their trap under the pretext of

offering him employment related to house painting.

Upon gaining Salim's trust, the perpetrators administered a drugged juice, rendering him unconscious. Subsequently, they would transport their victims to Islamabad, where they would hand them over to a certain individual known as Dr. Zafar. Dr. Zafar's involvement in the scheme reportedly included monetary transactions with the accused.

It is alleged that Nadeem and Shoaib would offer victims a meager sum of 50,000 to 60,000 rupees, falsely claiming it as partial payment for their kidneys. Shockingly, the victims would then undergo forced kidney extraction procedures, with Salim falling victim to this heinous

crime. Prompt action was taken by Salim, who managed to alert the authorities, leading to Nadeem's arrest. Efforts are currently underway to apprehend the remaining accomplices involved in this nefarious operation, with the police team actively pursuing leads to ensure justice is served.

A case has been formally registered against Nadeem and his cohorts, underscoring the gravity of the charges they face in connection with this abhorrent crime.

This development highlights the imperative for law enforcement agencies to remain vigilant and resolute in combating such criminal enterprises that prey on the vulnerable members of society.

# 31 schools to be upgraded in DG Khan

DG KHAN (INP): Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Hanif Patafi said that recommendations to upgrade 31 schools in DG Khan

have been submitted to the Punjab government. In a statement issued here, the MPA stated that there was huge pressure on different schools in the city.

Efforts are underway to upgrade Primary schools to middle, middle schools to high school and high schools to higher secondary schools.

He further remarked that Chief Executive Officer Education Abdur Rehman was also instructed to com-

plete file work in this regard. He hoped that Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz would approve the upgrade in the next few days.

The said upgrade of the educational institutes will also raise the standard of education in the city.

Meanwhile, the de-siltation of 171 small and big canals of Dera Ghazi Khan zone will start on Monday, March 18. The task has been given to remove silt from 1625 kilometers long canals by April 20.

Superintending Engineer Irrigation Department Khan Shaukat Hayat said that provincial, divisional, and district-level commit-

tees have been formed to monitor the proper de-siltation of canals.

He said that the monitoring land information management system has also been made functional by the provincial government.

There will be no wastage of water by the de-silting and the canal water will reach the tail-end farmers in abundance.

He said that if anyone has any objection or suggestion related to the de-siltation, it could be submitted in writing to his office and the Canal division.

The entire staff will play every possible role for the success of the de-siltation, he concluded.

# Spring plantation drive kicks off in Kot Addu

KOT ADDU (APP): In a heartwarming initiative to embrace the start of Spring, a tree plantation drive

was kicked off at Government Associate College of Commerce, Kot Addu.

Professor Zabir Ahmed Siddiqui, the Principal of the college, led the endeavor by personally planting trees in the campus.

Addressing the media, Principal Zubair Ahmed Siddique highlighted the significance of the spring season for tree plantation, while stressing its pivotal

role in environmental sustainability.

He proudly announced that the college had joined the green movement by planting over 30 fruit-bearing trees. The institution always adhered to its tradition of tree plantation in order to improve environment. Principal Siddique underscored the environmental benefits of tree planting.

He stated that tree plantation was imparting vital role in reducing pollution, enhancing biodiversity,

providing shade and oxygen. Despite facing seasonal changes, the region has witnessed a decline in tree population and he called for concerted efforts towards afforestation. The principal also announced rewards for students to ensure their wider participation in the noble cause.

He added that beyond its environmental benefits, the tree plantation also served as an continuous charity and also contribute a culture of environmental consciousness.





## Senegal’s Sonko takes election campaign to the south

CAP SKIRING (AFP/APP): Senegal's charismatic opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and his coalition's presidential candidate flew to the south of the country Saturday, pressing on with their election campaign less than two weeks before the vote.

Former prime minister Amadou Ba meanwhile, the presidential camp's candidate in the election, denounced Sonko's "slandering" attack on him the previous evening.

Sonko and his ally Bassirou Diomaye Faye were greeted by hundreds of supporters after they flew into the coastal resort of Cap Skiring in the Casamance region.

Sonko has endorsed Faye as his coalition's candidate for the March 24 election after he was barred from running himself.

The two political allies travelled from the airport in a black 4x4 vehicle with tinted windows, as the crowd shouted: "Diomaye, president!" Faye wearing a traditional white boubou, or flowing wide-sleeved robe, was the first to appear, followed by Sonko in a pale green shirt and cap. Both raised their hands to salute the crowd of mainly young people. "We are going to win in the first round, I'm sure of it," one supporter, 26-year-old Malang Sane told AFP, echoing the prediction made by Sonko the previous night in Dakar.

"We have come to welcome our

leader (Sonko) who has just got out of prison and is going to bring change," 29-year-old teacher Ibou Diatta told AFP.

"Senegal is like a new car that hasn't been used -- and Ousmane Sonko is going to get it running," he added. Faye sat up front and Sonko behind him as their convoy headed to the Casamance regional capital of Ziguinchor, some 80 kilometres (50 miles) away.

Sonko once served as mayor there and this region is his political stronghold.

The two men were only released late on Thursday evening, to the acclaim of hundreds of their supporters in Dakar.

Sonko was jailed at the end of last July on a string of charges, including provoking insurrection, conspiracy with terrorist groups and endangering state security.

Faye was imprisoned in April 2023, charged with contempt of court, defamation and acts likely to compromise public peace after posting a message critical of the justice system.

Sonko had been vocal in denouncing what he says is government corruption and maintains there was a conspiracy to keep him out of the 2024 election.

But he says he is fully behind the less charismatic and less popular Diomaye Faye.

Former prime minister Amadou

Ba, who stepped down from his post to campaign for the presidency under the banner of Macky Sall's party, denounced comments by Sonko at a Dakar news conference on Friday.

"If he is elected, he will be the president of foreign countries," Sonko had said of Ba, accusing him of having covered up corruption.

A statement from Sonko's team said Ba had "devoted an entire press conference to tasteless defamation and slander".

Ba is currently campaigning in the north of the country.

President Sall himself has already served two terms and is not running again. His mandate as president runs out on April 2.

It was he who proposed the amnesty law that allowed for the release of Sonko and Diomaye Faye, in a bid to ease political tensions.

But it was his last-minute decision in February to defer the presidential vote due later that month and try and push it back to December that sparked the latest crisis.

His decision sparked clashes that left four dead.

The Constitutional Council stepped in, forcing him to reset the date to March 24.

For some analysts, opposition figures such as Sonko and Faye have emerged stronger from their long political struggle with Sall's administration.

## Dissident Russian band returns to stage after Thai detention

WARSAW (AFP/APP): A Russian-Belarusian rock band that denounces Moscow's Ukraine invasion returned to the stage this week, voicing defiance after being detained in Thailand in January and threatened with deportation to Russia.

The band, Bi-2, formed in the 1980s in Belarus when it was part of the Soviet Union, left Russia in protest over the offensive and has been touring ever since in countries with large Russian-speaking communities. Ahead of a concert in Vilnius on Thursday, band members met with exiled Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya and supporters of late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny who died in an Arctic prison last month. "We have become hostages to Russian history," Egor Bortnik, one of the well-known band's two founders, told AFP ahead of another concert in Warsaw on Saturday.

But 51-year-old Bortnik, who is better known by his stage name "Lyova", said he was "not against the war". "On the contrary, I'm for the war. I just want Ukraine to liberate its own territory. Putin has to gather his ores and get out of Ukraine," Bortnik said, using a disparaging term for Russian soldiers frequently used by Ukrainians.

The band was held in Phuket, Thailand in January on immigration charges in a case that has alarmed Russians critical of President Vladimir Putin living abroad.

The organisers of their concerts



said all the necessary permits had been obtained, but the band was issued with tourist visas in error and they accused the Russian consulate of waging a campaign to cancel the concerts. After a week in detention, the band were released and travelled to Israel, where they met with Foreign Minister Israel Katz who said in a statement that the episode showed that "music will win".

Several of their concerts in Russia were cancelled in 2022 after they refused to play at a venue with banners supporting the war in Ukraine, after which they left the country.

"I put my prosperity on the line when the war began and I had to leave Russia. It was unexpected, it was not a process we had prepared

for," Bortnik said. Bortnik said he was more used to emigration than some of his peers who have left in the wake of the war since he moved to Israel while still a teenager. "I understand how difficult it is," he said.

Bortnik said he was no "geopolitician" and does not write explicitly "political songs" although their lyrics can "hit a nerve that is constantly vibrating". He said Putin's demise could be sudden and violent and would also bring down Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power for three decades.

"If something happens to Putin then there could be a civil war -- the finale for any tyranny," he said.

## Riding the storms: Venezuela’s ‘indestructible’ Nicolas Maduro

CARACAS (AFP/APP): Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro has been written off many times during a turbulent decade in power. But the former bus driver and anointed heir of Hugo Chavez has stubbornly clung to the wheel.

With neither the charisma, popularity, nor flush oil revenues of his late revolutionary mentor, Maduro is accused by rights groups of embracing full-blown authoritarianism to remain in power. There had been little suspense in the run-up to Saturday's announcement that he will be the ruling PSUV party's candidate in July 28 presidential elections. The 61-year-old will be seeking a third consec-

utive six-year term with his political opposition all but kneecapped.

Tall, and sporting an abundant mustache and slicked-back greying hair, Maduro was thrust into power as the handpicked successor of Chavez, who died of cancer in 2013.

Struggling to gain respect as the legitimate successor to still-popular Chavez, Maduro won his first election with a razor-thin margin.

Since then, he has fended off crisis after crisis, ruling with an increasingly iron fist and consolidating power even as life for the average Venezuelan grew ever more miserable.

Millions of Venezuelans

have fled a dire economic crisis, marked by runaway inflation and critical shortages, as an oil boom went bust partly due to a plunge in global crude prices.

Born in Caracas and a professed Marxist and Christian, Maduro as a teenager played guitar in a rock band called Enigma. He is a baseball fan and dances salsa.

He became a union leader for workers on the Caracas metro and went to communist Cuba in the 1980s to be educated.

Elected to the National Assembly when Chavez swept to power, he rose to become speaker of the legislature before taking over as foreign minister in 2006

and then vice president in October 2012.

In December of that year, Chavez officially declared Maduro his successor before travelling to Cuba for cancer treatment.

He died three months later and Maduro took over, much to the surprise of even some in the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

It was not the first nor last time Maduro was underestimated. In fact, he has embraced criticism that he is boorish and provincial to try and cast himself as a "worker president." It has even been claimed that he deliberately misspeaks in English so as not to be mistaken for high-brow.

## Rural clinic offers respite for priced out Zimbabwean patients

MOUNT DARWIN (AFP/APP): Outside a hospital in rural Zimbabwe, scores of people wait patiently under trees or inside small tents for news of their loved ones.

Vendors sell snacks, fruits and drinks to drivers queuing at the gates of what has become an unlikely sought-after healthcare destination in the impoverished southern African country. Zimbabwe's public health system has all but collapsed under years of mismanagement, amid shortages of funds, staff, medicine and equipment.

When in need, those who can afford it, including government ministers, fly overseas to seek treatment.

Some check into private, but relatively expensive clinics in Harare.

Many others make the trip to Mount Darwin, a small village in the parched countryside about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the capital and home to the Karanda Mission Hospital.

"I lost all hope of having my aunt treated in Harare, after we were asked to bring water for her to drink and bathe as well as to flush the toilet," says a SUV-driving man, who gave his

name as Gunira.

After a three-hour drive, nurses assist the aunt to move from the vehicle to a stretcher and take her inside the building. Funded by the Evangelical church of Zimbabwe and run by three North American doctors, the hospital originally set up to cater to rural folks has built a reputation as one of the best in the country.

The 150-bed clinic treats up to 100,000 people a year and is almost always full, says medical director, Paul Thistle, a Canadian physician who married a Zimbabwean woman.

Charging affordable rates -- a consultation costs around \$15 compared to the average \$50 asked by private hospitals in Harare -- it draws patients from well beyond its catchment area. Some come from as far as neighbouring Zambia.

We "never turn any patient away", says Thistle. "Karanda has stood out not because we have the most modern medication, the highest technology in diagnostic and equipment but because we have the intangibles," he told AFP.

That means a caring staff, something that elsewhere is also short in sup-

ply, say some patients.

Zimbabwean doctors and nurses have moved abroad en masse in recent years, due to poor working conditions and pay amid runaway inflation.

To stem the outflow authorities have made it more difficult to obtain the necessary paperwork to prove their qualifications -- further frustrating medical staff. Strikes are common.

"The sector has suffered from years of gross underfunding and investments," said Itai Rusike, who heads the Community Working Group on Health, an umbrella advocacy group.

"The depleted health personnel are also highly demotivated owing to dwindling real incomes, poor working conditions and under-equipped health institutions." The health ministry did not reply to a request for comment.

Ahead of elections in August last year, President Emmerson Mnangagwa opened a new "state-of-the-art" clinic in a battleground district of Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo.

But critics say that for years, flashy ribbon-cutting exercises have not been followed by systemic reforms

to salvage the health sector. Many hospitals lack equipment for magnetic resonance, radiography, cancer treatment and other procedures.

Collapsing infrastructure sees them often go without electricity and water.

Even basic medications sometimes run low.

Tuberculosis patient Regis Matinenga, 50, travelled 343 kilometres to be treated in Karanda.

Having been sick for more than one year, none of the hospitals he tried "offered him better service", he said, as he shivered and coughed on his hospital bed. Given its remoteness, relatives of the ill often camp outside, sometimes for days. Entrepreneurial locals have carved out small rooms at the back of their shops and rent them out for up to \$15 a night.

The hospital, which prides itself as having recorded no maternal deaths last year against a high national mortality ratio of 363 per 100,000 live births, is also looking to expand business. It was the management's "desire to have a hostel for relatives so that they can also get decent accommodation," said Thistle.

## Police in standoff with suspect in two fatal US shootings

TRENTON (AFP/APP): An "extremely dangerous" suspect armed with an assault rifle was holed up in a New Jersey home on Saturday, authorities said, as police negotiators tried to coax him out after he allegedly killed three family members in two earlier shootings. Police had tracked 26-year-old Andre Gordon to the three-story house after a trail of violence that set off shelter-in-place orders in two states.

"Andre, get away from the windows. We know you're inside, if you'd like to surrender, dial 911 now," police said over a loud-speaker. "You're a young man, you have too much to live for." Authorities said Gordon, who is believed to be homeless, began the day

by carjacking a vehicle in Trenton before driving some 40 miles (65 kilometres) to the northern Philadelphia suburb of Levittown.

There, police said, the suspect killed two people -- identified as his 52-year-old stepmother and his 13-year-old sister.

Three others in the house, including a minor, managed to hide "as he went through the house searching for them," Bucks County, Pennsylvania district attorney Jennifer Schorn said in a briefing.

The suspect then drove to a nearby residence where he broke in before shooting and killing a 25-year-old woman -- who Schorn said was the mother of his two children -- before bludg-

oning her mother with the butt of his rifle. She was expected to recover.

Driving to a nearby discount store, the suspect car-jacked a Honda vehicle from a 44-year-old man before fleeing. The man was not injured, according to Falls Township, Pennsylvania Sheriff Nelson Whitney.

The suspect then drove across the state line back to Trenton, where he barricaded himself in the three-story house.

Whitney said the suspect was believed to be armed with a powerful AR-15 style assault rifle.

SWAT negotiators "will attempt to negotiate a peaceful surrender," Detective Lieutenant Lisette Rios of the Trenton

police department said.

People in the house were "successfully evacuated with no injuries," Rios added.

Armed SWAT officers were seen using a ladder to climb onto the roof of the porch to help people inside escape through a window.

Because the suspect crossed state lines, federal authorities -- including the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives -- are aiding in the matter, along with local, county and state police. Residents in the area, a densely occupied neighborhood, remained under a shelter-in-place order although crowds of curious locals had gathered to watch the unfolding police operation.

## Police operation in Haiti capital against ‘Barbecue’ gang

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP/APP): Police in Haiti seized firearms and cleared roadblocks in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood controlled by notorious gang leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, in an operation that left several criminals dead, authorities said.

National police units entered the Delmas neighborhood Friday evening with the aim of unblocking a road, said Lionel Lazarre of the Haitian police union.

Several "bandits" were killed, he said. A later police statement said officers exchanged gunfire with men from Cherizier's gang, seized firearms and succeeded in unblocking roads. "New strategies are being implemented by the police with the aim of recovering certain areas occupied by these armed gangs in recent days, in order to facilitate the free movement of peaceful citizens," the statement said, without providing details.

Another operation was underway Saturday morn-



ing as law enforcement attempted to regain control of the capital's main port, where gangs had looted several containers, a source at the port told AFP.

The port has been shut since March 7 because of the violence.

Haitians have been on edge in recent days awaiting the naming of a transitional governing body meant to restore stability to

the impoverished country, wracked by gang violence and left largely isolated from the outside world.

Some are hoping a transitional council can fill the void left by departing Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who is leaving amid pressure from an offensive by gangs that control 80 percent of the capital.

Yet many have decried the pending establish-

ment of a transitional council, a move supported by Caribbean regional body CARICOM, the United Nations and the United States.

The country has a long, brutal history of foreign interventions, from a 20-year American occupation in the early 1900s to a deadly cholera outbreak linked to a UN peacekeeping mission in the 2010s.

REYKJAVIK (AFP/APP): Icelandic police declared a state of emergency Saturday as lava spewed from a new volcanic fissure on the Reykjanes peninsula, the fourth eruption to hit the area since December.

A "volcanic eruption has started between stora Skogfell and Hagafell on the Reykjanes Peninsula," said a statement from the Icelandic Met Office (IMO). Live video images showed glowing lava and billowing smoke.

Iceland's Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management announced it had sent a helicopter to narrow down the exact location of the new fissure. The authority also said the police had declared a state of emergency due to the eruption. According to the

IMO, it occurred close to the same location as a previous eruption on February 8. Lava appeared to flow south towards the dykes built to protect the fishing village Grindavik, it said.

Just after 2200 GMT, "the southern lava front was just 200 metres from the barriers on the eastern side of Grindavik and moving at a rate of about one km per hour," it added.

Lava was also flowing west, as it had on February 8, and the length of the fissure was estimated to be 2.9 kilometres (1.8 miles), said the IMO.

"From initial assessments of web camera imagery and aerial photographs from the helicopter flight, the eruption is thought to be the largest (in terms of magma discharge)

of the three previous fissure eruptions from the Sundhnukur crater row," IMO said, stressing the assessment was based on the first hour of "eruptive activity." Minutes before the eruption, the agency had issued a statement saying that seismic activity indicated that there was an increased chance of an eruption. "The pre-eruptive warning phase was very short," the IMO said.

On Friday, the IMO said that magma was accumulating under the ground in the area "which could end with a new magma intrusion and possibly an eruption." That could happen "with very little warning", it said.

Local media reported that Iceland's famed Blue Lagoon geothermal spa had been evacuated as well as

Grindavik. The roughly 4,000 residents of Grindavik were only cleared to return to their homes on February 19 after having been evacuated on November 11, though only around a hundred chose to do so.

On that occasion, hundreds of tremors damaged buildings and opened up huge cracks in roads.

The quakes were followed by a volcanic fissure on December 18 that spared the village. But a fissure opened right on the town's edge, in January, sending lava flowing into the streets and reducing three homes to ashes, followed by a third eruption near the village on February 8. As of Friday, more than 300 of Grindavik's inhabitants had put in requests to sell their house to the state.



The Frontier Post

JALIL AFRIDI  
Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

“USA and Canada Toll Free Number 415-3704551

# Flourishing peril of terrorism

Five brave sons of the soil embraced martyrdom on Saturday, including two officers, while valiantly thwarting a terrorist attack on the security forces post in North Waziristan District's Mir Ali area. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Army troops successfully foiled the initial attempt at the intrusion, the terrorists rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the post, followed by multiple suicide bombing attacks, which led to the collapse of a portion of a building, resulting in multiple Shahadats and injuries.

Pakistan faces a continued risk of cross-border terrorism from its joint border with Afghanistan, where the terrorist groups have made their hideouts in the far-flung border regions or crossed the Pak-Afghan border and attacked Pakistani troops, and civil and military installations in violence-hit regions. Similar situations exist on the Pak-Iran border, wherein, Baloch insurgents camped on Iranian soil frequently illegally cross the border to perpetrate terrorism in the country. Recently, terrorist groups have brought significant modification in their modus operandi during which they used bomb-laden vehicles and suicide bombers against military installations in a bid to pound maximum casualties to the Armed Forces. This was the third attack of such kind which caused significant losses to the military in recent months.

Pakistan successfully defeated the menace of terrorism on its soil back in 2015. Unfortunately, purblind leaders brought back terrorism to their country as the rehabilitation of terrorists was very dear to them, thus causing a great challenge to the nation's security and survival. Although brave security forces and Law Enforcement agencies are hunting down terrorists across the country, but terrorist groups enjoy safe havens and backing from neighboring states that make the work of our brave soldiers more hard and complicated.

Realistically, there were persistent calls from the public, civil society, and media regarding the growing risks of a resurgence of terrorism, regrouping, and unlawful activities of the members of banned outfits in KP's border regions including Buner, Swat, and Dir but neither the local administrations nor provincial and central governments responded to the outcry of the public until this monster surrounds the entire borderbelt for the second time in history. Presently, the menace of terrorism has again shaped into a grave challenge for the Pakistani nation. The reports suggest that the miscreants are well equipped this time with the latest weapons left behind by the US military during withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, neither the Pakistani political leadership nor military strategists and intelligentsia could access the full extent of the problems and linkage between terrorism and extremism that have taken deep routes in our society. A huge chunk of the population in various parts of the country had been radicalized due to policies of the past governments. Pakistani rulers had used religion for political purposes and state-sponsored jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir not only radicalized the society but encouraged the religious clerics to preach jihad and form armed groups to realize their nefarious agendas.

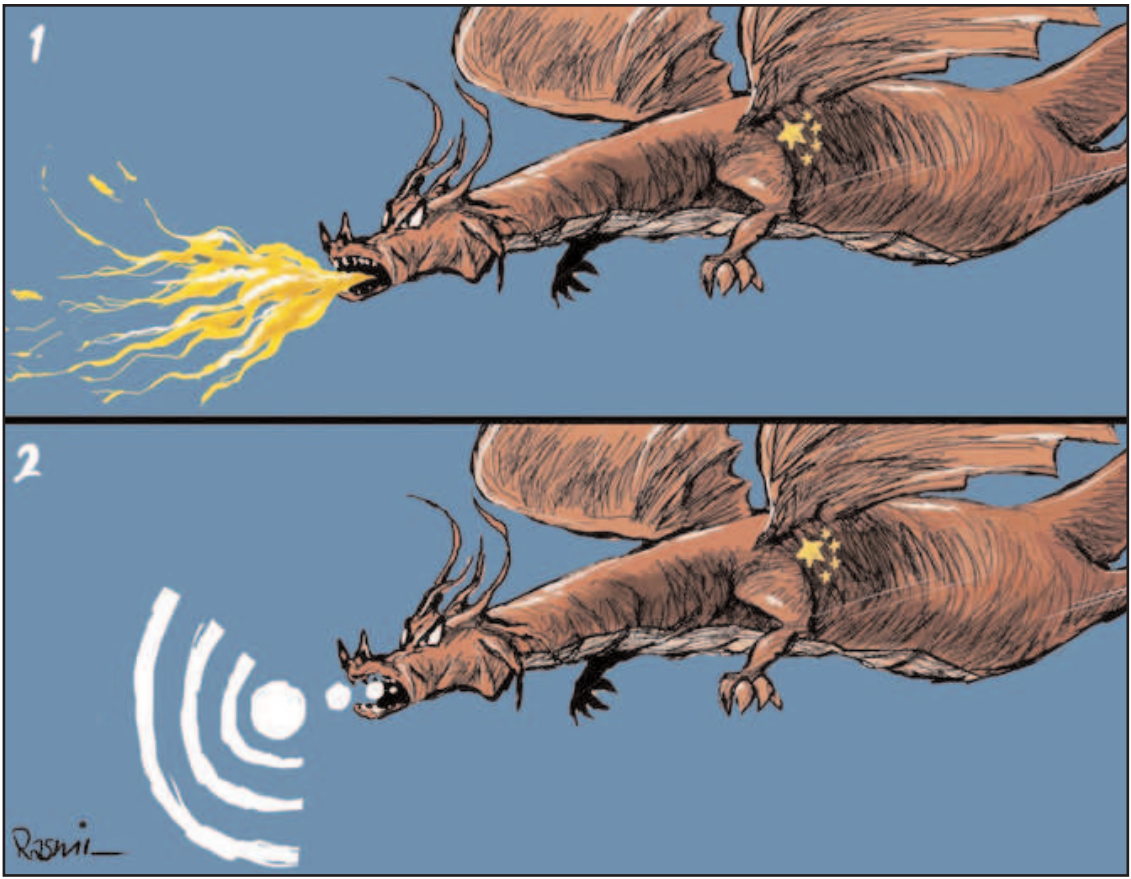
It is high time that the political leadership feels its responsibility and adopts a nationwide strategy to address the issue of violent extremism by regulating all educational institutes and religious seminaries, enforcing strict laws, banning hate speech, and promoting tolerance, and brotherhood in the society. All successive governments put off this essential task to their successors while the catastrophe multiplied over the years and reached an almost irreversible stage. At the same time, a countrywide merciless counter-terrorism campaign must be initiated to eliminate the peril of terrorism from our soil once and for all.

# Dearly Needed Tax Reforms

Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has signed an agreement with Karandaaz Pakistan to completely Digitalize the Country's Tax Administration and Internal Revenue Service (IRS). According to the details, Karandaaz will collaborate with the FBR to develop a comprehensive digital strategy for realizing the digital transformation of the FBR system to reduce the cost of compliance of taxpayers, document the economy, expand the tax base, and lead FBR on a sustainable path to revenue growth. Pakistan's taxation system faces several legal and regulatory issues that cause diverse problems relating to the administration and collection of taxes. The informal economy, a lack of regulation, and institutional corruption are major challenges together with Tax evasion wherein taxpayers conceal or misrepresent their income to avoid paying taxes. At the same time, the Country's tax system is complex and difficult to understand for taxpayers due to intricate tax laws, vague language, and difficult legal terms used on online Tax portals. Such complexities create opportunities for corruption and bribery wherein FBR officials take advantage of taxpayers' inability and generate bulk illegal money in reward for resolving minor technical issues. Meanwhile, the lack of transparency and accountability within the tax administration rendered the entire system user-friendly and troublesome. Pakistan's tax base is very limited. The country heavily relies on indirect taxes, tariffs, and customs duties. The limited tax base reduces government revenue and restricts the pace of economic development and growth. There is a need for digitization and simplification of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) including the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to make it simple and instantly usable. Appropriate reforms in tax policies, tax administration, and enforcement mechanisms to make the system agile and user-friendly are crucial to broaden the tax base and increase revenue. Tax regulations should be transparent and understandable for taxpayers, as simplification reduces confusion and encourages compliance. Modern Technology can help facilitate taxpayers' needs relating to filing tax returns, tracking payments, and managing tax records. The government must also educate citizens about their tax obligations and rights. Awareness campaigns can help dispel myths, promote voluntary compliance, and foster a sense of duty in the public. The FBR has now kicked off the digitization and reformation campaign, hopefully, this endeavor will benefit both the tax regulator and the taxpayers in the days to come.

## Important Notice

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



# The West needs to rethink its strategy in the Sahel

Hafed Al-Ghwel

West Africa and the Sahel are experiencing a disturbing trend of political instability, coups, and the rise of violent extremist groups. The region is plagued by serious challenges, including weak governance, economic decline, and insecurity.

The persistence and growing strength of harmful actors in the Sahel, the area that runs across Africa between the Sahara to the north and the savannas of Sudan to the south, threaten to exacerbate the crisis and spread mayhem across the continent.

It is raising concerns that West Africa, despite its purported commitment to democracy and stability, is settling into a familiar pattern of repeated failures and inaction, resulting in entrenched insecurity across the Sahel.

The region, stretching from Senegal in the west to Eritrea in the east, has long faced severe security challenges. A confluence of factors, from weak and illegitimate governance to the worsening effects of climate change, are contributing to the rise of violent extremism.

Left unchecked, agitators in the Sahel appear eager to expand south toward coastal West African countries, raising fears that they will eventually establish footholds there. Such expansions will likely be facilitated by a lack of foreign involvement and increased cooperation among malign actors with shared interests, such as extremist groups and transnational criminal organizations.

Far from being immune to this tumult in the Sahel, many governments in neighboring countries face a potent cocktail of civil-military frictions, escalating public discontent, and a crop of foreign partners all-too content to overlook military rule in favor of bolstering narrowly defined security interests.

The gravity of these conditions cannot be overstated; they leave an already fragile region in a precarious position, ripe for the picking by opportunistic actors. Future coup leaders will boldly calculate that the intense competition and prevailing power plays among global actors and increasingly assertive middle powers can provide a buffer, easing any international backlash they might face after a power grab.

This incessant drumbeat of coups past, present, and future underscores a regional crisis that is neither transient nor superficial but rather symptomatic of deep-rooted grievances and a sense of disillusionment with political processes that have either stalled or failed to deliver on their promises.

This pattern of instability, fueled by stagnant economies, persistent insecurity, and a crisis of legitimacy, begs an urgent examination of the West's role in all this, and its heavily security-oriented approaches to challenges that are fundamentally political and social in nature.

Within this context, coups in West Africa and the Sahel, four of which have been successfully ex-

ecuted since 2020, do not emerge from a vacuum but are reflective of broader regional disenchantment.

Yet it is the specter of insecurity in particular that has served as a rallying cry for military juntas, which justify their usurpation of power on the grounds that elected governments have failed to protect and provide for their citizens. Such claims resonate not only in the barracks but on the streets, where often significant public support for coups reflects a populace more concerned with the outcomes of governance than the form it takes.

The disillusion among the public is compounded by the glaring spotlight cast on unforced failures of gov-

comes next is a marked tolerance for violent excesses perpetrated by opportunistic actors.

Such violent decline into permanent insecurity is also a reflection of negative sentiments toward perceived neocolonial influences, which have resulted in fraught relationships with former colonial powers, in particular France. Despite having the advantage of enduring historical ties to the region, authorities in the country have been unable to halt the rise of anti-French sentiment stemming from unmet expectations for economic prosperity and stability.

A few Sahelian and West African countries are in the process of pivoting away

templating regime change.

Such calculated opportunism among external forces cleverly exploits worsening vulnerabilities and stokes the fires of instability to erode the capacities of threatened countries to guard against violent takeovers and maintain the integrity of their hard-fought democratic institutions.

Even more frustratingly, several Western partners have implicitly endorsed these recurrent coups, prioritizing their own core security interests in the region. Schemes designed to stem flows of migrants, contain geopolitical adversaries, and secure counterterrorism gains, while critical, have come at the expense, alarmingly, of longer-term investments in democracy and governance.

This myopic focus sets a dangerous precedent, fueling a cycle of instability in the region and inadvertently propagating a "coup contagion" that has the potential to resonate far beyond West Africa and the Sahel, potentially sowing seeds of discord even in North Africa.

The subtext is clear: The international community is not merely a passive observer in West Africa's current crisis and the subsequent contagion that will likely endanger North African countries as well. It remains a fractious participant that refuses to reform its approach, thereby enabling mounting crises that are beginning to cause regional institutions to fray, hampering their ability to develop effective regional security responses.

Last year, for instance, juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formed an alliance to resist the pressure they were coming under from the Economic Community of West African States, historically one of the most consistent organizations in efforts to uphold anti-coup norms in the region.

Regional organizations such as this can prove instrumental in their roles as convening, coordinating, and overseeing agents that can provide help to countries such as Ivory Coast, where jihadist groups have been steadily encroaching on its borders.

Crippling ECOWAS will undoubtedly result in coastal West Africa slowly becoming the next Sahel as a result of persistent political upheaval, with the potential for crises to spill over into sub-Saharan Africa and north toward the Maghreb.

The West's historical predilection for security-centric interventions, at the expense of support for genuine democratic governance and efforts to address the root causes of economic and political disenchantment, might not only fail to stem the tide of unrest but could, indeed, exacerbate the very conditions that cause the erosion of democratic institutions.

In the face of this burgeoning crisis, a recalibration of policies and priorities is required, with an emphasis on long-term, structural support for democracy that transcends mere election observers or military engagement.

# US floating port in Gaza might serve important purpose

Yossi Mekelberg

Desperate times call for desperate measures and I can't think of times more desperate than the current one in Gaza where, frustratingly, urgently needed humanitarian aid is still only trickling in. For more than five months, humanitarian supplies have continued to fall far short of the very bare minimum required to sustain a population caught up in a hellish war.

Therefore, US President Joe Biden's announcement during his State of the Union Address last week that he has directed the US military to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary floating dock on the Gaza shoreline, through which humanitarian aid can enter the Strip on a large scale, is a welcome development. Beyond the immediate needs, if the plan succeeds, it might have longterm implications for the future of Gaza as part of an independent Palestinian state, and for the territory's economic viability and connections with the world.

Israel went to war with Hamas in anger and rage, rather than with any clear strategy for peace in its aftermath. It is hard to identify where the thirst for revenge ends and political objectives begin, including some senior Cabinet members.

The stated objective of eliminating Hamas was one that could never be met militarily. A more achievable Israeli objective should have been to make the group less politically relevant to the people of Gaza by avoiding hurting the wider population and instead offering them hope for a better future free from occupation and oppression.

To achieve this, Israel should have carried out clinical and surgical military operations against Hamas, and not treated the entire population of the territory as mere collateral damage and turned the response to Oct. 7 into a war on the Palestinians of Gaza that has so far killed more than 31,000 of them, including thousands of children.

Instead, despite its actions — perhaps because of them — Israel is now closer to "destroying Hamas" or seeing the hostages held by the group returning home. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the Gazan population has been displaced and left with little or no access to food, clean water, medical treatment, or sanitation.

In a message posted on social media platform X last week, the World Health Organization said that during visits to hospitals in northern Gaza, its workers witnessed "severe levels of malnutrition, children dying of starvation, serious shortages of fuel, food and medical supplies, hospital buildings destroyed."

Without the delivery of emergency aid on a much larger scale than we are currently seeing, the situation will only worsen. The possibility of a threatened Israeli incursion into Rafah, the last refuge for more than a million displaced Gazans, would only make the situation even more catastrophic.

At the beginning of March, the average number of lorries crossing the border and delivering aid to Gaza increased from 98 a day the previous month to 168. This still falls far short of the 500 trucks this crisis demands. For both logistical and political reasons, this woefully severe shortage of humanitarian aid remains a constant, devastating feature of this war.

While some aid is also now being delivered using parachute drops, that is a mere drop in the ocean of need. Therefore, a floating port could play an important and significant role in addressing the crisis by facilitating a huge increase in the quantity of aid entering the disaster-stricken territory, and enabling the distribution of aid in a more orderly fashion.

Unfortunately, we are told it might take as long as two months to build and the people on the ground cannot afford to wait this long.

Delivering aid by road is still quicker, in theory, but since it is proving difficult to overcome the "administrative" and political diffi-

culties that are preventing enough relief supplies from getting through, the sea route could offer a solution until a ceasefire agreement is reached.

However, one wonders why it has taken so long to reach this conclusion. Biden's announcement last week was accompanied by a stark warning to Israeli authorities that they must play their part in alleviating the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. "To the leadership of Israel I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip. Protecting and saving innocent lives has to be a priority," he said.

An initial attempt to deliver desperately needed aid by sea in this way took place this week, when a Spanish ship, the Open Arms, towing a barge loaded with 200 tonnes of supplies left the Cypriot port of Larnaca en route to Gaza. Due to the current lack of a functioning port in Gaza, the US-based charity that organized the shipment, World Central Kitchen, is building a jetty where the aid can be offloaded. This goes to show that determination and creativity, and above all compassion and care for the suffering of the population in Gaza, can have at least some degree of positive effect on the situation.

There is something that seems a little ironic about the fact that it is only in these horrifying circumstances that Israel is accepting, or is being forced to accept, the opening up of maritime access to Gaza after it has blockaded the territory for so many years.

But this might prove to be a silver lining to these dark clouds of death and destruction, and encourage us all to think ahead to a future beyond the war. The symbolism and practicality of this development should not elude the international community.

If we assume that the Gaza Strip will not remain indefinitely under Israeli control, but authorities in Israel will want to decide what items enter or exit the Strip, which has been a recurring demand in all previous negotiations with the Palestinians, an important precedent for future negotiations is being set here, especially when we consider that this sea route will be the first passage in or out of Gaza in more than 75 years not controlled by either Israel or Egypt.

Moreover, this development might have the potential to evolve from being a viable mechanism for the delivery of goods to being one for the movement of people, too.

Thinking too far ahead might seem premature but it is crucial that we look to the future. So we need to consider that if the most viable route for the delivery of aid by sea is the one from Cyprus used by the Open Arms shipment to Gaza, that opens a window of opportunity for establishing links with an EU member state and, potentially, trade ties with the rest of this powerful economic and political union.

In the past few months we have seen only death and misery and very little, if any, rational or longterm strategic thinking about how to transform this unmitigated disaster into not only an end to the war in Gaza, but also an end to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Raising the idea of establishing a port in Gaza, which one can only hope will become reality very soon, is an important step forward. It is a clear sign that the Biden administration is recognizing and internalizing the need to take a different approach to the war, one that overrides and bypasses Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Otherwise this war will drag on for a very long time, prolonging the unbearable suffering of the people of Gaza while also having wider regional and international implications.

A floating port is an important step in the right direction. But it is only a small one. It needs to be followed up by a comprehensive plan for the future of Gaza and eventual peace between Israelis and Palestinians.



# Iraq seeks to avoid entanglement in regional conflict

The Iraq-based Kata'ib Hezbollah, a major part of the Iran-sponsored Popular Mobilization Units, in January directed a drone strike at America's Tower 22 base in Jordan. Three American servicemen, believing that the drone was "friendly," took no evasive action and were killed. These were the first deaths of US soldiers at the hands of Iraqi militants, who have been directing missile and drone attacks on US targets in Iraq and Syria in response to Israel's assaults on Palestinians in Gaza since Oct. 7.

The US responded with airstrikes on Feb. 2 and a drone strike in eastern Baghdad on Feb. 7 that killed a Kata'ib Hezbollah commander, Abu Baqir Al-Saadi. This led to a chorus of condemnation in Iraq. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani described the first US attack as "an act of aggression against Iraq's sovereignty." Iraqi military spokesman Maj. Gen. Yehia Rasool said the second strike further motivated the Iraqi government to seek an end to the US presence in the country. Rasool ominously noted that the US attack "threatens to entangle Iraq in the cycle of conflict," referring to the likelihood of the Gaza war pulling Iraq into a regionwide conflagration.

Iraqi officials and militants have been actively supporting their brethren in Gaza since October. Al-Sudani and all previous Iraqi prime ministers have expressed solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza and condemned "Israeli provocations and violations." The various militias in the country have backed the Palestinians by directing attacks at US targets.

By mid-December, there had been nearly 100 attacks on US bases in Iraq and

Syria, as well as an attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad. American retaliatory strikes have killed several militants and, occasionally, militia commanders. To prevent these attacks from getting out of hand, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Baghdad in early November to urge the Iraqi government to control the militants more effectively and to convey to Iran that

**The Gaza war has not only led to an increase in attacks on US targets in the region by Iraqi militants; there has also been increasing disenchantment with America among members of the country's civil society. They have been agitating for a reformed democratic order since 2019, when their demonstrations were brutally put down by security forces. Now, witnessing the impunity with which Israel has wreaked murder and mayhem in Gaza, few Iraqis believe that the US will promote civil rights and democracy in their country. In fact, the December provincial elections affirmed the resilience of Iraq's sectarian and family-based political order. The ruling Coordination Framework, the coalition of pro-Iran parties that opposes Al-Sadr, won most of the Shiite-majority provinces in central and southern Iraq and made major gains in areas hitherto under Sadrist or Kurdish influence. The latter include the provinces of Kirkuk, long-coveted by the Kurds, and Nineveh, which includes 16 "disputed administrative units" claimed by the Kurdistan Regional Government.**

the ongoing tit-for-tat strikes could escalate into a wider conflict.

Al-Sudani carried this message to Tehran the next day, when he met Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi. Observers believe he emphasized to his Iranian interlocutors that Iraq did not wish to get embroiled in a regional conflict. Later in November, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein

Talmiz Ahmad

urged the US to put pressure on Israel to stop the war, warning that the Gaza conflict could "burn all of us."

Iraq has a long history of supporting Palestinian aspirations. Its troops participated in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel. In 2022, Iraq passed the anti-normalization law that penalized any contacts with

ing disenchantment with America among members of the country's civil society. They have been agitating for a reformed democratic order since 2019, when their demonstrations were brutally put down by security forces. Now, witnessing the impunity with which Israel has wreaked murder and mayhem in Gaza, few Iraqis believe that the US will promote civil rights and democracy

latter include the provinces of Kirkuk, long-coveted by the Kurds, and Nineveh, which includes 16 "disputed administrative units" claimed by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

However, this will be easier said than done. The US has just 2,500 troops in Iraq and another 900 in Syria. Their presence has less to do with stopping the revival of Daesh forces than with balancing Iranian military and political influence in the two countries. However, by early March, the number of attacks on US targets had exceeded 180, indicating that Gaza could ignite conflict in Iraq, ahead of Lebanon or Yemen.

Given the sordid record of America's military misadventures in Iraq and the persisting dislike of US forces, both Baghdad and Washington would greatly benefit from US troops' withdrawal from Iraq.

# EU's complex competitiveness challenge is growing in urgency

Judged by the amount of air time devoted to it by the media, it would be easy to conclude that the biggest challenge facing Europe at the moment is the war in Ukraine.

Yet, many senior political leaders across the region perceive an even more significant, longterm problem: Europe's economic competitiveness in relation to other key world powers, especially the US, which appears to be significantly in decline.

In 2008, the EU economy was valued at \$16.2 trillion, greater than that of the US at \$14.7 trillion. Yet by 2023, the US economy had grown to more than \$25 trillion, whereas the combined value of the EU and UK economies had only reached about \$20 trillion.

This prompted Christian Ulbrich, the CEO of JLL, a global real estate services firm, to comment that Europe's "wealth is melting away at rapid speed."

There are differing opinions among economists on the scale of the challenge this presents to Europe.

Some, such as Isabel Schnabel, a member of the European Central Bank's executive board, argue it is a "crisis" that is structural in nature. Others think the problems are less serious, even though there is no denying that a glance at lists of the top global technology companies, the world's leading universities

or semiconductor manufacturing capacity reveals Europe is falling behind.

One key problem is that there are significant disagreements about what is driving the bloc's competitiveness challenges. That is to say, different people attach different priorities to what is a long list of problems, including flat-lining labor productivity; failure to match US levels of investment by the private and public sectors; failure to reap greater gains in efficiency from the use of digital technologies; and the fragmentation of European financial markets, and their regulation, which leaves the region more exposed to external pressures.

On the latter point, the external landscape might become even less favorable for Europe in the years to come. Geopolitically, for instance, China and Russia are increasingly flexing their muscles in the region, while a second Trump presidency might cause fragmentation of the post-1945 Western security alliance.

Further economic shocks cannot be ruled out either. The problem, as Francois Geerolf of the French Economic Observatory asserts, is that "with each new crisis, Europe seems to permanently lose a few points of economic growth to the United States."

In this context, it is unclear whether Europe will be able to recover its

Andrew Hammond

economic competitive advantage. However, there is unanimity on the important need for the region to urgently address the issue.

This is why European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen commissioned a report on this high-priority matter from former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi who, more recently, served as prime minister of Italy.

He is considered the leading central banker of his generation, who earned his reputation in 2012 at a time when it appeared as though the future of the single European currency was in peril. In seven simple words — "whatever it takes to save the euro" — he changed market sentiment by pledging massive intervention to defend the currency in what was perhaps the most decisive moment of the economic crisis.

His call for European governments to come together and take "urgent action" to implement a substantial bailout fund to tackle the debt crisis and instability was initially met with resistance from Germany. Yet, it eventually paid off, economies began to grow, and no country left the eurozone. For his efforts, Draghi earned the nickname "Super Mario," after the hero of the Nintendo video games.

Though Draghi might not complete his report until the second half of this year, he has indicated his thinking so far. He argues that Europe is undergoing massive changes, with three of the key pillars it has long relied on — Russian energy, Chinese exports, and the US security umbrella — all potentially transforming, albeit for differing reasons.

Against this backdrop, Draghi believes the EU needs to take bold, decisive actions, from cutting energy prices to reducing regulatory burdens. He also argues that massive investments are needed in the green and digital transitions, as he calculates the funding gap between Europe and the US in terms of investment in these areas is equivalent to about half a trillion euros a year, approximately a third of which is public money.

Draghi highlights these twin transitions as being key for Europe with good reason. On the digital front, there is a risk the region might potentially fail to capitalize on the revolutionary development of artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, mirroring its failures during the internet technology boom of the early 2000s.

Certainly, the EU has passed the world's first comprehensive AI-related legislation, providing it with a regulatory first-mover advantage. How-

ever, this is not the same as commercializing the technology, as we saw in the early 2000s when US firms such as Alphabet and Amazon seized the advantage and now dominate the landscape, while their main competitors are more likely to have emerged from world powers such as China, in the form of Alibaba for example, than Europe.

In terms of the green transition, the EU is placing much of the emphasis on its European Green Deal. However, such ambitions are not always matched by the provision of commensurate resources. Meanwhile, Washington's \$369 billion Inflation Reduction Act is widely seen as a "game changer," while China continues to offer significant state support to the nation's businesses.

Europe is therefore at a critical juncture and it is unclear whether it will be able to act decisively on this agenda while it is dealing with other ongoing crises, including the war in Ukraine. A key next step will be to marshal a broad political consensus around a bold package of reforms, complete with the funding needed to deliver it.

The Draghi report could create a window of opportunity for this to happen within the next European Commission when its term begins following the EU parliamentary elections in June.

# Google's bad Gemini rollout did the world a favor

Clive Crook

AI system, but they hallucinate.

Even if errors could be reliably identified and counted, the criteria for judging the performance of AI models are unclear. People make mistakes all the time. If AI makes fewer mistakes than humans, would that be good enough? For many purposes (including full self-driving) I'd be inclined to say yes, but the domain of questions put to AI must be suitably narrow. One of the questions I wouldn't want AI to answer is, "If AI makes fewer mistakes than humans, would that be good enough?"

The point is, judgments

distinction between facts and values is under assault from all sides. Eminent journalists say they never really understood what "objective" meant. The "critical theorists" who dominate many college social-studies programs deal in "false consciousness," "social construction" and truth as "lived experience" — all of which call the existence of facts into question and see values as instruments of oppression. Effective altruists take issue with values in a very different way — claiming, in effect, that consequences can be judged on a single dimension, which renders values other than "utility" null. Algorithmic ethicists, rejoice!

**AI handles these complications by implicitly attaching values to actions and/or consequences — but it must infer these either from the consensus, of sorts, embedded in the information it's trained on or from the instructions issued by its users and/or designers. The trouble is, neither the consensus nor the instructions have any ethical authority. When AI offers an opinion, it's still just an opinion. For this reason, the arrival of AI is unfortunately timed. The once-clear distinction between facts and values is under assault from all sides. Eminent journalists say they never really understood what "objective" meant. The "critical theorists" who dominate many college social-studies programs deal in "false consciousness," "social construction" and truth as "lived experience" — all of which call the existence of facts into question and see values as instruments of oppression. Effective altruists take issue with values in a very different way — claiming, in effect, that consequences can be judged on a single dimension, which renders values other than "utility" null. Algorithmic ethicists, rejoice! As these ideas seep into what AI claims to know, prodded further by designers promoting cultural realignment on race, gender and equity, expect the systems to present value-judgments as truths (just as humans do) and deny you information that might lead you to moral error (just as humans do).**

like this are not straightforwardly factual — a distinction that goes to the heart of the matter. Whether an opinion or action is justified often depends on values. These might be implicated by the action in itself (for instance, am I violating anybody's rights?) or by its consequences (is this outcome more socially beneficial than the alternative?).

AI handles these complications by implicitly attaching values to actions and/or consequences — but it must infer these either from the consensus, of sorts, embedded in the information it's trained on or from the instructions issued by its users and/or designers. The trouble is, neither the consensus nor the instructions have any ethical authority. When AI offers an opinion, it's still just an opinion.

For this reason, the arrival of AI is unfortunately timed. The once-clear

As these ideas seep into what AI claims to know, prodded further by designers promoting cultural realignment on race, gender and equity, expect the systems to present value-judgments as truths (just as humans do) and deny you information that might lead you to moral error (just as humans do).

As Andrew Sullivan points out, at the start Google promised that its search results were "unbiased and objective;" now its principal goal is to be "socially beneficial." AI systems might reason or be instructed that in choosing between what's true and what's socially beneficial, they should pick the latter — and then lie to users about having done so. After all, AI is so smart, its "truth" must really be true.

In a helpfully memorable way, Gemini proved that it's not. Thank you, Google, for screwing up so badly.

# Why the Gulf states have an interest in Russia-Ukraine peace

Luke Coffey

At a meeting of the G7 in October 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky launched his Peace Formula. It consists of 10 points that can lead to a just and honorable end to the war with Russia.

The 10 points address important issues such as respecting Ukraine's internationally recognized borders, radiation and nuclear safety, the security of food exports, and accountability for war crimes committed during the conflict. It remains the only proposal on the table to end the war in Ukraine.

Zelensky and his government have been promoting the initiative on the world stage with a series of meetings. One of the most

important took place last year in Saudi Arabia. It was particularly noteworthy because China also took part.

The importance of Saudi Arabia, indeed all the Gulf states, cannot be overstated in Ukraine's quest for a just peace. Kyiv knows the Kingdom is influential, not only among other Muslim states but also with many countries in the Global South. Saudi Arabia has also played an important role negotiating prisoner swaps between Ukraine and Russia.

Zelensky has visited Saudi Arabia three times since Russia invaded in February 2022. He addressed the Arab League in Jeddah in May 2023, there was the visit for the

Peace Formula summit in Jeddah last September, and last month Zelensky was in Saudi Arabia again for talks on the state of the war, the Peace Formula, and Ukrainian-Saudi relations.

When I was in Kyiv last week for meetings with Ukrainian officials, I was surprised by how many references were made to Saudi Arabia. Zelensky's right-hand man, Andriy Yermak, spoke by phone last week with Saudi national security adviser Musaed Al-Aiban about the next meeting on the Peace Formula in Switzerland this summer.

Other Gulf states have played an important role mediating and brokering prisoner exchanges and the

release of Ukrainian civilians from Russian custody. Qatar has negotiated the release of Ukrainian children, and the UAE has brokered at least three deals between Ukraine and Russia for the release of prisoners of war.

With so much to focus on in the Middle East, you may wonder why the Gulf states should care about the war at all. There are five main reasons.

The first reason is the issue of food security in the Global South if Ukrainian agricultural exports are restricted because of the war. Many countries in North Africa and the Middle East receive a sizable amount of

their grain imports from Ukraine. After an initial disruption in grain exports due to the war, they have returned to pre-war levels. The Gulf states want to ensure it remains this way.

Second, the war offers opportunities for Gulf states to play a bigger role in international diplomacy. In recent years, some have stepped up their diplomatic activity, becoming key interlocutors for engagement between rival and warring parties around the world. Saudi Arabia's engagement with Ukraine and Russia is a natural extension of this. The same can be said of Qatar and the UAE.

Third, the Iranian angle

is important. Since Russia started using Iranian drones in Ukraine, there has been a rapid evolution in Tehran's drone capabilities due to the lessons being learned there. This could have profound security implications for the Middle East. It also means no country in the world has more experience shooting down Iranian drones than Ukraine. There is no doubt that Gulf states are interested in learning these lessons.

Fourth, the principle of respecting territorial integrity is important for Gulf states. Before Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the last time a country used military force to annex part of another was when Saddam Hussein invaded

Kuwait in 1990 to make it Iraq's 19th province. Another good comparison with Russia's occupation of Crimea is Iran's control over the three UAE islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, and the presence there of the Revolutionary Guards navy.

Finally, the plight of the Crimean Tatars, the indigenous Sunni Muslim people of the peninsula, should concern many in the Gulf. They have faced persecution for centuries, from Catherine the Great in the 18th century to Stalin in the 20th. Since Russia's annexation there have been further civil liberty and religious freedom crackdowns aimed at them.

If Russia stopped fight-

ing, the war in Ukraine would end immediately. If Ukraine stopped fighting, its future as a country would be in doubt. So while the Ukrainians must continue fighting for survival, they are also showing the world that they seek a fair and just peace to end the war. This makes the work of Saudi Arabia to help find a just peace and a fair conclusion to the war more important than ever.

In the lead up to the next Peace Formula meeting in the summer, keep an eye on the Gulf states.

There is no doubt that they will be playing an important role behind the scenes. This is a positive contribution to peace that should be welcome.





## Markets, industrial bodies support PIAF: Chairman

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The various and traders and industrial associations, especially the paper market and Shah Alam Market, Young Traders Association, Beden Road and other markets, delegation visited the PIAF office to show their solidarity with the PIAF in the upcoming Lahore Chamber elections. The delegation from Paper Market Ganpat Road was led by APMA former chairman Khamis Saeed Butt while the delegation from Young Traders Association of Shah Alam Market was led by Shehzad Aslam and the delegation from Baden Road was led by Tahir Hafeez.

On this occasion, the PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol, Pattern-in-chief PIAF and Vice President of SAARC Chamber Mian Anjum Nisar, Senior Vice Chairman PIAF Nasrullah Mughal, Former Chairman PIAF Muhammad Ali Mian, Mian Abuzar Shad, Senior Vice President Lahore Chamber Zafar Mahmood Chaudhary and

others welcomed the all delegations.

Addressing the delegations, Mian Anjum Nisar and PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol said that PIAF is the largest representative party of the business community in the city and in the upcoming Lahore Chamber's elections, it would beat all expectations and achieve exemplary success.

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

He observed that the successive governments should pursue the same set of objectives and try to maintain consistent policies for a long-term of at least 10 years. The government should focus on the industrial sector in order to take the economy forward. Neglecting the industrial sector at this juncture will further aggravate the bal-

ance of payments situation, he added.

Pointing out the problems being faced by the trade and industrial sectors, he stressed the need for providing a level-playing field to the business community. The government should also reduce the cost of doing business by ensuring supply of energy at concessional tariff especially for SMEs sector, he added.

Fahimur Rahman said that Piaf's manifesto is to solve the problems of the business community on a priority basis.

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

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

He stated that the new government will have to take proactive measures to

encounter external and domestic challenges, besides stabilising the economy. The PIAF Chairman said that the upcoming government should be committed to transforming the economy of the country, as the process of transforming the economy is already underway in the country, acknowledging that structural reforms in every sector takes time.

Faheem Saigol mentioned that the new elected government will have to take joint action to combat currency smuggling and narrow the difference in dollar rates between official and open markets. It is the fact that the interim government has undertaken various initiatives for the betterment of the country. The trade deficit narrowed by 3.6 percent to \$1.3 billion in December 2023 compared to \$1.9 billion in the same period of 2022, demonstrating positive progress. Additionally, he expressed optimism that the government's efforts would lead to an expansion in export potential and the export market.



RAWALPINDI: People purchasing traditional food items for iftar.

### Modern designs crucial for furniture industry

LAHORE (APP): Modern designing and new trends in the furniture industry are essential for gaining a competitive edge, driving sales and profitability, enhancing brand image, embracing sustainability, and expanding into international markets.

Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq stated this while talking to a delegation of women entrepreneurs and furniture manufacturers led by Ms Nida Ejaz here on Sunday. He added that modern designing and new trends play a crucial role in the furniture industry.

By embracing these trends, he said, the furniture manufacturers can thrive in a dynamic and evolving industry.

"Modern furniture designs often incorporate technological advancements to provide enhanced functionality and convenience. Integration of features like smart furniture, wireless charging, and IT connectivity can make furniture more appealing to tech-savvy buyers," he observed.

The PFC chief was of the view that keeping up with new design trends allows manufacturers to leverage technological innovations and offer products that align with the digital age.

He said latest design trends often emphasize sustainable and eco-friendly materials and manufacturing processes.

With growing environmental awareness, customers are increasingly seeking furniture that is produced responsibly.

## Revolutionizing university land use: PIDE's bold vision for commercial partnerships, enhanced revenue

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a pioneering move, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), a Premier National Think Tank, has made public its investigative report titled "GORs Everywhere: University Land for Public Housing."

Authored by Nadeem Ul Haque, Vice Chancellor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, M. Jehangir Khan, and Iram Nadeem, this study embarks on a critical analysis of the conventional utilization of university lands, predominantly allocated for housing within educational institutions' premises, said in a press release issued here on Sunday.

It advances a transformative outlook proposing the allocation of these tracts for commercial endeavours through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), aiming at amplifying universities' revenue streams whilst augmenting local economies and societal well-being.

According to the Press Release issued from the PIDE, Islamabad office, the report states that Universities globally have evolved from their traditional roles to become contemporary, business-oriented centres of education and research, enjoying greater autonomy and financial independence.

This shift comes as higher education faces the dual challenges of growth and sustainability, prompted by the scarcity of tax dollars and diminishing societal support.

In response, institutions

are increasingly adopting entrepreneurial approaches, including self-promotion, forging partnerships, and embracing technological innovations, to thrive in the knowledge economy and align themselves as competitive entities in both domestic and international arenas.

In Pakistan, universities confront similar financial challenges and debates over resource allocation, particularly concerning the construction of housing colonies on campus lands. Such practices are criticized for squandering valuable assets that could be more strategically utilized to enhance the institutions' financial viability and fulfil their educational missions more effectively.

Central to the study's findings is an insightful comparison between the land use strategies employed by globally renowned universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, and their counterparts in Pakistan.

This contrast not only sheds light on the successful financial models adopted by these international institutions—stemming from strategic investments in commercial ventures on their campuses—but also underscores the significant potential for Pakistani universities to replicate such success.

Through meticulous analysis, the report brings to the fore the extensive opportunity costs entailed by the maintenance of residential colonies on university lands, underpinned by

the examination of high property values across major cities including Islamabad, Lahore, and Peshawar.

Emerging from these observations, PIDE posits a series of policy reforms aimed at reimagining the use of university lands.

Key among these is the suggestion to monetize residential perks for faculty and staff by introducing market-rate rentals for university-owned properties, thereby creating a new income stream.

Furthermore, the institute advocates for the development of high-rise residential and commercial complexes, a move anticipated to optimize land use and maximize revenue generation.

Central to realizing these visions is the establishment of PPP ventures, characterized by clearly defined profit-sharing models and ownership structures, ensuring that universities retain land ownership over the long term.

PIDE's call to action targets a broad audience, including policymakers, educational institutions, and the private sector, urging them to deliberate on the study's findings and recommendations.

By embracing these innovative land-use strategies, Pakistani universities stand on the brink of achieving financial independence, reducing their reliance on government funding, and significantly contributing to the country's economic growth and social development.

## Reducing interest rates to devalue rupee, raise inflation, says Murtaza

ISLAMABAD (INP): President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), Murtaza Mughal has said that demand of the business community to reduce the interest rate was unjustified, as it will weaken the rupee and trigger inflation.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said an interest rate cut would allow the government to start unnecessary expenditures that are not required at this point.

Murtaza Mughal said that electricity and gas prices have troubled the entire country. People are going bankrupt while factories are closing down.

Many factories were running at half their production capacity; therefore, the demand to reduce the electricity and gas tariff was justified, but getting approval from the IMF will be impossible, he added.

The business leader said that increasing the tax net, bringing the non-tax-paying sectors into the tax net, and amending the NFC award have become necessary to save the country.

Restructuring of local and foreign debt has also become necessary. Still, caution is needed in this regard so that it does not hurt the market, he cautioned.

Murtaza Mughal said the federal government is considering handing over the electricity distribution companies to the provinces. How will the provinces run these companies when the federal government cannot run them?

It would be better to sell these companies because the private sector would run them efficiently. He noted that bill-paying consumers have to bear the burden of loss-making discos, which is tantamount to encouraging corruption and power theft.

The people of the same area should also bear the burden of losses caused by electricity theft, and not the people of other areas should be punished for the crime they never committed, he said.

Dr. Mughal said climate change has become routine;

therefore, the entire process must be reset to address the issue.

Regrettably, throughout the past two or three election cycles, successive governments have paid little more than lip service to climate change and developed a coherent policy to mitigate its harmful effects.

The fact that provincial disaster management agencies are constantly behind the times despite having a full year and substantial funding to prepare for yearly rains is equally unacceptable.

When the civil machinery fails to clear roads and remove floodwater, as it does every time, the military is compelled to intervene and demonstrate the proper procedure.

We need an appropriate long-term and long-term plan, as Pakistan is among the top nations facing the most direct effects of climate change and global warming.

He said we need an appropriate short-term response mechanism for the

annual rain overflow, adding that politicians must set aside their competing agendas and act in the nation's and its citizens' interests.

Everything that is occurring around us is completely expected. Unfortunately, none of it has gotten any attention because our political leaders have been too preoccupied with lusting for power.

### Big industry grows by 1.48 per cent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The output of the Large Scale Manufacturing Industrial (LSMI) sector witnessed an increase of 1.48 per cent during the month of January 2024 compared to the same month of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

On a month-on-month basis, the production in January also showed 0.03 percent growth over the output of December 2023.

Overall the LSMI showed a decline of 0.52 per cent during July-January 2023-24 when compared with the same period of last year, according to PBS data.

The main contributors towards the overall growth of -0.52% included, food (0.38%), beverages (0.12%), tobacco (-0.82%), textile (-1.90%), garments (0.86%), paper & board (-0.10%), petroleum products (0.44%), chemicals (0.46%), pharmaceuticals (1.32%), iron & steel products (-0.05%), electrical equipment (-0.31%), automobiles (-1.38%) and furniture (0.31%).

The provisional quantum indices of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) for January 2024 with the base year 2015-16 have been developed based on the latest data supplied by the source agencies, including the Oil Companies Advisory Committee, Ministry of Industries and Production, Ministry of Commerce and Provincial Bureaux of Statistics.

## Dollars' demand in market must remain balanced: Shahid Rasheed

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Sunday that the demand for dollars in the market should remain balanced.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that a balanced exchange rate increases confidence in the market, which is very important. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that maintaining the dollar's value was necessary to maintain the current balance between imports and exports.

A change in the value of the dollar affects the import and export sector, which

disturbs the business environment, he added.

The business leader noted that the exporters get worried when the dollar becomes expensive. When the dollar becomes cheap, the imports start to increase, which causes the deficits to rise. Both these situations affect the business environment. He said that the dollar's depreciation will increase the trade and current account deficit, which has been controlled with incredible difficulty.

The seven-month current account deficit has been reduced to one billion dollars, and the federal government has to pay 24 bil-

lion dollars in debt servicing in the current fiscal year, so no risk can be taken. Shahid Rasheed said that exporters were currently facing problems. They have to use the most expensive electricity in the region. Gas has become more costly by 300%, the interest rate for them was up to 25%, and fuel was also expensive.

The government had proposed to make electricity cheaper for the export sector, which the IMF rejected. In the current situation, finding another way to relieve the exporters has become necessary.

He said the government

will likely sign the staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund next week, which will clear the way for Pakistan to receive the last tranche of \$1.1 billion under the SBA Agreement.

The government has assured the international lender of jacking up the electricity tariff from July 1, while monthly, quarterly, and yearly fuel adjustments will be slapped on consumers for cost recovery. The IMF delegation stressed to continue to protect people registered in BISP program and demanded to keep strict monetary policy and market exchange rate.

## BMP asks govt to work on fast track plan to address expansive energy issue

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has asked the government to work on a fast track plan to address expansive energy issue and priority should be given to the value-added industry in this regard.

The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that Pakistan's core issue is the high cost of doing business, which the government needed to bring down to bring the local as well as the export industry at par with global competitors.

The BMP Chairman urged for increasing ease of doing business, lowering

cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch, relaxing import policy for industrial raw material, and equalizing the energy tariff across the country.

He said Pakistan was at 147 out of 190 countries on the global ranking of doing business mainly due to bureaucratic hurdles. He said various provincial departments, including EOBI, Social Security, Women Welfare, Environment Department etc. were playing a negative role and treating the manufacturers and exporters like criminals.

The FPCCI former president called for giving a boost to the export sector by adopting diversified marketing techniques and extending practical support

to the industry, and asked the exporters to prepare themselves for meeting the global challenges so that exports could be enhanced by fully exploiting new opportunities. He also stressed the need for adopting new technology so that Pakistan's exports may be able to cope with the emerging challenges in international arena.

He urged the government to undertake thorough research and also brief the SMEs of the details of such challenges. He hoped that the government would help boost country's exports, while all the macro and micro issues of the trade and commerce should also be addressed.

He said that growth of economy was a must to

steer the industry of worse situation and contribute to the exports of the country. He observed that the domestic industry should be allowed to grow while enjoying the right to avail opportunities against the competitors.

The businessmen leader said the benefits of the GSP Plus status can only be harvested by maximum value-addition in finished products rather than exporting only raw materials, which cannot be possible without relaxation in import policies.

The Businessmen Panel (BMP) chairman said that business community has been facing tough challenges because of limited business. In this context, he sought attention of the government for formulation of

regional, provincial and central level task force, and formulation of sector wise regional policies which would help the government address the problems confronted by exporters.

The FPCCI former president called for promoting industrialisation and enhancing exports through lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch and relaxing import policy for industrial raw material.

Mian Anjum Nisar asked the government to appreciate the role of industry for its potential to harvest maximum benefits, providing mass employment to the jobless population of the country. He also sought government's attention for formulating aggressive

marketing plan and hurdle-free policies as well as urgent decisions in favour of exports while taking on board major stakeholders. He called for concerted efforts for exploring new markets both traditional and non-traditional in order to introduce home made products.

He urged the government to announce favourable policies and allow duty-free import of raw material and accessories. This move will attract investors and help in setting up new industries in the country which will create wide opportunities for employment.

We direly need a stimulus economic plan coupled with relief package by the government to maximise

production.

He also emphasized the need for seeking technical knowhow from China and other countries for the sake of innovation, and improvement of products.

The BMP chairman said the sustainable solution to Pakistan's problems lies in reforms, as we can see very large inefficiencies in tax collection. So, the tax compliance must be improved and tax base be broadened. This cannot be achieved with a single policy change, but by a systemic approach, he added.

He observed the government preferred direct taxation to meet revenue shortfall as opposed to resorting to increasing indirect taxes because direct taxes tend to be more progressive in

nature; therefore, the burden on the lower income strata of the population is lesser. He emphasised that concentrating on import substitution is imperative to narrow import bills and certain imported products such as oil are of a fixed nature; therefore, the government needs to enhance focus on import substitution industries, as chemicals, agriculture and steel are potential industries.

He said that undertaking structural reforms require political will. He said that enacting structural reforms, such as improvements in tax collection system, bureaucracy and ease of doing business requires major political will and strict implementation of policies, he added.





In brief

Afridi wants Amir to take back retirement

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistani captain Shahid Afridi has commented on the possibility of Quetta Gladiators' pace bowler Mohammad Amir reversing his retirement from international cricket. Afridi, while talking to a local news channel, praised Amir for his bowling skills and rated him among the best pace bowlers in the country. "Amir can easily make his way into the lineup of the Pakistan team even today. He falls in the category of Haris Rauf, Naseem Shah, and Shaheen Afridi," said Shahid Afridi. "There is still cricket left in Amir and he should play for Pakistan." Amir, who shockingly announced retirement from international cricket back in 2020 at the age of 28, claimed ten wickets in nine matches during the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine. Gladiators' wicket-keeper batter Sarfaraz Ahmed also voiced the same sentiments last month during the early stages of the PSL 9. Ahmed acknowledged the value Amir brings to T20 cricket in an interview and expressed confidence in the latter's abilities. "The inclusion of Mohammad Amir has made a big difference. He has been bowling really well and has a lot of experience of playing T20 cricket," Sarfaraz said. "I have always told Amir that he can still play for Pakistan since he has a lot to offer. He can be useful for Pakistan but it depends on Amir how he sees his future with the national team," he further added.

Kane returns to England

MUNICH (AFP): Harry Kane will have an ankle injury treated by England national team doctors in "close consultation" with Bayern Munich's medical department, the Bundesliga champions said on Sunday. Kane scored his 31st Bundesliga goal of the season in Bayern's 5-2 victory at Darmstadt on Saturday, surpassing Uwe Seeler's record for the most goals in Germany's top flight in a debut season. But England's captain and record goalscorer limped off in the 82nd minute after suffering a blow to his left ankle. Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel confirmed later that Kane had "stumbled and fell into the net and twisted his ankle" with club sporting director Christoph Freund insisting Kane "will take no risks" with injury. Kane will travel to England's training base at St George's Park ahead of two friendlies at London's Wembley Stadium against Brazil on March 23 and Belgium three days later. The forward has a long history of ankle injuries, having been sidelined on five separate occasions with problems during his time at Tottenham Hotspur. Two separate injuries to the same ankle in 2019 saw him miss three months of the season, including both legs of Tottenham's Champions League semi-final victory over Ajax. On Saturday, Tuchel said he "hoped the incident was just a scary moment" with the team's next match at home to Borussia Dortmund on March 30. "When Harry goes off it's never a good sign because Harry never goes off when there's still goals to score," Kane broke a 60-year record for most goals scored in a debut season in the Bundesliga. His 31 goals from 26 games overtook German legend Seeler, who scored 30 goals in the 1963-64 season for Hamburg.

## Islamabad United, Multan Sultans set to battle for HBL PSL 9 title

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Karachi's National Bank Stadium is set to host the HBL PSL 9 final on 18 March 2024, wherein table-toppers Multan Sultans will meet Islamabad United to battle it out for the grand Orion trophy. The first ball is expected to be bowled at 9pm, while the toss will take place at 8:30pm.

Sultans, who qualified for the final after beating Peshawar Zalmi in the Qualifier, will be playing their fourth consecutive final. They were crowned champions in the 2021 edition and finished as runners-up in the subsequent two editions wherein Lahore Qalandars clinched two back-to-back titles.

After finishing third on the table, United beat Quetta Gladiators and Peshawar Zalmi in the two eliminators to earn the coveted berth in the final. This will be two-time champions United's first final since 2018 – when they last won the HBL PSL title.

In the lead-up to the playoffs, Multan Sultans secured 14 points after winning seven out of their ten games. United finished with five wins, whereas their home game against Lahore Qalandars was washed out. As a result, United had 11 points, equalling with the fourth-placed Quetta Gladiators.

Multan's Mohammad Rizwan and Usman Khan are the second and third highest run-getters of the

tournament thus far, only behind Peshawar Zalmi's Babar Azam who ended HBL PSL 9 with 569 runs in 11 innings, including five half-centuries and one century. Rizwan has accumulated 382 runs in as many innings, with four half-centuries. Usman, having appeared in only six games, has made 373 runs on the back of two centuries and a half-century.

Colin Munro, with 309 runs from nine games with three fifties, is the highest run-getter for Islamabad United. Islamabad's skipper Shadab Khan has also starred with the bat and ball alike this season; in 11 games, he has produced 301 runs, including three half-centuries, and taken 11 wickets. Leader of the Sultans' spin attack, Usama Mir, is the current leading wicket-taker of the tournament, holding the Inverex Fazal Mahmood Cap. He has 23 scalps in 11 games, including one six-wicket haul.

His current tally of 23 is the best by any spinner in one edition of HBL PSL and is only two wickets behind Hasan Ali's record of 25 wickets, the most by any bowler in one edition, which has not been bested since 2019. Sultans' right-arm pacer Mohammad Ali, playing his maiden HBL PSL tournament, has 18 wickets in 11 games, the most by any pacer in the tournament thus far.

Naseem Shah, who made his move to

Islamabad United ahead of HBL PSL 9, has the most wickets for his team thus far. Assuming his role as the leader of Islamabad's bowling attack, the right-arm seamer has grabbed 15 wickets in 10 games.

Shadab Khan: "I'm proud of my team for standing tall in crucial situations and getting through to the final of HBL PSL after a long hiatus of five years. This is what we intended while assembling the squad and all the players have responded very well throughout the group stage as well as the playoffs. Islamabad winning the trophy for the third time will be a great achievement and I'm looking forward to whatever challenge Multan Sultans will pose in the final. Hopefully, our batters and bowlers will step up in a spirited manner as they have done throughout the season and will make us champions."

Mohammad Rizwan: "I am very proud of the way my team has played in this tournament. Our boys have displayed the true warrior spirit throughout the tournament. Whenever we found ourselves behind the opposition, our players stepped up through their bold and fearless approach. "We have a solid team that has all the bases covered. Our locals, foreigners and emerging players have shone and produced some extraordinary performances."

## Chelsea survive Leicester scare to reach FA Cup semi-finals

LONDON (AFP): Carney Chukwuemeka rescued Chelsea with a stoppage-time strike that inspired a 4-2 win over 10-man Leicester in an FA Cup quarter-final thriller on Sunday. Mauricio Pochettino's side were fortunate to survive a stirring fightback from Championship promotion chasers Leicester amid a mutinous atmosphere at Stamford Bridge. Chukwuemeka netted in the closing minutes to save Chelsea from the embarrassment of being forced into extra-time. Noni Madueke added Chelsea's fourth to ensure the angry fans who booed Pochettino in the second half were silenced, at least for now.

For the sixth time in the last eight years, the Blues have advanced to the last four in the FA Cup. But this was hardly a triumphant afternoon for Blues boss Pochettino, whose inconsistent team blew the two-goal half-time lead given to them by Marc Cucurella and Cole Palmer.

In between those strikes, Raheem Sterling missed a penalty and Axel Disasi gave Leicester hope with a farcical own goal early in the second half. When Stephy Mavididi scored an eye-catching equaliser, Chelsea were in turmoil once again as the hapless Sterling earned the wrath of the home support. But Leicester's Callum Doyle was sent off for a professional foul on Nicolas Jackson, setting the stage for the Blues' late revival. Chelsea have failed to win a single domestic trophy since their most recent FA Cup triumph six years ago.

The west Londoners are languishing in 11th place in the Premier League and former Tottenham and Southampton boss Pochettino is yet to win silverware in England. Under mounting pressure amid a troubled first season in charge, Pochettino revealed this week that some of Chelsea's young players endured a sleepless night before their League Cup final defeat against Liverpool in February. Making amends by

winning the FA Cup would buy Pochettino some much-needed breathing space.

Chelsea jeers

Chelsea had taken the lead in the 13th minute when Nicolas Jackson accelerated past Jannik Vestergaard into the Leicester area before whipping over a low cross that Cucurella converted from close-range. It was the Spanish defender's first goal since joining Chelsea from Brighton in August 2022.

In the 25th minute, Cole Palmer surged down the right flank and crossed to the edge of area, where Sterling was clattered by Abdul Fatawu as he prepared to shoot.

Palmer has been taking Chelsea's penalties this season and Sterling's decision to grab the ball proved misguided. A frustrating season for the 29-year-old, who was left out of the England squad again this week, showed no signs of abating as he fluffed his lines with a weak penalty that was easily saved by Jakub Stolarczyk.

To his credit, Sterling didn't hide and he set up Palmer's goal on the stroke of half-time. Sterling raced into the area and delivered a low cross that Palmer deftly slotted home from close-range. Disasi gave Leicester a lifeline in the 51st minute as the centre-back panicked under pressure from Daka and hacked a misjudged backpass past stunned keeper Robert Sanchez into his own net from 30 yards. Weaving into the Chelsea area as the anxious Blues defence backed off, Mavididi curled a blistering finish into the top corner in the 62nd minute. Chelsea thought they had been given a penalty in the 73rd minute when Doyle tripped Jackson. VAR ruled the offense was just outside the area, but that didn't save Doyle from a red card. Sterling was booed by Chelsea fans after a woeful free-kick, while Pochettino also copped it with chants of "you don't know what you're doing" when he substituted Mudryk.



LONDON: Carney Chukwuemeka of Chelsea scores his team's third goal past Jakub Stolarczyk of Leicester City during the Emirates FA Cup Quarter Final.

### Curry helps Warriors beat James' Lakers

LOS ANGELES (Agencies): Stephen Curry scored 31 points as he helped the Golden State Warriors beat LeBron James' Los Angeles Lakers 128-121.

James scored 40 points for the Lakers but could not stop the Warriors leapfrogging them into ninth place in the Western Conference.

"They always going to talk about me and him," Curry said of James.

"It was about our total group tonight. For us, it takes a whole team to win and we needed it - we needed it bad."

The match was marred by lengthy replay delays, with one overturning a three-pointer from James, and multiple shot-clock malfunctions with about two minutes to go.

"I've never seen that in my career. Usually they have a back-up clock or something," said 36-year-old Curry, who returned after a three-game absence because of an ankle injury.

"That's the worst thing that could happen, especially this age. You build up all pre-game, you get going and when the engine shuts off it's hard to get it going again."

The Warriors are a percentage point above the Lakers, with both teams in the last two play-in positions in the Western Conference., external

The Lakers were hindered by losing Anthony Davis after the first quarter because of an eye injury.

"A big win for us," added Curry. "I don't know the last time we won in here against them. Big deal."

Elsewhere, Jalen Brunson scored 42 points to help the New York Knicks to a 98-91 victory against the Sacramento Kings.

Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Memphis Grizzlies 118-112 to move top of the Western Conference, alongside the Denver Nuggets with a 47-20 record.

Jalen Williams scored 23 points and registered seven rebounds and six assists in the Thunder's win.

## PFF names squad for FIFA World Cup Qualifiers

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) announced the final national men's squad for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifier Round 2 matches against Jordan on Thursday, with diaspora players set to join the team from Monday.

Pakistan will lock horns with Jordan at the Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad on Mar 21 followed by an away fixture in Jordan on Mar. 26.

In October 2023, the Pakistan men's football team beat Cambodia 1-0 to win their first ever FIFA World Cup qualifier in Islamabad. Pakistan subsequently lost 4-0 to Saudi Arabia in the second round.

"The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) named a final squad for the forthcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifier Round 2 matches against Jordan, scheduled to

be held at Jinnah Stadium, Islamabad on 21st March followed by an away game in Jordan on 26 March," the PFF said in a statement.

It said the week-long camp for the Jordan fixtures will be relocated from Lahore to Islamabad on Sunday. A total of 36 teams, grouped into nine groups of four teams each, are competing to progress through to the third round of the qualifiers.

The top two from each group from the second round will head into the third round, where 18 nations will be split into three groups of six. From there, the top two of each group will secure their spot at FIFA World Cup 26.

Pakistan men's football team coach Stephen Constantine on Saturday acknowledged that Jordan was one of the best sides in Asia but vowed Pakistan would not "lay down" in

front of their opponents.

"We have very little time to prepare for such a big game. And unfortunately, we are going to play one of the best teams [Jordan] in Asia on 21st March," Constantine said.

"We will fight against Jordan and not lay down."

**Squad: Goalkeepers:** Yousef Butt (D), Saqib Hanif, Abdul Basit and Hassan Ali

**Defenders:** Easah Suliman (D), Abdullah Iqbal (D), Mamoon Musa, Haseeb Khan, Mohammad Saddam, Mohammad Sohail, Omer Rao, Mohammad Fazal (D) and Mohammad Adeel

**Midfielders:** Rahis Nabi (D), Harun Hamid (D), Alamgir Ghazi, Rajab Ali, Ali Uzair, Shayek Dost and Abdul Samad (D)

**Forwards:** FareedUllah, Waleed Khan, Imran Kayani (D) and Adeel Younis.

## Alcaraz ends Sinner run to set up Medvedev final



INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): Carlos Alcaraz ended Jannik Sinner's 19-match unbeaten run to set up a final against Daniil Medvedev at Indian Wells.

Australian Open winner Sinner was 2-1 up in the first set when the match was interrupted by a three-hour rain delay. The Italian won the opener when they resumed before Spaniard Alcaraz fought back to claim a 1-6 6-3 6-2 victory.

Russia's Medvedev also came back from a set down to win his semi-final 1-6 7-6 (7-3) 6-2 against American

Tommy Paul. The final will be a repeat of last year's which Alcaraz won comfortably. "To be able to end something like this, it's incredible for me," said world number two Alcaraz, 20, about halting Sinner's streak.

"I stayed strong mentally – I think that's a really important part in this game."

"This kind of match, a set down playing against someone that's playing an unbelievable game – I'm really happy with the things I've done. "I changed my style a little bit, I changed my game a little bit, and I think it

worked very, very well,"

Sinner's standards slipped in the third set, when he hit eight of his 15 unforced errors, while Alcaraz only made two unforced mistakes in the decider. "It's for sure not the ending that I wanted, but playing against him is always tough," said world number three Sinner, 22.

"I tried to play good tennis, which I have done, especially in the first set. "Then I made a couple of mistakes. The momentum changed. He raised his level." Alcaraz will be aiming to win his first title since Wimbledon last year when he takes on Medvedev.

"I know what happened last year so I'm going to try my best to try to turn this around, to play better, to play stronger, more on the lines, hit more aces, stuff like this," said the 28-year-old Russian.

"Hopefully I will be able to do it."

## Peshawar Zalmi's dreams of reaching final for fifth time crushes



PESHAWAR (APP): In the second eliminator of the 9th edition of the HBL-Pakistan Super League, Islamabad United crushed Peshawar Zalmi's dream of reaching the final for the fifth time thanks to an unbeaten partnership of 98 runs by Imad Wasim and Haider Ali.

In another sensational match of PSL, Islamabad qualified for the final of the event for the third time by claiming victory. Peshawar Zalmi was defeated by 5 wickets in Ely Monitor 2. Peshawar Zalmi's

dream of playing the final for the fifth time in Karachi's National Bank Arena could not be fulfilled. After a one-sided match in the first qualifier of (PSL), they defeated Peshawar Zalmi by 79 runs and reached the final. And so, under the leadership of Rizwan, the franchise won the honor of reaching the final for the fourth time in a row.

This is a new record as from the beginning of HBL-PSL-9th, Peshawar Zalmi's bowling looked weak and this bowling on wickets favorable for batting. The

average remained the same. The bowling of Multan Sultans was the best in this HBL-Pakistan Super League's 9th edition.

The second place was the bowling of Islamabad United. Even in this match against Peshawar Zalmi, at one point Peshawar Zalmi was in a good position and it seemed that will cross the mark of 200, but due to Islamabad's best bowling, it was limited to 185 runs, which was not a difficult target on Karachi's good pitch. On this occasion, Imad Wasim played a match-winning innings of 59 runs off 40 balls while Hyder Ali scored a brilliant 52 runs off 29 balls. An unbeaten partnership of 98 runs and won the match by five wickets to reach the final for the third time.

Islamabad had a disappointing start and the first three wickets fell for 21 runs with Alex Hales one, Agha Salman five and Shadab Khan bowled out on no score and returned to the pavilion. Martin Gupthill scored 34 runs and Azam Khan got out with 22 runs. After that, Imad Wasim and Hyder Ali played an unbeaten aggressive innings and played an important

role in the team's victory. Saim Ayub got two wickets for 34 runs.

Earlier, Peshawar Zalmi, batting first, scored 185 runs for the loss of 5 wickets in the stipulated overs and set Islamabad United a target of 186 runs to win. Saim Ayub played a brilliant innings of 73 runs, 6 in his innings. Fours and four sixes were included. The team of Peshawar Zalmi made three changes Hussain Talat, Arif Yaqoob and Khurram Shahzad were given a chance in the match.

Peshawar Zalmi scored his fifty runs in 5.2 overs without any loss and the whole ground was echoing with Babar's voice. Naseem Shah dismissed Babar Azam wherein Shadab took a brilliant catch and brought the team back into the match. Naseem Shah's spell proved decisive as he did not allow the 200 mark to be crossed and then, in favorable batting conditions, Peshawar fell well short of a tight total. Mohammad Harris, who was constantly unsuccessful, put up some resistance and played an innings of 40 runs. Apart from them, Babar Azam scored 25 runs, Tom Kholar Cadmore scored 18

runs. Naseem Powell scored 2 runs. Naseem Shah dismissed three players for Islamabad. PSL 9's Haneef Muhammad cap has fallen to Babar Azam. He has scored 569 runs in 11 matches. The best innings was 111 runs. He scored five half-centuries and one century during this time. He is the closest batsman to Babar Azam. In international matches, his opening partner Mohammad Rizwan has scored 381 runs.

Mohammad Rizwan has scored four half-centuries. Multan Sultans' Mohammad Usman is third in this list who has scored 373 runs, which includes two centuries. His best innings was 106 runs. The fourth number is Dosan of Lahore Qalandar who scored 364 runs thanks to one century and three half-centuries. The best innings was 104 runs. The fifth number is Saim Ayub of Peshawar Zalmi who scored two half-centuries in eleven matches. He scored 345 runs with the help of half-centuries. In terms of sixes, Saeeam Ayub is on top this season with 21 scalps. In bowling, Usama Mir of Multan Sultans, who dismissed 23 players, Mohammad

Ali of Multan Sultans, who is in second place by taking 18 wickets. On the third place is Abrar Ahmed of Quetta Gladiators who has dismissed sixteen players. In fourth place is Aqeel Hussain of Quetta who has taken 15 wickets. In fifth place is Naseem Shah of Islamabad. Shah also dismissed fifteen players with his fast balls.

The final of HBL-PSL 9 edition will be played between Multan Sultans and Islamabad United today at the National Stadium Karachi. The most popular team of Pakistan Super League, Peshawar Zalmi, defeated Quetta by 76 runs and reached the play-off stage for the 9th time. That is a unique record. In the last 8 seasons, Peshawar Zalmi reached the final four times. Apart from them, Multan Sultans also reached the final and equaled Peshawar Zalmi's record of four times. Islamabad, Lahore Qalandars and Quetta Gladiators three times. They have reached the final three times. Islamabad and Lahore Qalandars have won the Pakistan Super League title twice. Peshawar Zalmi, Quetta, Multan Sultans and Karachi Kings have reached this final once.





## In brief

### Ten gamblers apprehended

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a crackdown on illegal online gambling, Morgah police have apprehended 10 gamblers who were involved in betting on horse races here Sunday. The gamblers were identified as Khurram Shehzad, Aslam, Abdullah, illyas, Raees, Tahir, Irshad, Siddique, Abdul Waheed, and Fayyaz Hussain. Upon their arrest, police also seized a total of Rs 12,650, 09 mobile phones, laptops, LED screens, and various other devices presumably used for facilitating the illicit gambling activities. SP Potohar Nasir Nawaz emphasized that gambling is root cause of other evils. He reiterated that strict action will be taken against such anti social elements without any discrimination.

### 5 stolen motorcycle recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested three members motorcycle gang and recovered 05 stolen motorcycles from their possession during crackdown here on Sunday. According to police spokesman, R.A Bazar police held three member bike lifter gang while taking action who were identified as Chand Shahzad, Hassan Ali and Saqib Ali. Police have registered separate cases against all of them and further investigation was in progress. SP Potohar Nasir Nawaz commended police team and said that the accused who deprive the citizens of their valuable assets cannot escape from the grip of the law. He made it clear that it is prime duty of police to protect the lives and properties of people.

### WASA recovers Rs 1044.572 mln

RAWALPINDI (APP): Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi had recovered over Rs 1044.572 million in the first eight months of the financial year 2023-2024, said Managing Director (MD) WASA, Muhammad Saleem Ashraf. He said that on the directives of the DG, Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Rawalpindi, Kinza Murtaza, WASA had accelerated its ongoing revenue recovery campaign. Total connections of WASA are 154,017 out of which 137,629 are domestic and 16,388 are commercial, he said and informed that over Rs 1044.572 million were recovered in first eight months of the financial year 2023-2024, which is more than the target. Along with this, the crackdown against the defaulters was launched and it would continue to improve the recovery, he added. According to a WASA spokesman, FIRs would also be lodged against the defaulters and illegal connections. In future installments of the bills would not be allowed and the customers would have to pay their entire bill, he added. Mobile SMS service would also be introduced and the bill information would be provided to all the consumers through SMS, he said. The City Police Officer, Rawalpindi would be requested for the provision of a police team to help the WASA authorities in the recovery of WASA outstanding dues from the defaulters. A Business Facilitation Center to facilitate the businessmen had been set up in RDA in which the representatives of all the departments concerned are available, he said and informed that WASA would also appoint its representative who would issue the WASA No Objection Certificate and collect the dues of WASA if any before transfer of any property.



ISLAMABAD: National flags flutter cover a billboard installed on Faizabad Bridge ahead of Pakistan day on 23 March 2024.

## PUC vows global action against Islamophobia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi said the Council is set to escalate its efforts on a global scale to foster interfaith dialogue and harmony.

Addressing international media in connection with the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' the other day, he emphasized that Islamophobia poses a grave threat to Muslims worldwide. Ashrafi urged world powers to accelerate initiatives to eradicate Islamophobia, labeling it as a toxic barrier hindering interfaith harmony.

He called upon the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other international bodies to champion initiatives aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination while nurturing a culture of love, tolerance, and coexistence.

He stressed that Islam embodies peace, love, and tolerance, emphasizing the teachings of Allah Almighty and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ashrafi lamented the incitement of non-Muslims against Islam, attributing it to misinformation and hatred propagated against Islamic teachings.

Recognizing Islamophobia as a crime, Ashrafi highlighted the designation of March 15 as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' by the United Nations, a milestone achieved through collaborative efforts involving Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other entities. Ashrafi emphasized the urgency of addressing global anti-Muslim sentiment, branding

discrimination as a significant threat to world peace. He underscored the need to clarify the distinction between Jihad and terrorism through dialogue, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which fueled widespread misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the Western world. The PUC, Ashrafi said, pledged to intensify its global endeavors for interfaith dialogue and harmony, culminating in an upcoming international conference, themed 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' in Islamabad after the holy month of Ramadan.

He informed that the conference would be comprised all faith leaders as the invitations will be tendered to Imam of Khana-e-Kaba, Grand Imam of Palestine, Sheikh Al-Azhar, Pop Francis, Bishop of Canterbury and others.

## Awareness walk about kidney diseases

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Noon Foundation successfully hosted an awareness walk on Sunday evening near Mehran Gate, F-9 Park with aimed to enhance understanding of kidney diseases, their prevention and treatment options.

A renowned nephrologist, Dr Zahid Nabi engaged with participants in an interaction talk, focusing on raising awareness about kidney diseases and advocating for lifestyle changes to avert severe kidney-related complications, said a press release. Administrator of a dialysis center supported by Noon Foundation, Dr Zubair Hassan underscored the alarming prevalence of Diabetes Mellitus in Pakistan which is nearly 30 percent.

## Ayaz, Amiri discuss booting parliamentary, economic ties

ISLAMABAD (INP): Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq was called on by Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Amiri Moghaddam on Sunday and they discussed strengthening parliamentary and economic relations between the two countries. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq reaffirmed Pakistan's deep-rooted fraternal bond with Iran, steeped in shared history, culture, and religion, said a news release.

Emphasizing the need to strengthen these ties further by expanding cooperation across all mutual areas of interest, particularly in energy and trade, he stressed to uplift the economies of both nations, especially those living on both sides of the common border.

The Speaker NA highlighted the strategic geographical positioning of both countries, presenting significant opportunities for regional and global connectivity and trade promotion. While acknowledging the positive trajectory in bilateral trade, he noted that there is untapped potential that both nations should explore.

He stressed the importance of cordially addressing pending issues related to bank-

ing, trade, transportation, and energy. Additionally, he expressed optimism about resolving issues related to the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.

Ayaz Sadiq underscored the pivotal role of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening bilateral relations. He expressed intent to actively engage all relevant stakeholders regularly to support governmental efforts in achieving the common goal of expanded economic cooperation.

Dr. Amiri Moghaddam congratulated Speaker Ayaz Sadiq on his re-election and extended warm Ramadan greetings.

He praised the Speaker's vision for collective growth and assured full commitment and cooperation from Iran across all areas. The Ambassador also informed the speaker about the upcoming visit of the Iranian President to Pakistan, highlighting its significance in advancing bilateral relations and enhancing cooperation in various sectors. Ayaz Sadiq thanked the Ambassador for his kind words and pledged mutual efforts to strengthen the bond between Pakistan and Iran.

## Faisal Masjid to host 300 individuals for Aitekaf

ISLAMABAD (INP): During last Ashra of Ramadan, as many as 300 Muslim will execute Aitekaf at Faisal Masjid this year in a bid to deepen their spiritual connection. Aitekaf is a revered Islamic tradition of seclusion and devotion. Faisal Masjid administration has opened its doors to those seeking this profound spiritual experience in the last Ashra (10 days) of the holy month. It has announced

that applications for Aitekaf will be accepted until the 10th of Ramadan, allowing eager devotees to secure their spots in advance. Applicants are advised that the process operates on a first-come, first-served basis, emphasizing the importance of prompt submission. Prospective participants are required to obtain an application form from the Faisal Masjid Islamic Centre office. Alongside the application, individuals must provide two

passport-sized photographs and a copy of their national identity card, ensuring all necessary documentation is in order. With the responsibility of Suhoor and Iftar arrangements falling upon the participants, individuals are urged to prepare accordingly for the duration of their Aitekaf. It's worth noting that the opportunity for Aitekaf is open to individuals up to 60 years of age, fostering inclusivity within the spiritual community.

## PMNH finally on way to expansion

ISLAMABAD (APP): The country's only natural history museum – Pakistan Museum for Natural History (PMNH) with its collection of around 1.6 million specimens is finally on way to expansion after experiencing a painful sluggish response of authorities during respective regimes.

Since, its establishment in 1976, this project generally remained a picture of neglect with its incomplete structure, when year 2023 proved as fortuitous for PMNH with the government allocating funds for construction of its remaining blocks.

The delayed construction of six blocks of this important outfit was a big hurdle in enhancing display of huge collection of unique specimens and expanding its galleries to attract maximum visitors.

But after years, the previous coalition government led by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif finally allocated funds for this project and ensured that same are also released on time. "The construction work of the museum has been started after receiving initial funds out of total Rs. 500 million allocated for this year. This money would be spent on construction of these blocks," stated Dr. Khalid Mehmood, who is heading this project in PMNH.

He informed that the contractors have been hired by the Public Works Department during October last year and work has been started.

"Construction of six blocks would be completed during three years time and it would help address the issue of space shortage for displaying more specimen," Dr Khalid said.

Although the science and technology sector in Pakistan witnessed a boom during last few years with its departments diligently focusing on research and innovation, but the Pakistan Museum for Natural History (PMNH) could not get due share of funds to complete construction of its

lingering six blocks.

The museum comprising only two blocks and delay in their completion since its establishment in 1976 had compelled the PMNH administration to display maximum specimens of natural resources in small rooms and corridors. Besides providing research facilities to faculties and students, PMNH regularly organizes trainings, workshops, seminars, symposia and other educational interactive activities related to natural history, environment and biodiversity of Pakistan.

PMNH has also formed many national and international liaisons with the other research institutes in the country and abroad.

"The museum executed a number of research projects of national importance including 'cooperative development of an innovative auto-ID platform for beetles from China and Pakistan' with the cost of Rs. five million," informed DG PMNH, Dr. Saima Tanveer.

"Hazards of wildlife aircrafts strike and their prevention" and 'Biosystematics of Insect Fauna of Khunjerab National Park, Gilgit Baltistan' are our two important projects being executed at the cost of Rs. 4.3 million and Rs. 4.5 million respectively," she informed.

The Director General also mentioned to projects like development of outdoor volcano display, integration of QR code technology to enable visitors to scan code of the exhibit through their android phone and get all linked information, development of teachers training and STEM Resource Lab and a training program for school kids to teach them about conservation of nature.

"Despite financial constraints, PMNH generated Rs.6398.755 million revenue during year 2021-22 through visitors of its galleries," she said. "In all 86,587 visitors including 102,085 students and 658 foreigners

visited the facility during this period." Dr Saima also informed that PMNH has four principal divisions namely Botanical Sciences Division, Earth Sciences Division, Zoological Sciences Division and Public Services Division.

First three scientific divisions are engaged in collection, identification and research activities pertaining to plants, animals, fossils and mineral resources of Pakistan, while fourth one is responsible for mass education and popularization of natural history through various displays, exhibits and dioramas. Researchers of PMNH carry out extensive field works from the Coast of Arabian Sea to the Alpine Regions, roam through barren areas for collection of Flora and Fauna, Rocks, Fossils and minerals not only for research work but for education also as one of the main objectives of the museum.

Students of schools, colleges and universities all over Pakistan visit PMNH as a part of their educational tours while scientific and technical staff of PMNH facilitate and assist them in their research work by dispensing information, technical assistance and specimens.

PMNH is an attached department of Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF), Ministry of Science and Technology with a designated assignment of collection, preservation and identification of flora fauna, rock, fossils, gems, minerals, etc. with a two-fold objective of exhibiting these to teach general public and visitors about biodiversity and natural history and conducting research through field study by scientists for identification and cataloging. The expansion of this facility, after completion of the remaining blocks, will definitely increase the number of visitors and help generate more revenues.

## TJP chief grieved over martyrdom of Army soldiers

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Tehreek-e-Jawaan Pakistan (TJP) Mohammad Abdullah Gul has expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of the officers and soldiers of Pakistan Army in North Waziristan terrorist attack.

In a condolence message on Sunday, the TJP Chairman prayed for the exaltation of the ranks of the martyrs in the hereafter and blessings of peace and patience onto the bereaved families. Abdullah Gul said it was not easy to offer the funeral of martyrs while expressing his deep grief and pain over the martyrdom of the brave sons of

the soil. He said that the government and opposition leaders should abstain from politics on such occasion as it was not the time for scoring points but rather for creating motivations and encouragement among all the ranks and files of the nation.

The TJP chief regretted that it was big tragedy but no news channels turned their screen margins and logos dark to express solidarity or held any talk show. "There should not be a criminal silence on such big tragedy on the floor of the National Assembly and the Senate, but rather should express sorrow and share the pain with the mar-

tyrs' families, because our children sleep peacefully due to the guard of Army soldiers at border," he said.

Abdullah Gul mentioned that martyrs did not only belong to the institutions but rather of nation and the nations that did not value their heroes fall into decline.

The martyrs included Colonel Syed Kashif Ali, Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar, Havaladar Sabir, Naik Khurshid, Sepoy Nasir, Sepoy Raja, and Sepoy Sajjad who embraced martyrdom while gallantly thwarting terrorists' attack on the military post in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan.

## HRCP's awareness campaign

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has started an awareness campaign aiming to recognize the right to health as a fundamental right accorded to everyone in the constitution without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, age, ability, sexual orientation or class. The HRCP in its 'people's manifesto' has demanded of the state and key players in the health sector to at least 10 percent of the budget be allocated, particularly in provincial budgets, to healthcare, strengthening workforce capacity and infrastructure of health care.

HRCP's demanded to take a holistically approach to healthcare as physical, mental

and social wellbeing as prerequisite for people's living in a country.

"Prioritize healthcare in local, provincial and national policymaking, instead of leaving it subject to political, economic, social and environmental variables, HRCP further added.

"Make healthcare freely accessible, or at least affordable, for all. Healthcare must be accessible by vulnerable groups and those in remote areas of the country", the HRCP demands.

To conclude the HRCP added that there is dire need to promote preventive measures, address misconceptions, and foster a culture of wellbeing through education and mass awareness campaigns.

## Admin takes solid steps to reduce prices of daily use items

RAWALPINDI (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema has said that the administration had taken solid steps to reduce the prices of daily use items. He informed that 50 magistrates were monitoring the prices of food items in Rawalpindi district.

163 shopkeepers involved in profiteering were arrested during March, he informed. The DC said that 15

cases were registered and 14 shops were sealed on the sale of substandard items.

Fines amounting to over Rs 3.5 million were also imposed on the retailers found involved in profiteering, he said adding, in over 30,000 inspections conducted and nearly 1350 violations were checked.

Hassan Waqar Cheema informed that the price of onion in Rawalpindi is Rs 100 less than Islamabad. There is a big wholesale

market in Islamabad which is controlled by the Islamabad administration, he said and informed that a market had recently been established in Rawat where the prices of vegetables and fruits were being monitored to provide relief to the citizens. Agriculture Fair Price Shop and wholesale market had also been established on the special instructions of the Punjab Government to facilitate the people, the DC added.



ISLAMABAD: Large number of people participating in a Walk to "Raise Awareness About Kidney Diseases Their Precautions & Treatment in Pakistan" at Mehran Gate F-9 Park.



2 workers of gold mine killed

BADAKHSHAN (Ariana News): Two people died after a gold mine they were working in collapsed in Badakhshan, local officials said. Hikmatullah Mohammadi, the director of information of the Department of Information and Culture of Badakhshan, said that the incident happened in the Vakhanda village of Kohistan district. He added that a landslide also occurred on the same day and in the same district, without causing any human casualties or financial loss.

Hundred Afghans repatriated

KABUL (BNA): Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation announced the involuntary return of more than a hundred Afghans from Pakistan to the country. According to statement, approximately 127 Afghan migrants returned to the country on the dates of 14th and 15th of March from the virtual Torkham border line. Based on information from the Torkham border crossing authorities in Nangarhar Province, 25 families, comprising 127 individuals, were forcibly repatriated.

IE welcomes UN's mandate extension



KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate, welcoming the extension of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) mandate, has called on UNAMA to pursue its mission based on the interests of Afghan citizens. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, told TOLONews that the body should prepare and present reports on the current realities of Afghanistan. Mujahid said, "UNAMA's mission should encompass all issues that connect both the United Nations community and the people of Afghanistan, and must also consider the realities of Afghanistan in its mission."

Some global institutions have also asked UNAMA to prioritize the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in its agenda. Amnesty International, welcoming the extension of the UNAMA mission, urged Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the mission, to prioritize the human rights emergency in the country with a focus on the rights of women, girls and minorities, as well as the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Amnesty International said: "UNAMA must continue its public, robust, and frequent human rights reporting, while maintaining pressure on the Taliban to reverse all edicts that suffocate the rights of women and girls."

Tariq Farhadi, a political affairs expert, regarding the extension of UNAMA's mission, said: "There are two things that UNAMA cannot provide for us; the reopening of girls' schools and the constitution, this is the responsibility of the caretaker government that has promised it, and it must be actively realized."

Human Rights Watch also said that action must be taken to protect and secure human rights in Afghanistan. Heather Barr, the Associate Director of Human Rights Watch, told TOLONews, "It is excellent news that UNAMA's mandate has been renewed for a full 12 months, and it is important that this happened unanimously because it signals that there is still international consensus about the concerns about Taliban's abuses in Afghanistan. The work that the human rights unit within UNAMA does monitoring the human rights situation is absolutely essential as the situation continues to worsen."

Prior to the extension of UNAMA's mission, the Islamic Emirate stated that the body had not reflected the realities in Afghanistan and must present its reports impartially.

Taliban shut down two stations

KABUL (Radioinfo): According to local sources, two private radio stations – Shamla and Dehkada, were temporarily closed by the Taliban municipality in Ghazni province. The stations were shut down for not possessing the required municipal licenses, although they had licenses from other government entities. This was the second closure of the stations for the same reason in a week. The closures, which lasted for three hours, led to protests from media officials and local journalists and an intervention from the Information and Culture department. They were permitted to resume operations, provided they agreed to meet the municipality's taxation demands within one week. Taliban municipal officials have conveyed to the media organizations that pressure from Kabul authorities necessitates the enforcement of municipal law, which includes an annual "license tax" of 7,000 Afghan afghanis, approximately US \$100. This action, according to the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) places undue pressure on media organizations, effectively subjecting them to double jeopardy by demanding additional licensing when they already comply with broader regulatory and tax requirements.

Afghan student injured

KABUL (Ariana News): Five international students were injured when a mob stormed a Gujarat University hostel in India on Saturday night allegedly over prayers. India's State Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi has reportedly spoken to Gujarat's top police officers and directed them to arrest the accused as soon as possible and to investigate the matter fairly, NDTV reported. The students had gathered inside the hostel to offer taraweeh, a prayer offered at night during Ramadan, as there is no mosque on campus. Soon after starting prayers, a mob armed with sticks and knives stormed the hostel, and attacked the students. They also vandalized their rooms. Students told NDTV the security guard had tried to stop the incident but had not been able to. A student from Afghanistan said people in the mob shouted slogans and asked them who had granted them permission to offer prayers in the hostel. "They attacked us inside the rooms too. They broke laptops, phones and damaged bikes," he said. The student said the five injured students are from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Turkmenistan and two from African countries. "Police arrived half an hour after the incident. By then, the mob had fled. The injured students are in hospital and have informed their embassies," the student said. Visuals shared on social media showed damaged bikes, broken laptops and ravaged rooms. In some of the visuals, people are seen throwing stones at the hostel and hurling abuse at the foreign students. In the visuals, the international students are heard saying that they are "scared" and that "this is unacceptable".

21 dead in bus collision with tanker in Helmand



KABUL (AFP): Twenty-one people were killed and 11 injured in a traffic accident between a passenger bus, a tanker and a motorbike, a provincial governor spokesman Mohammad Qasim Riyaz told AFP. The accident occurred on Sunday morning in Gerashk district of Helmand province on the main highway between

southern Kandahar and western Herat provinces, a statement said. A motorbike crashed into a passenger bus, which then hit a fuel tanker on the opposite side of the road, said Qudratullah, a traffic official in Helmand. An investigation into the accident was underway, he added.

Eleven of the 38 injured people were transferred to hospitals with serious injuries, said Hazratullah Haqqani, a spokesman for the Helmand police chief. Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, mainly due to poor road conditions and driver carelessness.

US Intelligence report: Low threat of uprising in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community has stated that the near-term prospects for regime-threatening resistance in Afghanistan remain low. The annual report reads that, large swathes of the Afghan public being weary of war and fearful of "Taliban" reprisals, and since armed remnants lack strong leadership and external support, the threats to the Islamic Emirate are low. The report further reads that the current Afghan government has strengthened its power, suppressed its opponent groups and has bolstered international engagement but the issues of humanitarian crisis and

rights are unlikely to be addressed adequately. "The Taliban will not adequately address Afghanistan's persistent humanitarian crisis or structural economic weaknesses. The Taliban will continue to implement restrictive measures, carry out public punishments, crack down on protests, and prevent most women and girls from attending secondary school and university," reads part of the annual report. Regarding the request of the Islamic Emirate to be formally recognized, the report states that the regional powers will cautiously proceed with the Kabul's request. "Regional powers will

continue to focus largely on keeping problems contained in Afghanistan and seek to develop transactional arrangements with the Taliban while proceeding cautiously with Taliban requests for formal recognition," part of the report. The Islamic Emirate top officials have persistently said that they want positive engagement with all countries in the world including the US and Russia and that the current diplomatic and economic relations with countries, is recognition of the caretaker government. The intelligence report has also expressed concern about the US persons possibly facing ideologi-

cally diverse threat from terrorism. According to the report, al-Qa'ida has reached an operational nadir in Afghanistan and Pakistan and ISIS has suffered cascading leadership losses in Iraq and Syria, regional affiliates will continue to expand. Earlier, the Islamic Emirate has said that Afghanistan's soil is secure and that no group will be allowed to threaten other countries from it. In respect to its opponents, top officials in Kabul have continuously asked those who have left Afghanistan to return to country and contribute to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Distribution of dates by KSRelief begins in Kabul



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has launched the distribution of dates provided by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid

and Relief Center (KSRelief), an official said. Mawlawi Matiulhaq Khaleq, the acting head of the ARCS, told a gathering

organised for the distribution of dates that the KSRelief provided 100 tonnes of dates to the ARCS to be distributed amongst needy people and pledged more assistance in the future. He said the KSRelief last year also assisted 47,000 vulnerable families through the ARCS. According to Mawlawi Khaled Qatar and Turkiye assistance also arrived in Afghanistan. ARCS Spokesperson Erfanullah Sharafzoy said this assistance worth 15 million afis and would be distributed to 12,500 families in different provinces of Afghanistan.

Girls express hopes for new academic year



KABUL (TOLONews): With the start of the new academic year just six days away, several girls who have missed out on education are voicing their concerns over the ongoing school closures, expressing a strong desire to return to their studies. They emphasize their unwillingness to endure the hardships they faced over the past two years, marked by a lack of access to education. Yalda, who was close to completing the tenth grade, has found solace in painting during her time away from school. In a conversation with a TOLONews reporter, she shared her readiness for the new academic year, along with her hopes to rejoin her classmates soon. "I hope this year marks my return to school; we're

prepared, having purchased school uniforms, notebooks, pens, and books. I've also been keeping in touch with my friends," Yalda added. For many girl students, the thought of schools reopening and returning to their studies has become a dream. Nourin, another student, shared her hopes: "This year, we aim not to revisit the bitter experiences of the past but to concentrate on realizing our future dreams and aspirations." Addressing the ongoing closure of schools, Bahar, another student, appealed to the Islamic Emirate, "I urge the authorities to reopen the schools for us. I don't want to face disappointment as I did last year, being turned away at the school gates."

University professors have highlighted the broader societal implications of continued school closures. Professor Parviz Khalili said: "With each day that girls are barred from education, Afghanistan confronts increasing challenges and problems." Although the Islamic Emirate has not recently commented on the reopening of schools for girls in the new academic year, it has previously stated that the closure of schools and universities for girls is temporary, with efforts underway to reopen them.

Resident Mohammad Reza Ahmadi told Pajhwok Afghan News they had no ENT specialist in the

provincial capital and districts. He said they could not afford to take their patients for medical treatment to Kabul or other provinces due to poverty. "We want authorities to take effective steps to solve this problem so that our people don't have to travel long distances or go to other provinces for treatment," he commented. Anwar, a resident of Meramor district, said: "An

insect entered my daughter's ear. I searched the entire city for an otolaryngologist. Finally, I took her to Kabul, where the problem was resolved and she got better immediately." He complained due to the lack of ENT specialists and equipment, people were forced to pay exorbitant fees for the treatment of minor illnesses. Hussain, another resident, claimed not much attention had

been paid to the health sector of the province either in the past or currently. He called the ear, throat and eyes very important and sensitive parts of the human body, but their minor disease could not be treated in Daikundi. Widespread poverty and long and impassable roads made it difficult for residents to transport their patients to Kabul, he argued. The resident urged

the government to pay serious attention to addressing the issue. Dr. Mohammad Ghani Samim, director of public health, acknowledging absence of an otolaryngologist in the province. "There are no ENT specialists in public hospitals. We have repeatedly shared this issue with higher-ups and proposed enhancing the capacity of the provincial hospital." He said if their

demand for upgrading the hospital were accepted, then facilities would be created there for the treatment of ENT diseases. He clarified only one private hospital was active in Daikundi, where no treatment facilities existed for ENT diseases. According to him, ENT specialists could not come to Daikundi because private hospitals were unable to hire their services.

Daikundi residents irked by absence of ear, nose and throat specialists



KABUL (TOLONews): A source has told TOLONews that the Islamic Emirate has introduced a new military attaché to the Afghan embassy in Moscow who has been accepted by Russian authorities. Ahmad Zmarak Yaser has recently been introduced as the military attaché in Moscow and has begun his duties, the source said. The Islamic Emirate has not officially confirmed the introduction of this attaché; however, it stated that the interim government of Afghanistan seeks engagement with all countries, including Russia. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said: "Afghanistan's relationship with Russia is at a very good level; we have diplomatic, economic and trade relations managed through diplomatic channels and embassies, which are progressing well. We want our relationships with all countries to be secured."

Experts said the existence of military attachés in political representations of countries is important. Taher Yarghal, a military affairs expert, told TOLONews: "A military attaché works on specific duties such as concluding arms and weaponry contracts

with the country where they are stationed and arranging military scholarships." Afghan military affairs expert Zalmay Afghan Yar said: "It is reassuring that Afghanistan has good military relations with Russia and alongside it, there is the possibility of professional-

ization and capacity building by sending Afghan soldiers to Russia for military capacity enhancement." The Islamic Emirate previously introduced economic attachés and those for the migrant sector to several countries, both close and far.



# Gaza truce efforts revived as first aid ship unloaded

GAZA STRIP (AFP/APP): Efforts towards a truce in the Israel-Hamas war appeared to rekindle on Saturday after a new proposal from the Palestinian militant group which also called for more aid into Gaza, where the first food shipment by sea reached shore.

Israel said it would send a delegation to Qatar for a new round of talks on a possible deal. It also advanced plans for a military operation in Rafah, where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge from more than five months of war and deprivation. The US charity World Central Kitchen said its team had finished unloading almost 200 tonnes of food, the first shipment to arrive on a new maritime aid corridor from Cyprus.

"All cargo was offloaded and is being readied for distribution in Gaza," it said in a statement. The Cypriot government said that a second aid ship, the Jennifer, would depart soon, although World Central Kitchen later said rough weather made it hard to predict when the vessel, carrying 240 tonnes of food, would set sail.

"Maritime weather reports show bad weather from Sunday until end of next week -- so exact timing of sailing for either boat to return to Gaza is not available at this time," the charity said in a statement. The United Nations has reported particular difficulty in accessing north Gaza to distribute food and other aid.

Residents say they have resorted to eating wild plants and animal fodder, and some have stormed the few aid trucks that have made it through.

"Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies," Dominic Allen, of the United Nations Population Fund, said after visiting the area.

With the situation increasingly dire, donors have turned to deliveries by air or sea. Multiple governments have begun daily aid airdrops over Gaza, while the new maritime corridor is to be complemented by a US-military-built temporary pier. But air and sea missions are no alternative to land deliveries, UN agencies say. Humanitarians have cited Israeli restrictions as among the obstacles they face.

The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said at least 63 people had been killed over the previous 24 hours.

Earlier Saturday, ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra reported 36 deaths from a

strike on a house sheltering displaced people in Nuseirat, central Gaza. The Israeli military said it had targeted two "terror operatives" in Nuseirat "throughout the night" without elaborating. It added it was reviewing the "circumstances of the incident". AFP TV images showed a building blown apart. Yusef Tabatibi said survivors were trying to recover the dead with only their bare hands.

"What should we do? God help us," he said. In negotiations aimed at securing a truce and hostage release deal, Hamas has put forward a new proposal for a six-week ceasefire and the exchange of about 42 Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, an official from the Islamist group told AFP. Palestinian militants seized about 250 Israeli and foreign hostages during the Hamas attack which triggered the war on October 7.

Dozens of captives were released during a week-long truce in November. Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza, including 32 presumed dead.

The Hamas attack resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures. Israel's retaliatory campaign against Hamas has killed at least 31,553 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry.

Until Friday, Hamas had insisted no further hostages would be exchanged without a permanent ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Now the militants are saying that, during a six-week truce, Israeli forces would need to pull out of "all cities and populated areas" in Gaza, according to the Hamas official. The Hamas proposal also calls for more humanitarian aid, the official added.

Israel has so far rejected withdrawing troops from Gaza, saying such a move would amount to victory for Hamas.

The White House said Friday it was "cautiously optimistic" about the prospects for a new truce but stressed that negotiations were far from over. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Israel would send a delegation to Qatar for a new round of talks. Before its departure for Doha, representatives of the negotiating team held talks with army, intelligence and security service commanders late Saturday chaired by Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, his ministry said.

## President rejects workplace harassment case against FCE Professor

ISLAMABAD (APP): The President of Pakistan has rejected the appeal filed by Waseem Ajmal Chaudhary, Secretary, Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MOFE&PT), challenging the order issued by the Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment. This decision comes in the wake of a contentious case involving allegations of harassment against Dr. Samia Dogar, a former director at the Federal College of Education (FCE).

Earlier on December 8, 2023, the Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment issued a final order directing the Ministry of Education and Professional Training to reinstate Dr. Samia Dogar to her previous position as a Professor (BS-20).

This decision followed an appeal filed by Dr. Samia against Waseem Ajmal Chaudhary under the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Key concerns were raised by the Ombudsman regarding the initial inquiry committee's proceedings, highlighting serious violations of Dr. Samia Dogar's due process rights.

These included the absence of cross-examination of witnesses and the failure to examine crucial evidence such as a video recording of a Zoom call. Consequently, the Ombudsman set aside the initial inquiry committee's report and directed the Ministry of Education to reinstate Dr. Samia and conduct a fresh inquiry into the harassment complaint.



NAWAB SHAH: Daughter of Former Prime Minister Shaheed Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto, Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari submitted her nomination form to R.O for for By- election.

# Aseefa Bhutto submits nomination papers

## E.P Report

S H A H E E D BENAZIRABAD/NAWA BSHAH: Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has officially submitted her nomination forms for the upcoming by-election in NA-207.

In the recent general elections held on February 8, President Asif Ali Zardari secured a significant victory in this

constituency.

However, following his election to the presidency, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declared the National Assembly seat vacant in accordance with the law.

According to a press release from the Media Cell Bilawal House, Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari arrived at the returning officer's office in Nawabshah to formally

submit her nomination forms.

Sindh Health Minister Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, along with other party leaders, accompanied her.

Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's submission of nomination forms for the NA-207 by-election has sparked a wave of jubilation and enthusiasm amongst the citizens of Shaheed Benazirabad, and Jiyalas nationwide.

# Gaza facing famine, ceasefire needed rapidly: Ursula von der

CAIRO (Reuters): European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Sunday that Gaza was facing famine and there had to be a rapid ceasefire agreement in the war between Israel and Hamas. "Gaza is facing famine and we cannot accept this," von der Leyen told reporters, speaking in Cairo after signing a strategic partnership agreement with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

"It is critical to achieve an agreement on a ceasefire rapidly now that frees the hostages and allows more humanitarian aid to reach Gaza," Sisi said that Egypt and European leaders have agreed to reject an Israeli military operation in Rafah.

"(An operation) would double the humanitarian catastrophe that civilians in the Gaza Strip are suffering from, in addition to the effects of that operation on liquidating the Palestinian cause, which Egypt outright rejects," Sisi said.

His comments follow the announcement of a 7.4 billion euro (\$8.1 billion) funding package from the EU for Egypt, as well as an upgrade in relations with the North African nation, part of a push - criticised by rights groups - to stem migrant flows to Europe.

Meanwhile, the European Union announced a 7.4 billion euro (\$8.06 billion) funding package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt,

part of a push to stem migrant flows to Europe that has been criticised by rights groups.

The agreement, which lifts the European Union's relationship with Egypt to a "strategic partnership", was announced as a delegation of leaders visited Cairo. It is designed to boost cooperation in areas including renewable energy, trade, and security while delivering grants, loans and other funding over the next three years to support Egypt's faltering economy. The proposed funding includes 5 billion euros in concessional loans and 1.8 billion euros of investments, according to a summary of the plan published by the EU.

## Brave son of the soil sacrifices his life for homeland

HAVELIAN (APP): The land of martyrs and warriors, Tehsil Havelian has sacrificed another young patriot for the motherland on Sunday. Sajjad Yousaf, son of Muhammad Yousaf, serving his duties in Frontier Constabulary (FC) in North Waziristan, suddenly came under attack by terrorists.

Sajjad Yousaf showed great courage and fought bravely until he embraced martyrdom. He was buried with full military honors in his ancestral village, Sambil Dhera Tehsil Havelian. A smartly turned out military contingent presented guard of honour to the martyred Yousuf and also laid floral wreath on the grave.

Chairman Tehsil Havelian Aziz Sher Khan, accompanied by notable figures expressed heartfelt condolences to Bilal Khan's father, Asif Khan who has sacrificed his life in the line of duty a couple of days ago while fighting against terrorists in Adam Khel Pass, during a condolence ceremony. The ceremony concluded with prayers for the departed soul and the laying of a floral shroud on Bilal Khan's grave.

The community mourns the loss of these brave sons of Tehsil Havelian, who bravely confronted terrorism to safeguard the motherland. Their sacrifice serves as a beacon of pride for the entire region, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps.

## Maleeka Bokhari gets permission to fly to Australia

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Tehreek I Insaaf leader, Maleeka Bokhari has got permission to fly to Australia to see her sister in a hospital after Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz took a prompt action on her appeal to let her go Australia.

Taking to X (formerly known Twitter), Maleeka Bokhari said, "I have come to know that my name has been excluded from No Fly List." She thanked Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for giving a sympathetic view to her appeal for help.

The CM in her tweet prayed for the early recovery of Maleeka Bokhari's sister. Maleeka Bokhari in her tweet has appealed to the people for the early recovery of her sister.

"Please pray for my sister Erum Bokhari, who is only 46 years old and has gone in coma after suffering brain haemorrhage. She is fighting for her life on a ventilator in a hospital in Australia. I cannot not travel out of the country to be with her. She has been a mother to me.

# Defence minister accuses PTI of working against national interests

SIALKOT (APP): Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif has condemned the terrorist incident in Mir Ali and paid tribute to the martyrs.

Addressing a press conference at his residence at Sialkot Cantonment, Khawaja Muhammad Asif said that unity is necessary then this war would spread in every street and neighborhood. Khawaja Muhammad Asif said that martyrs are our benefactors. "Our security forces have made countless sacrifices against terrorism and the defense of this country has been kept strong by the blood of our martyrs. The Pakistan Army is sacrificing their lives in the ongoing war against terrorism. Our soldiers, including a Lt-Col and a captain, were martyred in yesterday's terrorist attack in Mir Ali," he added.

He said that it is our Pakistan Army that ensures our safety while being present at the borders in all circumstances and we the people

are sleeping peacefully while these people ensure the fulfillment of their duties in cold and heat.

The Federal Minister said that once again terrorism had been rising for a few months and the war can be fought only by a united government and if on this occasion, there is division then this war would spread in every street and neighborhood. Khawaja Muhammad Asif said that martyrs are our benefactors. "Pakistan Army, our police, our paramilitary, our people, women, men and children have sacrificed their lives in the war against terrorism. If the country is stable today, it is because of martyrs. These martyrs have kept the defence of this country strong by giving their blood for the country," he added.

He condemned the nefarious campaign against martyrs on social media. "Our martyrs are our pride, but there is no doubt that those who gave wrong

remarks against them are in touch with terrorists.

We are determined that we will definitely succeed in uprooting terrorism, but for that we all have to be united," he added.

The Defence Minister said that the previous government of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) had successfully broken the nexus of terrorists, militants and insurgents in the country and it would eliminate the terrorists again and would not hesitate from any sacrifice for it.

He said that our Pakistan Army is one of the great forces of the world which is determined to raise its flags of success on any front.

Khawaja Muhammad Asif added that Pak Army martyrs, who embraced martyrdom while defending the motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, were ridiculed by a political party on social media.

# Protest call as Russian vote to confirm Putin wraps up

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): Kremlin critics called for massive protests at Russian polling stations on Sunday for the final day of a presidential election that is guaranteed to cement Vladimir Putin's hardline rule.

The three-day vote has already been marred by a surge in fatal Ukrainian bombardments and a series of incursions into Russian territory by pro-Ukrainian sabotage groups.

There have also been acts of protest in the first days of polling, with a spate of arrests of Russians accused of pouring dye into ballot boxes or arson attacks.

Before his death in an Arctic prison last month, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who galvanised mass anti-Putin rallies, urged Russians to protest on Sunday.

His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has reiterated his call in the run-up to the election and said protesters should show up in large numbers at the same time to overwhelm polling stations.

She called for protesters to spoil ballots by writing "Navalny" on them, or vote for candidates other than Putin. Any public dissent in Russia has been harshly punished since the start of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and there have been repeated warnings from the authorities against election protests. A Moscow resident in his twenties told AFP he would take part in the protest at 12:00 pm (0900 GMT) in the capital, "just to see young supportive faces around... feel some support around me, and see the

light in this dark tunnel."

The man, who declined to give his name for security reasons, said he hoped the demonstration would show the authorities "that there are people in this country against the conflict... against the regime."

The 71-year-old Putin, a former KGB agent, has been in power since the last day of 1999 and is set to extend his grip over the country until at least 2030. If he completes another Kremlin term, he would have stayed in power longer than any Russian leader since Catherine the Great in the 18th century. He is running without any real opponents, having barred two candidates who opposed the conflict in Ukraine.

The Kremlin has cast the election as an opportunity for Russians to show they are behind the assault on Ukraine, where voting is also being staged in Russian-held areas.

In a pre-election address on Thursday, Putin said Russia was going through a "difficult period". "We need to continue to be united and self-confident," he said, describing the election as a way for Russians to demonstrate their "patriotic feelings". The voting will wrap up in Kaliningrad, Russia's westernmost time zone, at 1800 GMT and an exit poll is expected to be announced shortly after that.

A concert on Red Square is being staged on Monday to mark 10 years since Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula -- an event that is also expected to serve as

a victory celebration for Putin.

Ukraine has repeatedly denounced the elections as illegitimate and a "farce", and its foreign ministry has urged Western allies not to recognise the result. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, as well as more than 50 member states, have slammed Moscow for holding the vote in parts of Ukraine, with Guterres saying that the "attempted illegal annexation" of those regions has "no validity" under international law.

Ahead of the election, Russian state media have played up recent gains on the front and portrayed the conflict as a fight for survival against attacks from the West.

Moscow has sought to press its advantage on the front line as divisions over Western military support for Ukraine have led to ammunition shortages, although Kyiv says it has managed to stop the Russian advance for now. In Ukraine, a Russian missile strike on the Black Sea port city of Odesa on Friday killed 21 people including rescue workers responding to an initial hit -- an attack President Volodymyr Zelensky described as "vile".

On the Russian side, the army has reported repeated attempts by Ukrainian sabotage groups to cross into Russia and the local governor in Belgorod region on Saturday decreed that shopping malls and schools would be shut for two days in the main city Belgorod and the surrounding district following recent strikes.