

Quake shakes Balochistan
F.P. Report

QUETTA: An earthquake of magnitude 5.4 jolted parts of Balochistan on Tuesday early morning. The magnitude of the quake was 5.4 on Richter Scale, the seismic center reported. The tremors were felt in Quetta, Noshki, Chagai, Chaman, Qila Saifullah, Pashin, Mastung and other parts. The epicentre of the earthquake was some 150 kms away from Quetta, according to the seismic centre.



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PM seeks ‘early implementation’ of Pak-Kuwait deals

Shehbaz directs for a report over provision of relief to recent rain affected people

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday called for concerted efforts from both sides to ensure the early implementation of seven agreements worth US\$ 10 billion signed between Pakistan and Kuwait in November last year.

The bilateral ties were discussed in a meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Pakistan Nassar Abdulrahman Jasser Almutairi who called on him here. The prime minister noted with satisfaction that both countries had signed seven agreements for cooperation in diverse areas including food security, technology, hydel power, mining and minerals, water supply and mangrove rehabilitation, a PM Office press release said.

In this context, he emphasized the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) which provided a robust and efficient mechanism to attract foreign investment into Pakistan. He said that Pakistan attached great importance to its historic and deep-rooted ties with Kuwait.

He thanked the Kuwaiti leadership, including Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, for the warm wishes and felicitations on his re-election. The PM expressed the desire to work closely with them to further strengthen the bilateral relationship with a focus on trade and investment. He also extended an invitation to Amir of Kuwait to visit Pakistan at his earliest convenience.

The Kuwaiti ambassador thanked Pakistan for its support to Kuwait in difficult times. He thanked former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif for his strong public support to Kuwait's independence and sovereignty during the 1990-91 crisis. He also expressed gratitude for Pakistan's support to Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ambassador reaffirmed Kuwait's strong commitment to build closer ties with Pakistan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appreciated Ambassador Almutairi's contribution in fostering stronger ties between Pakistan and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also directed for submission of a report regarding quick and transparent provision of relief to the people affected by recent torrential rains across the country.

He also directed the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to accomplish a joint survey report in collaboration with the provinces, besides enhancement of cooperation with the provinces to face the future calamities.

The PM also sought an implementation report over his directive in the previous tenure regarding technical improvement of NDMA. PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister was given a detailed briefing by the NDMA about the relief and rehabilitation activities in wake of recent torrential rains as well as weather forecast and preparedness. The meeting was attended by Minister for Economic Affairs and

Establishment Ahad Khan Cheema, Chairman NDMA Lt Gen. Inam Haider Malik and relevant senior officials. Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal attended the meeting through video link. The meeting was apprised of the recent damages, rescue efforts and distribution of assistance amount. The NDMA with assistance of provinces; specially Balochistan would soon complete a collective verification survey over number of complete and partially damaged houses.

Under the PM's directive, a total of 766,000 kg dry ration would be distributed in Gwadar till March 24, out of which about 388,000 kg ration had been distributed so far till March 16. Moreover, 97,000 kg ration had been distributed in Quetta and Dalbadin, it was further informed. The PM directed that the relief process should be completed immediately, besides ensuring transparency in its distribution. With earlier completion of joint survey, the aid should be provided to the affected people only, he stressed, adding that affected people from the recent rains could not be left in despair and it was among government's top priority to support them.

The meeting was further informed about the weather forecast during April to June and July to September in the current season and the preparedness of NDMA. The prime minister was also apprised of the relief assistance sent to the affectees of Gaza by the NDMA. From October to this day, a total of 320 tons relief goods had been sent.

462 hate-filled social media accounts shut

ISLAMABAD (INP): Islamabad Police in a proactive move to combat online extremism and drug trafficking have taken stringent action, closing down hundreds of social media accounts found to be spreading religious, national, and linguistic hatred.

The Anti-Extremism Unit spearheaded this effort, shuttering a total of 462 accounts, of which 65 were identified for their dissemination of religiously provocative content, 47 for anti-national propaganda, and a staggering 350 for their involvement in propagating terrorist material.

According to the official spokesperson of Islamabad Police, a comprehensive sweep identified a total of 1,522 accounts engaged in nefarious activities. A formal request has been forwarded to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for the immediate closure of these flagged accounts, with plans underway to shut down the remaining 1,060 accounts in the near future. This decisive action underscores Islamabad Police's commitment to curbing extremism and enhancing the security landscape of the city.

Emphasizing the importance of public cooperation, the spokesperson urged citizens to refrain from participating in or supporting such negative activities on social media platforms. Legal repercussions await those found culpable, with Islamabad Police encouraging citizens to report any suspicious behavior through the dedicated Pukar 15 or ICT 15 app.

In addition to combating online extremism, Islamabad Police have also made significant strides in the fight against narcotics. Under the vigilant supervision of SSP Operations Islamabad, ongoing anti-narcotics operations have yielded substantial seizures. Notably, authorities confiscated 80 kg of heroin, 3.4 kg of methamphetamine (ice), and 78 kg of hashish in the current year of 2024. The dedication of law enforcement agencies is evident in the remarkable statistics provided by the police spokesperson.

Nawaz's sons acquitted in NAB cases

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court Tuesday granted relief to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's sons — Hasan and Hussain — on the petitions seeking acquittal in corruption cases related to the Al-Azizia Steel Mills, Flagship company and Avenfield apartments.

Earlier, while presenting arguments before the court, the brothers' counsel Qazi Misbah said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz was exonerated by the trial court in the Flagship reference, while the National Accountability Court (NAB) withdrew its appeal against the trial court verdict as well on November 29, last year.

The lawyer said the proceedings could not be carried out merely on the allegations of abetting in a crime, when the main suspect had been acquitted. At the outset of the case, the court inquired Deputy Prosecutor NAB Azhar Maqbool about the report he was supposed to submit on the plea. The deputy prosecutor apprised the court that the Supreme Court's verdict was not a hurdle in the case, hence, the court could announce its verdict on the petition.

Maqbool asked the court to record his statement in this regard, stating that the said petition was not referred



to the NAB amendment. In those cases against Nawaz, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and Capt (ret'd) Safdar, the high court had announced its verdict, he said. He said the NAB did not file an appeal against acquittal of Maryam, but Hasan and Hussain were accused of abetting and conspiring. The NAB prosecutor said the main suspect in the cases, wherein Hasan and Hussain were alleged of involvement, were acquitted. The defendant lawyer, Misbah said Nawaz was exonerated on the same documents on which Maryam was acquitted and the accountability watchdog did not file an appeal against their acquittal. He apprised that the Islamabad High Court (IHC) verdict's copy in the case was available on the court's website.

Misbah said the NAB could not present any evidence in the reference against Maryam and Nawaz, hence, the IHC acquitted them in the case.

"The IHC accepted Nawaz Sharif's appeal in December 2023 in Al-Azizia case. The NAB did not challenge the decision to approve Nawaz Sharif's appeal," he said. NAB, the lawyer said, did not present any additional evidence on the basis of which the case should be proceeded against Hasan and Hussain.

Prosecuting Hasan and Hussain would be a waste of court's time, Misbah said, adding that they could not be convicted on the basis of the evidence available with the court. On March 14, an accountability court had approved bail of both brothers in exchange for Rs50,000 bond each in the three references pertaining to Al-Azizia Steel Mill, Avenfield apartments and Flagship.

The court also cancelled the brother's perpetual arrest warrants and fugitive status in the said cases. Upon petitions filed by Nawaz's sons for acquittal, the accountability court had issued a notice to the NAB.

PTI founder acquitted in two cases

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A district and sessions court in Islamabad Tuesday granted relief to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan in two different cases pertaining to the vandalism during March 2022 long march on the former prime minister's plea seeking acquittal.

Judicial Magistrate Shaista Kundi accepted Khan's petitions and acquitted him in cases registered at Islamabad's Lohi Bhair and Sahala police stations. At the outset of the hearing, Khan's

lawyer, Advocate Naeem Panjotra, argued that the vandalism, as per the case, took place at his client's behest.

"Several cases were registered in a single day, PTI's founder was [framed] in the same role," he further argued. He added that neither a notification was issued nor the party was informed regarding the enforcement of Section 144. The lawyer maintained that the plaintiff is the Station House Officer (SHO), who has no jurisdiction to register the case. "There are no witness statements in the cases filed against the PTI founder," he

further argued.

The judicial magistrate asked the counsel if Khan had been acquitted in cases before, responding to which he said: "PTI founder had been acquitted in several cases even earlier." Following the arguments by the former premier's counsel, the court reserved the verdict, which was announced later. Khan, the only prime minister to be voted out of his office, is currently imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail as he serves several sentences in the Toshakana, un-Islamic marriage, and the cipher cases.

The Frontier Post

Three FC jawans injured
F.P. Report

QUETTA: Three jawans of Frontier Corps Balochistan on Tuesday sustained injuries in a blast near a check post of security forces in Kuchlak, a suburb area of Quetta. According to SSP Operations Quetta Jawad Tariq, the explosion carried out with a cracker near the FC check post in Kuchlak, resultantly, three jawans of Frontier Corps Balochistan sustained injuries.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif being briefed about relief and rehabilitation activities in wake of recent torrential rains as well as weather forecast and preparedness.

LPG prices soar again across country

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The local marketing companies in Karachi have reportedly raised the prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) without obtaining prior approval from the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA).

According to a report on Tuesday, this is the third time during Ramadan that LPG prices have seen an arbitrary increase of Rs30 per kilogram. Despite the government's fixed price of Rs257 for LPG, it has been observed to be sold at Rs300 in the market. Additionally, domestic cylinders, which were previously sold for Rs 3,030, are now being priced at an alarming Rs 4,200 in the local market.

The Chairman of the LPG Association, Irfan Khokhar, condemned the unauthorized price hike and emphasized that any increase without proper notification is unjustifiable. The LPG association called for action against those involved in black market activities.

Earlier this week, the OGRA termed the association's increase in the pricing of LPG as unlawful, asking the provincial governments to ensure that LPG is available to customers at prices set by the government. According to the OGRA spokesperson, there is ample storage of LPG molecules in the country, adding that increasing the prices is illegal.

"Illegal hoarding of LPG is the main reason behind the hike in prices," the spokesperson added. He said that some elements are creating an artificial shortage of LPG and the OGRA also informed the provincial chief secretaries regarding the artificial shortage. The OGRA also asked the provincial governments to ensure the provision of gas to consumers at authorities fixed prices.

Shaheen, Marwat granted bail

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: District and Sessions Judge Islamabad has approved bail applications filed by prominent figures including Shoaib Shaheen, Shirafazl Marwat, Ali Bukhari, Seembia Tahir Sati, Ayaz Amir, and others in a case related to protesting against alleged election rigging.

The bail applications were heard by Additional Sessions Judge Tahir Abbas, with lawyer Sher Afzal Marwat representing the accused before the court. During the proceedings, the petitioner's lawyer argued that following the events of May 9, peaceful protests were organized at 73 locations. Despite attempts to provoke violence, the protests remained peaceful, and all allegations outlined in the FIR were deemed fabricated. Subsequently, the court approved the sureties of all leaders, set at Rs 5,500 each.

The incident dates back to February 17 when PTI leaders and workers, led by Sher Afzal Marwat, staged a protest outside the Press Club in Islamabad.

Arrest warrants for KP CM issued

F.P. Report

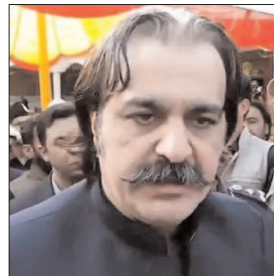
RAWALPINDI / PESHAWAR: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Tuesday issued arrest warrants for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister (CM) Ali Amin Gandapur in a case pertaining to May 9 events, wherein military installations came under attack. ATC Judge Malik Ejaz Asif issued the non-bailable arrest warrants for the newly-elected chief minister and ordered the police to present him before court on April 2. The arrest warrants against Ali Amin Gandapur were issued in a case registered at City Police Station.

Meanwhile, a divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprised Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered the federal government for provision of details of cases registered

against Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, on Tuesday. PHC's divisional bench heard petition of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur seeking details of cases registered against him. "This problem has not yet resolved?" Justice Shakeel Ahmed questioned.

"Problems still persist, we don't know the cases registered in Punjab," counsel Arshad Ahmed said. "Get bail if involved in any case in Punjab," Justice Shakeel said. "If they will provide us details than we will go to courts. They are not providing us details of cases, and nothing has been shared in writing till now," Gandapur's lawyer said. "There are two inquiries against him in D.I. Khan," FIA's Director Legal Abdul Rehman argued.

"He is chief minister of



the province and the people of the province have reposed confidence in him," Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim remarked. He observed that "the people have voted him and now he is running the province". PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel observed that "It is unlikely that you could not provide him details. Provide details of the cases registered against him, to the petitioner". The court adjourned further hearing in the case till 25th April.

US urges both Pakistan & Afghanistan to show restraint

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: The US State Department has asked Pakistan to show restraint against killing civilians in Afghanistan whereas in the same breath it asked the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to not allow their land to be used by terrorists to launch terrorists attacks against Pakistan.

The same comments were made today by White House Spokesperson, Karine Jean Pierre while addressing the media that the US urges both the countries to show restraint.

When asked by *The Frontier Post* that the US is taking very balanced approach towards both the countries and it doesn't seem like the US is considering Pakistan as an ally,

Vedant Patel stated that "next time you have feedback invite me to Yelp" and he also stated that US condemns the loss of lives on both sides where Pakistani soldiers perished and where Afghan civilians got killed.

Vedant further stated that Pakistan is a key partner with whom the US has regular communication with regard to terrorism related issues. It is pertinent to mention here that today at the White House it was journalist from the Voice of America who raised the question about Pakistan and Afghanistan tussle which obviously shows that Washington DC is abuzz about this issue but has decided to allow both Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve this

issue among each other and not become party to this conflict.

On the other hand international news media outlet Al Jazeera is reporting that Pakistan is struggling with the fact that Tehrike Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has gotten their hands on sophisticated weapons which were left behind by the United States at the time of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Other analysts in Washington DC are of the opinion that these small skirmishes between the two countries can eventually lead to a small scale war. At the end of the briefing when this correspondent asked Mr Vedant about the Yelp comment, he said that it was a silly joke.

Police get arrest warrants for Elahi, Murad Saeed

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Police have obtained arrest warrants for former Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Murad Saeed in cases related to incidents on May 9, involving charges of terrorism and other serious provisions.

Reports from the Cantt and Civil Line Circles of Potohar Division indicate that Parvez Elahi has been implicated in cases registered at Cantt and RA Bazar Police Stations under Case No. 836/23 and Case No. 708/23 respectively. Arrest warrants have been issued against him in connection with these cases.

Similarly, PTI leader Murad Saeed finds himself named in Case No. 836/23 registered under the Terrorism Act at Cantt Police Station and Case No. 708/23 at R Bazar Police Station. Arrest warrants have been secured against him as well. However, notable figures like Senator Faisal Javed, Senator Azam Swati, Azhar Mashwani, and Khurram Zeeshan have not been implicated in any cases registered at Civil Lines Police

PTI to launch protest movement across country

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has decided to launch a countrywide protest movement. PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat, while speaking to the media outside the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House, said three important decisions were taken by the core committee meeting, according to a statement on Tuesday.

The core committee decided to launch a strong protest movement in the Centre and the provinces, Marwat said, adding that the first meeting would be held in Islamabad on March 30. "My statement was wrongly presented on TV. We have no differences," he said, adding that the members of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would appear in court during the hearing of the cases of the PTI founder. "Every decision taken by the core committee will be approved by the PTI founder," he concluded.

PTI has also approached the Islamabad High Court seeking permission to hold a rally in the federal capital on March 30th. A petition filed by PTI leader Aamir Mughal, represented by lawyer Sher Afzal Marwat, requests the court's authorization for the gathering.

Station or Morgah Police Station, according to the report.

Records reveal that former federal minister Murad Saeed is facing Case No. 981/23 at Civil Lines Police Station and Case No. 397/23 at Morgah Police Station. Similarly, former Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi is named in Case No. 981/23

at Civil Lines Police Station. The Chief Police Officer's Office in Rawalpindi has been directed to thoroughly examine all records from police station levels and furnish necessary information. Investigations into the criminal records and status of the individuals mentioned, including Parvez Elahi, are underway.

‘Resumption of flights to the UK’

F.P. Report

KARACHI: This explanation pertains to the response of Additional DGCAA regarding a query about the resumption of flights to the United Kingdom during the 43rd E-Kacheri.

The Additional DGCAA's response referred to the upcoming European Union Air Safety Committee meeting in May, and not to the resumption of flights to the UK. With regards to resumption of direct flights to the UK, the efforts are in hand, however exact time cannot be specified at this moment. Any inconvenience in this regard is highly regretted.

Alhambra hosts exhibition

LAHORE (APP): The Alhambra Arts Center welcomed art enthusiasts to a thought-provoking exhibition titled "Challenging Oeuvres" here on Tuesday.

According to a spokesperson, the exhibition serves as a platform for the remarkable overlooked artists affiliated with the Differently-Abled Artists Consortium (DAAC) in the United States (US).

Through their compelling works, these artists aimed to evoke profound emotions and spark meaningful conversations among viewers. Presented by ForArtsSake, in collaboration with DAAC, the exhibition marked a significant endeavor to introduce Pakistani audiences to the diverse and impactful art produced under the DAAC banner. By showcasing the talent of marginalized artists, ForArtsSake endeavors to enrich the local art scene and promote inclusivity within the artistic community.

"Challenging Oeuvres" invited visitors to explore the intricate life experiences, rich emotions and exceptional talents of these artists. It celebrated their resilience, creativity, and indomitable spirit in the face of adversity.

2200 profiteers imposed fine of Rs17.905 mln

KARACHI (APP): Karachi administration, during 13 days of ongoing special price checking campaign, imposed fines of over Rs17,905 million on 2200 shopkeepers and wholesalers while 26 shops were sealed for violating officially notified rates.

The campaign was initiated on directives of Sindh Chief Minister for ensuring availability of essential items of daily use on officially notified rates during Ramadan and Commissioner Karachi is monitoring the campaign, said a statement issued here on Tuesday. Price magistrates carried out action in their respective areas and paid visits to 545 different places of the metropolis, said the statement adding that administration, on eighth day of Ramadan, imposed fines of Rs1,591 million on 164 illegal profiteers. As per details, fines of Rs 5,25,000 were imposed on 48 illegal profiteers in district South, Rs1,47,000 on 16 profiteers in district East and fines of Rs80,000 were imposed on 22 profiteers in district West.

CM chairs 3rd cabinet meeting

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif chaired third meeting of the provincial cabinet at CM's office, here on Tuesday.

The cabinet ratified the approval of annual budget and supplementary budget grant for the year 2023-24. The approval to hand over Lahore Knowledge Park to Punjab Central Business District Development Authority was also given by the cabinet. The land will be transferred to CBD to build Pakistan's largest IT city.

The CM said that the Pakistan's first IT city is being built in Lahore, adding that tech giants like Google and Microsoft have already shown their interests in the IT City. The CM directed to complete both towers of IT City in one year.

CM Maryam Nawaz highlighted that the world's major educational institutions will be invited to build campuses in the Knowledge City, saying that there will be a Film City too.

The cabinet also approved project for the supply of 20,000 petrol and electric bikes by the Bank of Punjab.

The CM said electric bikes are essential to reduce environmental pollution but are currently not that much viable due to risk of battery theft and low mileage. Therefore, It has been decided to give petrol bikes along with electric bikes. To reduce burden on students, the down payment will be reduced to Rs 25,000 and the monthly installment will also be less than Rs 5,000, she mentioned.

The distribution of bikes will start in May this year, she said and added that a separate scheme will be introduced to give bikes to students who have achieved significant success in examinations.

The cabinet also gave in-principle approval for the extension of posting on

deputation of CEO Punjab Transport Company. Approval was also made for provincial representation of Punjab in the Council of Common Interest Secretariat.

The approval for the transfer of Government of Punjab's Grade 19 Vacancy in Council of Common Interests Secretariat Islamabad was also granted. Punjab Air Ambulance Project was also discussed in the meeting.

The CM said all facilities are available for the rich and the influential people, but nothing to save life of a poor man. She added, "We want to provide every facility of timely treatment to our people." She lamented that it is unfortunate that Sargodha does not have adequate facilities for the treatment and transfer of heart attack patients, adding that sitting in offices, it seems that air ambulance is not needed, but it is needed, because Rescue 1122 received 11 hundred calls for air ambulance in emergencies.

Maryam Nawaz highlighted that in Lahore PIC Emergency, heart attack patients arrived from distant areas within 8 hours. Therefore, Air Ambulance Project is very much needed, but it will be rolled out on trial basis in the first phase, "We should feel pain for the poor. How sad it was that sanitary workers lost their lives in Faisalabad due to lack of safety kits" she said. The cabinet also gave in principle approval to reduce the number of law officers in Punjab to 66 after following a strict performance-based criteria. "I have not recommended anyone." She added that corruption, political affiliation and incompetence will not be tolerated in government service.

Provincial ministers, Chief Secretary, IGP, secretaries and other senior officers attended the meeting.

PFA shuts food point for storing unhygienic meat

LAHORE (APP): On the directions of PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javaid, meat safety teams conducted a massive operation against unhygienic meat shops and fast-food points in the city and shut down a shop besides imposing Rs345,000 fine on 16 outlets. PFA's watchdogs inspected 56 meat shops, fast-food points and meat carrier vehicles in Tollinton Market and G1 Market Johar Town in a daylong operation.

During the operation, PFA discarded 120kg of stinky meat and 30litres of rancid oil, as well as, issued warning notices to meat suppliers.

Muhammad Asim

Javaid said PFA is ensuring the checking of all meat shops, shawarma, burger and saji points across the province.

A team of PFA raided a food point and stopped its production and sale by imposing an emergency prohibition order (EPO). He said that the authority took action against the food business operator (FBO) for storing unhygienic meat in dirty freezers with the intention of using it in food preparation.

He further said that PFA imposed hefty fines on FBOs for failing to present employees' medicals and training certificates to the raiding teams on the spot.

The PFA DG urged FBOs to ensure compliance with the rules set by the Punjab Food Authority. During Ramadan, any food businesses involved in adulteration and counterfeiting will be closed, and a case would be registered as per the PFA Act, he added.

He also mentioned that the PFA has been compiling a comprehensive record of the meat, tracking its source from where it comes to Tollinton Market and where it is supplied beyond that.

The utmost priority of PFA is to completely eradicate the enemies of Public health from Punjab, he said.

3,288 arrested as crackdown on profiteers continues

LAHORE (APP): The authorities intensified an ongoing crackdown on profiteers in the province, arresting 3,288 profiteers and lodging 1,181 cases during the first week of Ramadan. The price control magistrates conducted inspections of four lac 35 thousands places and imposed fines of more than Rs 40 million.

A report was presented in the meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman at the Civil Secretariat.

The meeting reviewed price control measures and provision of ration bags under the Ramzan package.

The secretaries of the relevant departments, including industries, agriculture, additional IG Special Branch, chairman PITB and officers concerned attended the meeting while the additional chief secretary, all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated through video link.

The chief secretary ordered that the crackdown against profiteers be expedited. He directed the administrative officers to ensure the implementation of price lists as

sale of essential commodities at more than the fixed prices was not acceptable in any case. He said that special inspections should be carried out on the identification of special branches.

He also asked the price magistrates to remain active in the field and take stern action against overcharging.

The chief secretary also issued instructions to speed up supply of ration bags to the deserving people in Gujranwala, Sialkot, Gujarat, Sargodha, Mianwali, and said that the deserving people should get their right at their doorsteps as soon as possible. The secretaries of industries and agriculture gave a detailed briefing at the meeting. They said that 3.8 million ration bags had been delivered to the deserving people under the Nighaban Ramzan package. A day before, one lac 13 thousand consumers benefited from the agriculture fair price shops established in Ramzan bazaars. A subsidy of Rs 20 million was being given daily on 13 items at these fair price shops, they concluded.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazir Tarar convened and chaired a meeting of Appellate Tribunal Inland Revenue at Law Ministry.

Sindh gov't initiated preparations to crack down on drug dealers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has initiated preparations to crack down on drug dealers throughout the province. In this regard, a high-level meeting was convened in Karachi, chaired by Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon.

During the meeting, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that teams comprising expert and reputable officers will be assembled to target



drug dealers. He emphasized the need to rescue the young generation from the clutches of drug dealers. Additionally, he mentioned that officers who

excel in the crackdown against drug trafficking will be honored and awarded prizes. Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the crackdown will involve daily operations, with the objective of eradicating drugs at their source.

He mentioned that alongside the crackdown on drug dealers, efforts will also be made to raise awareness among the younger generation.

Secretary Excise, Taxation & Narcotics Control Atif ur Rehman, DG Excise Aurangzeb Panhwar, DG Excise Admin Riaz Khoso, and other officers attended the meeting.

LESCO detects 410 power pilferers in 24 hours

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 410 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 187th day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Tuesday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 228 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations.

Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity 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.

On the 187th consecutive day of the anti-power

theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections 12 were commercial, 04 agricultural and 394 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 314,722 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 8.339 million. Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he explained that LESCO charged Rs 300,000 detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Batapur; Rs 171,000 detection bill to a power pilferer in Misri Shah area; Rs 170,000 detection bill to another electricity thief also in Misri Shah; and Rs 150,000 fine in the form of detection bill to a customer stealing electricity in Old Anarkali area.

During the 187 days of the grand anti-theft campaign, the spokesman mentioned, the LESCO detected pilferage on 65,144 power connections and 63,619 FIRs have been registered against electricity thieves in the relevant

police stations, while 20,053 accused have so far been arrested by the police. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 82,663,410 detection units worth Rs 3,140,990,702 to all the power pilferers.

LESCO collects over Rs 6.77m from 379 defaulters in 24 hours: Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has recovered more than Rs 6.77 million from 379 dead defaulters in all the five districts- Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara- on the 180th day of its recovery campaign.

LESCO spokesman told media here Tuesday that on the 180th day, SE (Superintending Engineer) Faizan Butt has recovered outstanding dues of Rs 1.56 million from 69 defaulters in Northern Circle; SE Umar Bilal recovered Rs 0.79 million from 44 defaulters in Eastern Circle; SE Shabbir recovered Rs 1.14 million from 37 defaulters in Central Circle; SE Zafarullah Saanghi collected Rs 0.43 million from 20 defaulters in South Circle; SE Muhammad Hussain recovered Rs 0.50 million from 23 defaulters in Nankana

Circle; SE Najamul Hassan recovered Rs 0.62 million from 24 defaulters in Sheikhupura Circle; SE Jamshed Zaman collected Rs 0.54 million from 68 defaulters in Okara Circle and SE Ahmed Shahzad Chughtai recovered Rs 1.19 million from 94 defaulters in Kasur Circle.

During the 180 days, the spokesman added that the LESCO, under the supervision of Director (Customer Services) Rai Muhammad Asghar, has recovered a total of Rs 2.71 billion outstanding dues from 93,063 dead defaulters. He elaborated that uptill now the company has collected Rs 396.25 million from 13,481 defaulters in Northern Circle; Rs 638.48 million from 11,792 defaulters in Eastern Circle; Rs 359.48 million from 10,457 defaulters in Central Circle; Rs 153.38 million from 5,439 defaulters in South Circle; Rs 220.43 million from 8,179 defaulters in Nankana Circle; Rs 400.14 million from 10,932 defaulters in Sheikhupura Circle; Rs 174.01 million from 14,960 defaulters in Okara Circle and Rs 374.65 million from 17,823 defaulters in Kasur Circle.

74 arrested, 103 cases registered over profiteering

LAHORE (APP): The district administration has intensified price control measures following the Chief Minister's directives and conducted raids at 2,580 points resulting in the arrest of 74 violators during the last 24 hours.

Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told media here on Tuesday that the price control magistrates imposed hefty fines on 295 shopkeepers and sealed three sale points. Around 103 individuals are facing cases over profiteering.

In an effort to ensure the sale of essential commodities at prescribed rates, stringent monitoring is underway across the city and price control magistrates are conducting rigorous operations.

A total of 40,742 locations were inspected and 46 points were sealed during the last month, while 1,021 individuals were arrested over profiteering and a fine was also imposed on 3,782 shopkeepers.

Railways intend to revive Safari Tourist Train exploring Potohar's scenic beauty

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways is planning to revive the 'Safari Tourist Train' to promote culture and beauty of Potohar Region which will commence its journey from Islamabad's historic Golra Station to Attock Khurd.

"The Safari Train will commence its journey from Golra Station, traversing through Hasan Abdal, Attock, and Attock Khurd Railway stations. Notably, Attock Khurd boasts a rich historical legacy, housing the oldest railway museum," official sources told APP.

They said that the basic purpose of the tourist train is to bolster tourism and acquaint travellers with the railway's ancient heritage while can play a key role in promoting tourism.

The tourists will experience travelling through a beautiful landscape of Potohar, consisting of Margallah Hills, Sangjani tunnel and many bridges like Chabhal Bridge, Haro Bridge, Ghazi Borotha and Attock Khurd bridges.

They said the Safari Train will also pass through the old iron girder bridge on the Indus River between Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

The Golra Station, steeped in British-era history, houses the sprawling Islamabad Railway Museum, showcasing

a treasure trove of railway artefacts, including ancient steam engines and heritage railway kitchens.

Following this immersive heritage tour, the Safari Train will stop at the Attock Khurd's Station, offering passengers the opportunity to explore the captivating beauty and entertainment spots along the Indus River.

The train itself has undergone a stunning makeover, both internally and externally, with meticulously designed interiors, delectable onboard cuisine, and arrangements for high tea. Luxurious seating arrangements and newly constructed washrooms add to the passengers' comfort and convenience, they added.

The sources said the preparations for the Safari Train are in the final stages and likely to be completed next week, whereas the official date of the journey would be announced in due course of time.

The departures of the Safari Train are scheduled every Sunday at 9 am, with return trips from Attock at 6:30 pm and the ticket prices vary according to the type of accommodation, with special discounts available for students from educational institutions.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people breaking fast (Iftar) during the holy month of Ramazan ul Mubarak.

SACM on IC&TE briefed on performance and goals

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: First introductory meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) with the Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education (IC&TE), Abdul Karim Tordhir was held here in the headquarters of the company at Hayatabad on Tuesday.

During the meeting the Special Assistant was given a detailed briefing regarding the measures taken for industrialization, company's performance and its future goals. Besides, the CEO of the company, Javed Iqbal Khattak, managers of the relevant sections and other officials attended the meeting.

The Special Assistant was informed that currently 10 Economic Zones and 2 Special Economic Zones have been established in the province, while the establishment of 4 new Economic Zones and 1 Special Economic Zone is under consideration.



They further informed that the establishment of Ghazi Economic Zone has been completed while Mansehra Economic Zone is also ready for commercial launching.

The Special Assistant was told residential apartments are being constructed at Hattar Economic Zone while electricity has also been provided to Hattar Special Economic Zone.

The Special Assistant was further told that commercial area is also being developed at Gadoon while 19 units have been allotted in the Rashakai Special Economic Zone established under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the province.

Similarly, the expansion of Nowshera Economic Zone has also been com-

pleted, while in terms of exports, the performance of Export Promotion Zone Raisalpur is better performing EPZ after Sialkot. The largest matchbox manufacturing plant of the world has set up its plant in the zone.

Similarly, the construction work of Chitral Economic Zone is also completed while the complete handover of land to start the construction work of Marble City Buner is still pending.

It was informed in the meeting that 13 units have been made operational at Mohmand Economic Zone while 22 more are under construction.

On this occasion, the Special Assistant was also informed regarding the targets set in connection with the digitalization of the

company and success towards it. He was told that affairs of the company up to maximum level have been made online to facilitate investors and industrialists.

The Special Assistant directed that all possible measures should be taken for industrial development in the province and provision of facilities to investors. He said that efforts should be made to solve the problems related to electricity and gas in the industrial zones and steps to contact the relevant authorities to solve problems related to the federal government departments.

He directed that the company managers to market industrial zone to attract investment to various industrial zones and also approaching the local small hydro power plants for supplying cheap electricity to the Chitral Economic Zone.

He directed for the useful utilization of the commercial area of Karak Salt and Gypsum City while adopting different business models. He further directed the company to take steps to increase economic activities and income.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif address a seminar.

CPPCA team meets with Speaker KP Assembly

PESHAWAR (APP): The Canadian Pakistani Pakhtun Community Association (CPPCA) delegation led by the association's founding leader Fakhru Islam Toru met with Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Babar Saleem Swati and Food Minister Zahir Shah Toru here at Speaker House on Tuesday.

On this occasion Provincial Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah, Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi and other officials were also present while Colonel Jahanzeb, Dr. Farman, Dr. Tariq, Dr. Manzoor, Dr. Ejaz Mehbub, Zarbadshah, Jahanzeb, Bahader Khan, Fahim Khan, Farooq Khan Toru and Sohail Khan were included in the delegation.

Overseas Pakistanis congratulated on assuming the responsibilities of the Speaker. The Speaker welcomed the delegation on their arrival at the Speaker's House. Ali Amin Gandapur and Speaker Babar Saleem Swati and Food Minister Zahir Shah Toru were invited to visit Canada.

Minister visits office of DG Agri Engineering

PESHAWAR (APP): Minister for Agriculture, Muhammad Sajjad on Tuesday visited office of Director General Agriculture Engineering Tarnab and inspected machinery workshop.

He also visited sections of the office and directed to utilize machinery for facilitation of farmers enabling them to increase production. He was also briefed about ongoing projects being underway under agriculture department.

The minister was told that agriculture engineering department is working on various projects including installation of solar pumps, levelling of uncultivated land, provision of agricultural machinery and implementation of public sector developmental program.

Narcotics recovered

PESHAWAR (INP): The Excise police, Peshawar Region on Tuesday foiled two bids of narcotics smuggling and recovered 165.6 kg narcotics while arresting two drug peddlers.

In the first operation, 144 kg hashish was recovered during checking of a suspicious vehicle number BY5-678, ICT while in another operation, 21.6 kg of opium was recovered from vehicle number AHV-681 near Motorway. Excise police arrested two drug peddlers, registered cases against them and started further investigation.

PHC orders UOP to hold Selection Board

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Waqar ordered University of Peshawar (UOP) to hold Selection Board for appointment Associate Professor within two months, on Tuesday.

The petitioner named Dr. Minhas Majeed had applied for post of Associate Professor at Department of International Relation in

response to advertisement issued by UOP in 2022 in this regard, Tariq Afghan advocate informed.

The petitioner is eligible for the post of Associate Professor but UOP didn't held Selection Board after advertisement in 2022 which will deprive her from promotion as Dr. Minhas Majeed will retire soon, the counsel added.

Higher Education Commission (HEC) had also issued an notification regarding recruitment process

compelling the varsities to concluded the hiring procedure within one year but UOP had failed to ensure compliance with HEC decision, the lawyer argued.

PHC's divisional bench comprised of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Waqar Ahmad ordered UOP for holding Selection Board within two months for conclusion of recruitment process for appointment of Associate Professor at Department of International Relations.

Teaching staff congratulates VC, Registrar ICUP on appointment



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Islamia Collegiate School (ICS) Teaching Staff Association

congratulated newly appointed Vice Chancellor and Registrar Islamia College University Peshawar (ICUP) Professor Dr. Ali

Muhammad and Professor Dawood Zahid respectively. ICS Teaching Staff Association president Kafel Ahmad and general secre-

tary Muhammad Shahzad present bouquet of flowers to newly appointed VC Dr. Ali Muhammad and Registrar Professor Dawood Zahid on assuming their respective charges at the varsity. Teaching Staff Association presented ICS case before Vice Chancellor Islamia College University for fulfilling shortage of teachers, provision of funds for curricular activities and 40% shares of Self Support Scheme income to the school.

The association also stressed for restoration ICS glory on priority basis as a mother elementary education institution in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with rich history and prestige.

KP Minister for Agriculture reviews development projects

PESHAWAR (APP): Agriculture Minister, Muhammad Sajjad on Tuesday visited the Directorate General Agricultural Engineering Office to oversee ongoing projects. During his inspection, the minister emphasized the timely completion of all projects.

He personally examined the agricultural machinery

workshop and urged for its effective utilization to enhance agricultural productivity.

The minister underscored the importance of maximizing benefits for farmers and boosting agricultural output to address food scarcity.

Various ongoing projects were discussed, including

the installation of solar pumping systems, establishment of tube wells, and the promotion of mechanized agriculture.

These initiatives, part of different development programs, aim to increase agricultural productivity and meet the rising demand for food. The Minister was accompanied by officials,

including Director-General of Agricultural Engineering Nasim Javaid, DG Agriculture Extension Jan Muhammad, and DG Soil Conservation Muhammad Yaseen Wazir.

The visit provided an opportunity to assess progress and ensure the effective implementation of development initiatives.

FIA nabs two human traffickers

PESHAWAR (INP): In a major operation by Anti Human Trafficking Circle, FIA Peshawar two human traffickers were held who were operating the business of travel agencies.

The accused Muhammad Sulaiman and Naseer Hussain were arrested during raids on the offices of travel agencies located in Ram Das Chowk, Charsadda Chowk and Deans Trade Center Peshawar.

The arrested suspects were operating the business of travel agencies without licenses and were involved in a huge amount of money from innocent people promising to send them abroad. The FIA team recovered 11 Pakistani passports from the possession of the accused, the spokesman said.

No negligence to be tolerated in Ramadan Dastar Khawan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Zakat and Ushar, Social Welfare and Women Development Mashaal Azam Yousafzai on Tuesday urged the concerned officers to inform her about statistics of Ramadan Dastar Khawan on daily basis and no negligence will be tolerated in Ramadan Dastar Khawan.

She said this while presiding over the introductory meeting of the officers and district directors of the Social Welfare and Women development Department.

She said that every officer and official will not be posted in one place for more than three years. She directed District

directors to take proactive measures to include poor widows in the Ramadan relief package so that no poor widow is deprived of this package and the facilities in Darulaman should be improved.

"Wherever there is a need for the Zamong Kor project, mark it so that steps can be taken in this regard," Mashaal Yousafzai added.

During the meeting she further said that to prevent drugs, conduct a vigorous campaign in collaboration with the police and other departments to eliminate this evil from the society.

Advisor to Chief Minister Mashaal Azam Yousafzai was informed about the ongoing projects of the department and the

problems and challenges faced by the department in different districts.

Speaking during the meeting, Advisor to Chief Minister Mashaal Azam Yousafzai said that measures should be taken for the transport of children in the Special Education Institute and vehicles should be arranged on rent wherever necessary.

Advisor to Chief Minister Mashaal Azam Yousafzai directed that wherever women face any problem, district directors should take steps on priority basis to solve their problems. Poor widows should be included in the Ramadan relief package on priority basis who are excluded from the Ehsaas program for some reason.

Dates outlets attracts faithful in droves ahead of Iftar

PESHAWAR (APP): In spite of high prices, the dates outlets on Tuesday here attracted faithful in substantial numbers ahead of Iftar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. All the fruits markets of Peshawar including Gul Bhar, Firdus, Hashthnagri, Chamkani, Faqirabad, Boards, Tehkal, Cantonment, Pishakhara, Kohat, Dalazak Roads and Qissa Khwani bazaar etc are flooded with different varieties of dates, attracting buyers despite it's high prices.

Great rush of buyers was seen on dates outlets at these areas where the commodity was being sold like a hot

cake. "Dhaki Kajoor (date) is my prime choice for Iftar. I have bought five kilograms dates including two kilogram each for my married daughters as special Ramadan gift," said Qaiser Khan, a retired Wapda employee and resident of Wapda Town Peshawar at Qissa Khwani bazaar while talking to APP.

Owing to its delicious taste and numerous health and nutrition benefits, date is an integral part of almost every "Dastarkhwan" and a prime choice of the rozaadars (fasting people) during Iftar parties.

The business of imported and locally produced dates (Kajoor) have get upward boom during Ramzan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including seven merged tribal districts where people thronged to its shop after Zuhar prayer.

This year, Muzafati date is being sold at Rs420-440 per kilogram compared to RsRs400-420 last year. Similarly, Iranian dates are being sold at Rs280-300 this year as against Rs260 per kg last year and its price is quite high this year that needed to be checked by the district administration in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Dhaki DI Khan's dates are also almost out of reach of poor people as it is being sold at Rs440-460 this year against Rs380-400 last year in Peshawar where high inflation and skyrocketing prices irked Rozadars.

"Despite its high prices, Ajwa Kajoor are my favorite item and my iftar party cannot be complete without it," said Riazul Haq, a former PST teacher while talking to APP at Pabbi bazaar. "I prefers Ajwa dates due to its better taste and numerous nutrition and health benefits. However

my family and friends liked Dhaki dates of DI Khan during Iftar as it help in restoration of blood sugar levels after fasting all day."

Punjgor dates are also attracting consumers in large number in local markets due to it's better quality and nutritious level. "My sister has requested four kilograms' dates but I purchased only two kilograms because of its high prices in Peshawar," said Riaz.

The consumers said it was the responsibility of district administration to control prices of daily use items including dates in

open markets during Ramadan. Mubarak urged DCs to activate his staff to control price hikes during Ramadan.

Dr Malik Riaz Khan, head of the medical and children ward at Govt Rashid Hussain Shaheed Hospital told APP that dates were an important food item during Ramzan and recommended people to commence Iftar by eating at least five dates because it provides the body with necessary sugar and helping in the restoration of blood sugar level after fasting all the day. "One of the most

common reasons for headaches or dizziness during Ramzan is low blood sugar that is why eating dates is very beneficial at the start of Iftar to maintain sugar level and control hunger," he said.

He said it is easy to digest so they don't exhaust the fasting person's stomach, adding research studies proved that having dates after fasting has got great benefits for nutrition and health of people.

"Dates decrease great hunger feeling of the fasting person and people don't rush into excessive food eat-

ing, which causes digestion disorders."

Dr Malik Riaz said dates prepare a person's stomach to receive food after being inactive throughout the day by activating the release of digestive secretions and juices rich with sugary energy. The scientific studies showed that eating dates were extremely beneficial for pregnant women and lactating mothers as it contains certain stimulants, which assist in strengthening the muscles of the womb that can lead to an easier delivery and good health of newborns.



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A committee has been constituted for redressal and upholding grievance of Associate Professors at University of Peshawar (UOP), on Tuesday.

The decision was made during a meeting of Associate Professors at Committee Room in Peshawar University Teacher Association (PUTA) hall in which all members of the cadre were present. They discussed

core issues and grievances of associate professor at UOP since longtime.

The participants argued for recruitment on vacant seats in the varsity (UOP) on priority basis and condemned the delay in the advertising the vacancies.



In brief

Ex-cop shot dead in Khesghi F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: Unknown assailants on Tuesday shot dead a retired police official in the Khesghi area of Nowshera district. Police said a retired police official identified as Ehsan Ullah was on way home when assailants riding a motorcycle shot him dead in Khesghi. The attackers managed to flee the area after committing the crime. The body of the deceased was shifted to hospital for medico legal procedure while a police team collected evidence from the crime scene for investigation.

Rescue 1122 arranges training F.P. Report

SWABI: Emergency Rescue Service 1122 on Tuesday arranged one-day first aid and lifesaving training workshop for personnel of Swabi Police. A team of Rescue 1122 informed police about basic life-saving and life support procedures. The police force was also given training to manage choking hazardous and fracture management. Deputy Superintendent Headquarters, Muhammad Iqbal appreciated management of Rescue 1122 for the training and said that it would enable police force to effectively manage situations during emergencies.

AAC arrests BISP agent F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: Following instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayyaz Khan Sherpao, Additional Assistant Commissioner Khaula Haqdar on Tuesday visited Ehsaas Kafalat centers and reviewed the arrangements. During inspection an agent in village Qasim of Toru area was found deducting Rs.500 from deserving women. The Additional Assistant Commissioner took prompt action and arrested the culprit and sent a report against him to the concerned Assistant Director BISP. The BISP authority blocked the agent's ID and confiscated his device. AAC Khaola Haqdar has asked the public to collect the full amount of Rs 10,500 from the agent in the established centers and contact Deputy Commissioner Complaint No. 09379230048 for any complaint.

Four injured in gas cylinder blast

MULTAN (INP): Four people were critically injured when ammonia gas cylinder exploded here on Tuesday morning. According to details, the incident took place in Samejabad area of Multan where ammonia gas cylinder exploded inside an ice factory. The blast also caused blaze in power supply line resulting in severe injuries two four people. Rescue teams rushed the scene and extinguished the blaze. Deputy Commissioner Capt (ret'd) Rizwan Qadeer reviews the rescue activities.

Package distribution

RAJANPUR (INP): Distribution of Negahban package among deserving people of the district Rajanpur has been completed by 75 percent. Deputy Commissioner, Dr Mansoor Ahmad Baloch briefing the media about the arrangements said that more than 96,000 ration bags were distributed among poor under the generosity movement to help them out promptly at their doorstep. He said that more than 40 per cent people were surviving below the poverty line in backward areas of the province.

Agents turn Passport Office Mardan into mess for sake money

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: The passport office in Mardan has become a punishment for the citizens, the rush at the passport office in the most sensitive area has increased enormously, the rule of the touts the needy citizens have started returning disappointed. People demand to take notice from the higher authorities of the Ministry of Interior.

According to the details, the passport office located in front of the DIG office on Mardan GT Road became crowded as every day thousands of young and old citizens, including women, gather in front of the office early in the morning to get their passports, however, due to the slowness of the staff in the office and the abundance of touts, ordinary citizens are disappointed after failing to obtain their passports.

Also, the only passport office of Mardan district is located in a private building on GT Road, not only the visitors, it is devoid of washrooms, mosque, canteen, shutters and other basic facilities for the citizens, on both sides of the office, touts have piled up and mislead simple citizens and take extra money in the name of admissions. Citizens have strongly demanded the high authorities of the Ministry of Interior to take actions against the officials of Mardan passport office.

As many as 95 family obtained Ramzan package: Save The Life Welfare Foundation Baghdad Mardan distributed Ramazan food packages of Four Hundred and eighty thousand rupees among ninety-five deserving families as part of their Ramazan Package initiative. Each Ramazan Food Package contains 10kg of flour, 5kg Rice, cooking oil of 2 liters, 2kg of Sugar, 1kg of Daal Chana, 1kg of Dates, 1kg basin and half kg of black tea which will be sufficient for a family throughout the holy month of Ramzan.

A special ceremony was held in this regard, which was presided over by the Foundation's Patron-in-Chief Maulana Abdul Haq, while the Foundation's Executive Member Fazal Rabbani, Acting President Mansoor Ali Advocate, Chairman NC Baghdada one Ishfaq Ahmad Lodhi, Vice Chairman Malik Muhammad Ilyas, Maulana Jawad Haqqani, Maulana Muhammad Raees Khan, Mufti Ehsanul Durrani, Haji Ehsanul Haq and volunteers of the foundation were also present.

President of foundation Maulana Ziaur Rehman Farooqi said that a Google form was created within the jurisdiction for the distribution of food package, in which the beneficiaries, orphans and widows of the area were entered and after the verification, 25 widows and orphans were included in the first category while 70 families were included in the second category.

He said that the purpose of distribution of Ramazan food package is to share the happiness of Ramadan with financially weak families. Ziaur Rahman Farooqi stated that in the future scholarships will be given to orphans for better education so that they can get better education with integrity and satisfaction.

Admn to crackdown against illegal profiteers

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The district administration decided to take actions against the shopkeepers and wholesale dealers over selling the grade B fruits and vegetables on prices fixed for grade A such items. The decision was made during a meeting regarding monitoring of prices during the month of Ramazan held at Balambat with deputy commissioner Wasil Khan in the chair.

District Food Controller Kashif Ehsan, Additional Assistant Commissioner Revenue Tariq Khan, Additional Assistant Commissioner Timergara Hazrat Bilal attended the meeting in person while Assistant Commissioner Adenzai Muhammad Daud Salimi, Assistant Commissioner Lal Qila Noor Zali Khan, Additional Assistant Commissioner Adenzai Sardar Badshah and Additional Assistant Commissioner Samarbagh Numan Pervez participated in the Zoom meeting.

Deputy commissioner

Wasil Khan directed the ACs and AACs to pay regular visits to the price monitoring desk and take actions on lodged complaints instantly. It was decided that the stakeholders would analyze the wholesale rates and determine retail rates and prepare price lists accordingly. The district food controller, additional assistant commissioner Timergara and officials of the agriculture department were directed to review the grading of fruits and vegetables and take actions against the shopkeepers who sell grade B fruits and vegetables on rates fixed for grade A.

The participants were also directed to ensure the quality and prices of meat in all parts of the district. The meeting agreed that all necessary measures would be taken to provide relief to the public and control the prices during Ramadan. The meeting was informed that in the holy month of Ramadan, the availability of food items at official rates should be ensured in

all markets under the supervision of assistant commissioners at tehsil level.

The officers were instructed to monitor the supply of food items at the official rate on a daily basis, so that legal action could be taken against the hoarders and profiteers. The meeting decided that actions would also be taken against those selling adulterated milk and underweight bread and chicken to ensure supply of affordable and quality products to the public.

According to the official price list issued here on Monday, potato is to be sold at Rs 70 per kilogram, onion at Rs 220, tomato Rs 120, ladyfinger Rs 330, bangles Rs 180, cauliflower Rs 130, spinach Rs 50, cucumber Rs 100, garlic Rs 200, lemon Rs 200, peas Rs 150, carrot Rs 70 per kg while apple at Rs 220, Iranian apple Rs 300, banana Rs 250, strawberry at Rs 550, kino Rs 220 per dozen, orange at Rs 400 per dozen and pomegranate is sold at Rs 500 per kilogram.



HYDERABAD: Labourers busy shifting bricks during construction work of a house at Latifabad.

Free plants provided by 'Sheen Khyber' campaigners

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Under the "Sheen Khyber" (green Khyber) drive, plants were given away freely to the locals aimed to make district Khyber greener and more verdant here on the last day.

With assistance of representatives of Sheen Khyber campaign, Additional Assistant Commissioner, Jamrud Nasir Abbas Khalil distributed siblings among the tribesmen in various localities.

Speaking on the occasion he said that the purpose of the welfare activity was to enhance greenery in Khyber. He urged the locals to actively participate in the drive and plant even a single sibling in their houses to make the district ver-

dure. NDMA provide compensation to 42 families on PM orders: Forty-two families recently affected by torrential rain in district Khyber were granted financial support last day. In the light of the announcement made by the Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif to help the rain affectees, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) paid 15.4 million rupees to the deserving families in Khyber.

In this connection in a simple gathering held in (Khyber House), Deputy Commissioner (DC), Office, former parliamentarian and local leader of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Haji Shahjee Gul Afridi and ex-

Member Provincial Assembly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bilawal Afridi distributed cheques among the affected tribesmen.

DC, Khyber Sanaullah, rain effectees, local leadership of PML-N, tribal elders and other officials were among the participants of the moot.

Speaking on the occasion Haji Shahjee Gul Afridi said that the incumbent government of PML-N was aware of the miseries of the rain effectees and would never leave them in that time of need and every possible assistance would be provided to them. The tribesmen thanked the Prime Minister for the provision of forthwith relief to them.



GILGIT: Deputy Speaker Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly, Sadia Danish speaking at the first sitting of 18th Assembly session of Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly.

FC rescue four laborers in Bajaur F.P. Report

KHAR: Frontier Corps (FC) North reaffirms its commitment to public safety with a swift and decisive rescue operation in Bajaur district. When the roof of an ice factory collapsed in the Nawagai area, endangering the lives of four individuals, Frontier Corps North sprang into action.

Operating on an emergency basis, the highly trained personnel of Frontier Corps North swiftly reached the scene, where they meticulously worked to extricate the trapped individuals from the debris. Thanks to their prompt response and coordinated efforts, all four persons were successfully rescued and promptly transported to the hospital for medical attention.

The timely intervention of Frontier Corps North undoubtedly saved precious lives, earning the gratitude and appreciation of the local community. Residents of the area expressed their joy and support by raising slogans in favor of Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North, recognizing their unwavering dedication to serving the people. FC North remains steadfast in its mission to uphold peace, security, and welfare within the region, exemplifying the epitome of valor and service to the nation.

19 peddlers arrested Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: As many as 19 drug peddlers were arrested during a massive organized crackdown against drugs in Kohat. In the latest operation of the last 48 hours, drugs worth millions of rupees have also been seized, including dangerous drug ice, hashish, heroin and alcohol.

In the light of the clear orders of DPO Kohat Muhammad Umar Khan, a decisive operation is underway across the district to rid Kohat of the scourge of drugs. In this continuation of the operation for the complete destruction of drugs, the police of different police stations arrested 19 people involved in drug selling and smuggling during the last 48 hours and seized a total of 18.365 kg of hashish, 300 grams of heroin, 5 bottles of liquor and 2.965 kg of deadly drug ice have been recovered.

As a result of the police action, cases have been registered against the accused who were caught with drugs in the respective police stations and they have been sent to jail.

Drive against profiteers F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Assistant Commissioners of all four Tehsils and price magistrates continued crackdown against profiteers and hoarders.

DC Muhammad Naeem Sindhu told Media reporters that on the direction of chief minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, fines of Rs1,32,500 were imposed on 67 shopkeepers who were found during raids on 2616 places, overcharging on commodities and fruits. DC said that 10 of the shopkeepers were handed over to police and cases were registered against them.

Islamia Varsity arranges visual arts show

Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: Professor R.M. Naeem along with Prof. Dr. Shazia Anjum Dean Faculty of Chemical and Biological Sciences inaugurated M. Phil Visual Arts Degree Show organized by University College of Art and Design, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur at Hakra Art Gallery.

Faculty of Arts and Languages Prof. Dr. Syed Aamir Sohail, Registrar Muhammad Shajir Rehman, Najia Ali Head of Fine Arts Department Government Sadiq College Women University Bahawalpur, Dr. Naveen Javed Assistant Professor Department of English Literature, Dar e Shahwar Principal Government Graduate College Dubai Mahal Road for Women Bahawalpur, former member of National Assembly Parveen Masood Bhatti, social leader Amber Tanseer, educationists Prof. Maryam, Dr. Zaman Ali and other teachers were present.

Legendary visual artist Prof. R.M. Naeem reviewed the work of the



MPhil students and appreciated the efforts of the faculty and students of the University College of Art and Design. He encouraged the students to actively participate in art exhibitions and conferences for the development and promotion of art in the areas of South Punjab. Judges of the second batch of MFA Visual Arts Principal College of Art and Design Punjab University Dr. Samira Jawad and well-known artist Dr. Rahat Naveed Masood performed the duties. Experts appreciated the diversity of the work of the second batch of MFA Visual Art at the Hakra Art Gallery of the University College of Art and Design.

On the success of this mega event, Dean Faculty

of Arts and Languages Prof. Dr. Syed Amir Sohail congratulated the University College of Art and Design Principal Dr. Farhana Altaf Qureshi and faculty. Degree show arrangements were made by Dr. Farhana Altaf Qureshi, Hassan Qureshi, Reema Qadeer, Sajjad Nawaz, and Shafiq. Students presented a skit under the supervision of senior faculty member Farjad Faiz. All attendees enjoyed the event's performances, music and art talk at the University College of Art and Design's amphitheater. Office of Research Innovation and Commercialization, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur has given special support in organizing this event.

Unknown culprits attack ASJ residence

F.P. Report

KARAK: The residence of Additional Sessions Judge Zahid Karim of Nusrati under Tahsil Bar was severely damaged due to firing by the goons at late night.

According to details, A FIR was registered against the unknown accused under the Anti-Terrorism Act at the local police station. However, no arrests have been made yet.

Journalists' bodies joint meeting held: A joint meeting of Union of Journalists and Karak Press Club was held under the chairmanship of Alhaji Shafiuddin Shafiqi.

In the meeting, Irfan Rafi, Aqib Shafi, Saqib Shafi and others participated in the meeting. Deep

grief and sadness were expressed over the death of journalist Nisar Ahmad Shakir. In the meeting, Fatiha was recited for the deceased and prayed that God may grant Jannat al Firdous to the deceased and patience to the bereaved.

Meanwhile, in the light of the orders of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Karak Mujibur Rahman, Additional Deputy Commissioner General Karak Dr. Sohail, Assistant Commissioner Headquarters Kirk Squadron Leader R Amanullah reviewed the prices of food items in Metakhil Bazaar.

AC urged the shopkeepers to check the prices of fruits and vegetables and display the official price

list. And strictly instructed all the shopkeepers to avoid making illegal profits in this blessed month of Ramadan. Make sure to follow the official price list otherwise strict legal action will be taken against violators.

Moreover, retired Deputy Director of Information and Public Relations Department, Regional Information Officer Ghaziur Rehman Qalandar Khattak, while appreciating the journalistic services of Nisar Ahmad Shakir, a well-known columnist, senior journalist. Lifetime Achievement, expressed his prayers for the repose of his soul and the bereaved family members. Expressed sympathy with the bereaved and Asif Nisar Ghayashi.

Separate fair price shops setup for public facilitation

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad and District Police Officer Faisal Gulzar visited Ramazan Bazar, Fair Price Shops established at Model Bazar to provide essential commodities to people on cheaper prices than open market during holy Month of Ramazan and reviewed security and other arrangements for giving different basic facilities to consumers in model bazaar.

On this occasion, DC Sundas Irshad said that separate fair price shops for male and female were setup for providing relief to people and in view of rush at fair price shops of people at fair price shops, the number of fair price shops was increased. She said that 13 edible items were available to consumers on 25 percent discount and a large number of people were buying different items on cheaper price than open market whereas supply, demand and quality of edibles items were being monitored.

She said that sitting arrangements for male and female were also made in the modal bazar. Later, DC and DPO also visited utility store established by the federal government to sell subsidiary 19 essential commodities to people on cheaper rates under Prime Minister's Ramazan Relief Package.

Meanwhile, fourth batch of Police Youth Internship Programme has been launched. District Police Officer Faisal Gulzar give information to Male and Female Internees regarding promotion of concept of community policing and its importance. Internees students visited IT branch, control room, and feedback office in the of the DPO

Woman sets husband on fire

SIALKOT (INP): A woman along with co-accused set husband on fire over domestic disputes here on Tuesday. The culprits escaped the scene leaving the victim in critical condition.

According to details, the incident took place in Rawail Garha in Ugoki area of Sialkot where Shakeel and his wife Iqra exchanged hot words over domestic issues.

The verbal clash turned violent after which key accused Iqra along with her sister and brother-in-law set her husband Shakeel on fire by sprinkling petrol.



Famine imminent in northern Gaza

GAZA (Reuters) Famine is imminent and likely to occur by May in northern Gaza and could spread across the enclave by July, a UN-backed report said, after more than five months of war which have shattered the Palestinian territory and cut off supplies.

Malnutrition and food insecurity have probably exceeded famine levels in Gaza's north, and hunger-linked death rates were likely to do so soon, the report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) said. The assessment - a scale used by UN agencies, regional bodies and aid groups that sets the global standard on measuring food crises - comes amid global pressure on Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into the enclave of 2.3 million people.

Some 300,000 have been cut off by fighting in the north. The European Union accused Israel of provoking famine and using starvation as a weapon of war - claims that Israel rejects, saying it does not target civilians and is only interested in eliminating the militant Islamist movement Hamas.

The IPC uses a complex set of technical criteria. Its most extreme warning is Phase 5, which has two levels, catastrophe and famine. Famine is assessed as at least 20% of the population

suffering extreme food shortages, with one in three children acutely malnourished and two people out of every 10,000 dying daily from starvation or from malnutrition and disease. In northern Gaza, the upward trend in non-trauma mortality is also expected to accelerate, resulting in all famine thresholds likely to be passed imminently, the IPC said.

The window is shutting, and it is shutting very, very fast, Arif Husain, chief economist of the World Food Programme, told Reuters. The study said the number of people projected to experience catastrophic hunger across the besieged enclave between now and mid-July had nearly doubled to more than 1.1 million, or about half the population, since the IPC last reported in December, when there was already record hunger. Under a worst case scenario, central and southern Gaza also face a risk of famine by July, the IPC said. Famine has been declared just twice in the past 13 years in parts of Somalia in 2011 and in parts of South Sudan in 2017. Some humanitarians voice frustration with the criteria, since assessing famine thresholds can be particularly difficult in a war zone due to a lack of access and reliable data.

Gaza health authorities

have reported children dying of malnutrition or dehydration, but UN officials say the health system has basically collapsed and the situation is hard to monitor. It's impossible to find the data to meet their criteria in northern Gaza as people aren't dying in hospital so it's unrecorded, said one aid worker who asked not to be named. The IPC said that because of a lack of aid, almost all households were skipping meals every day and adults were reducing their meals so children could eat.

In northern Gaza, in nearly two thirds of households, people went entire days and nights without eating at least 10 times in the last 30 days, it added. In southern areas, that applied to one third of the households. The IPC analysis said famine could still be avoided if Israel and Hamas stop fighting and aid organisations gain increased access. Israel has said it plans to assault Rafah, the southern Gaza city bordering Egypt, to root out Hamas fighters, but it is also involved in mediation talks about a possible truce. We must act and we must act now, said Husain. When famine happens, people have already starved, children are already wasted, and many, many, many lives are already lost.

Three police officers killed in Mexico

MEXICO CITY (AP) A state police officer and her two bodyguards were killed in a highway attack in Mexico's violent western state of Michoacan, security officials said. Michoacan's state security agency said on X, formerly Twitter, that three members of the state Civil Guard had died in the line of duty. One of them, Cristal García Hurtado, was a regional police commander. Local press reported that she had been decapitated.

The attack occurred on the highway connecting the towns of Patzcuaro and Uruapan. The Michoacan state prosecutor's office, which is investigating, did not immediately comment.

Michoacan has been particularly hard hit by gang turf wars, with the Jalisco New Generation cartel fighting a local gang, the Viagras, for control. Thousands of residents have been displaced as organized crime experiments with drone attacks and improvised explosive devices. In February, two hopefuls to be mayor of the town of Maravatío were killed within hours of each other.

Cubans stage rare protests

HAVANA Rare protests have taken place in Cuba as the island nation's economic crisis persists. President Miguel Díaz-Canel called for calm after hundreds of people gathered in Santiago, Cuba's second largest city, to demonstrate against power blackouts and food shortages a day prior.

Social media videos showed crowds in the communist-governed country chanting, "Power and food." Díaz-Canel blamed the United States for provoking the unrest, and his government summoned the US's top diplomat to Cuba for meeting. A wave of blackouts in Cuba has recently seen power supplies cut for up to 18 hours or more in a day. That, in turn, has jeopardised food supplies and economic activity in the cash-strapped country. Cuba is battling its worst economic crisis in decades, caused in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the flow of much-needed tourism dollars plunge. Its economy has also long been stymied by US trade embargoes and recent sanctions imposed during Donald Trump's presidency.

Díaz-Canel called for dialogue and "peace". "Several people have expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation of electrical service and food distribution," he wrote on X. "The disposition of the authorities of the party, the state and the government is to attend to the complaints of our people, listen, dialogue, explain the numerous efforts that are being carried out to improve the situation, always in an atmosphere of tranquility and peace," he added. The president blamed government "enemies" and "mediocre politicians and terrorists" in the US for trying to hijack the protests. Vedant Patel, a US State Department spokesperson, vigorously denied those allegations in a press conference.

"The United States is not behind these protests in Cuba and the accusation of that is absurd," Patel said. Meanwhile, the US embassy in Havana said in a post on X that it had received reports of protests in Bayamo, Granma and other locations. It urged the government "to respect the human rights of the protesters and address the legitimate needs of the Cuban people". The protests in Santiago were peaceful as demonstrators shouted, "Down with communism. Down with Díaz-Canel." Videos on social media showed no signs of scuffles or arrests. A large number of state security forces were also in attendance. However, internet services were down, according to some reports. Havana cracked down heavily on large protests in July 2021, the widest demonstrations seen in Cuba since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. The response was criticised by the international community. Since 1960, the US has maintained an economic embargo on Cuba, which restricts trade between the countries. — Aljazeera



GAZA CITY: Palestinians flee the area after Israeli bombardment.

No choice for Ukrainians - more Putin means more war

KYIV (BBC) When Ukrainians write about Russia's presidential election they put the word in quote marks. The vote was entirely engineered, so people here were not holding their breath for the result. The only unknown was how much support Vladimir Putin would claim, and even for him 87% was quite something.

But no-one in Ukraine was laughing. Whatever the supposed result on paper, the meaning here is clear more deadly missile attacks, more drones, more shelling. The full-scale invasion that Vladimir Putin ordered two years ago will go on. Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, gave his response to the official result last night, describing the Russian leader as sick with power, a man who would stop at nothing. He called on Ukraine's allies to ensure Putin was held to account. This person must end up on the dock in The Hague, Ukraine's president wrote in English on Twitter, referring to the International Criminal Court. Putin is

already a wanted man in the Hague the war crimes court has issued an arrest warrant for him, for the forced deportation of children from occupied areas of Ukraine. Russian elections have been tightly controlled for a long time, increasingly so each year. This time, there were no genuine opposition candidates on the ballot at all. The Kremlin has spent years creating the impression that there is no other choice that Putin is Russia. But for Ukraine, Putin is Mariupol, Bucha and Bakhmut. He's the reason for the rows of fresh graves at every town cemetery; for the displacement of millions from their homes and the nights in bomb shelters and basements for those who've stayed. It was Vladimir Putin who launched the war that badly injured a young girl I met in Chernihiv, after a missile attack, then killed her brother at the front line, where he had gone to fight as a volunteer.

That same war sent another Ukrainian soldier back to the front

today. Before he left, he told me he's the only one of his original group of some 30 men still walking. Of course, Putin hasn't done all this alone. That's why it's hard to find Ukrainians these days who speak well of any Russians. Relations between two neighbours have been ruined for decades, perhaps longer. Many here feel Russians didn't do enough to stop a war that was years in the making, and that Ukraine is now paying the price. I know Russians who feel the same, even those who have gone to prison in their own country for protesting against Putin his repression at home and aggression abroad. There are Russians in exile, too, who help Ukraine however they can. One is even here, fighting on the front line against his own countrymen. He told me it was a matter of conscience. He felt guilty. That man will fight on. But so will Russia, under Vladimir Putin. And so, then, will Ukraine. It's been left with no choice.

South Korea will suspend licenses of two senior doctors

SEOUL (AP): South Korean authorities will suspend the licenses of two senior doctors for allegedly inciting the weeklong walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents that have disrupted hospital operations, one of the doctors said.

The impending suspensions are the punishments against physicians after more than 90% of the country's 13,000 doctors-in-training walked off the job last month to protest the government's plan to sharply increase medical school admissions. Officials say the recruitment plan is aimed at adding more doctors to prepare for South Korea's rapidly aging population in a country whose doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest in the developed world. But doctors say schools can't handle an abrupt, steep increase in students, and that it would ultimately undermine the country's medical services.

In early March, the government began taking steps to suspend the licenses of striking junior doctors after they refused its orders to return to work by the end of

February. Police are separately investigating five senior members of the Korean Medical Association, which represents doctors in South Korea, for allegedly inciting and abetting the strikes. Park Myung-Ha, one of the five members, said he received a government-sent letter saying that his license will be suspended for three months from April 15. Park, who works for the KMA's emergency committee, said committee leader Kim Taek-woo was also given a three-month suspension. The Health Ministry said it wouldn't confirm any reported administrative steps imposed on individual doctors.

"My fellow doctors and I are really angered and appalled by the government's measure," Park told The Associated Press. Park accused the government of attempting to break up the KMA emergency committee and sending a warning message to striking junior doctors. He said he and others are discussing legal steps to respond to the license suspensions. About 12,000 junior doctors have

been off the job for a month, but none has received a license suspension. Observers have said it would take a few months to suspend all their licenses and that the government would likely end up suspending only strike leaders. The striking junior doctors account for less than 10% of South Korea's 140,000 doctors. But in some major hospitals, they represent about 30%-40% of the doctors, assisting senior doctors during surgeries and dealing with inpatients while training.

Their strikes have caused hundreds of canceled or postponed surgeries and other treatments, but officials say the country's handling of emergency and critical patients largely remains stable. Senior doctors at major university hospitals recently decided to submit resignations next week in support of the junior doctors. Still, most of them will likely continue to report to work. If they walk off the job, that would burden South Korea's medical services severely. In a briefing, Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo urged senior doctors to cancel their plans

and persuade the striking junior doctors to return to work. "Under any circumstances, you must not use the lives of the people for negotiations," Park said.

In early February, the government said it would increase the country's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current cap of 3,058 that has been unchanged since 2006. Officials say more doctors are required to address a long-standing shortage of physicians in rural areas and in essential yet low-paying specialties. But doctors say newly recruited students would also try to work in the capital region and in high-paying fields like plastic surgery and dermatology. They say the government plan would also result in doctors performing unnecessary treatments due to increased competition. Surveys show a majority of the South Korean public support the government's recruitment plan. Critics say doctors - one of the best-paid professions in South Korea - are only worrying about the possibility of a lower income in the future.

Thaksin projects power as loyalists cosy up

BANGKOK (Reuters) With politicians pouring in to greet him, a dinner with Thailand's prime minister and a police escort to places he went, billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra looked more like a statesman this week-end than a convicted criminal on parole.

Loyalists, cabinet ministers and lawmakers flew to his hometown of Chiang Mai to visit and consult Thaksin, projecting an image of power for a tycoon who loomed large over politics throughout his 15 years in self-exile to skip jail for abuse of power and conflicts of interest. Thaksin made a dramatic return to Thailand in August and was paroled on Feb. 18, six months into an eight-year jail sentence that had been commuted to a year by the king.

With his family's party in power and ally Srettha Thavisin prime minister, analysts predict it will not be long before Thaksin tries to control politics, testing the limits of an apparent truce between him and a conservative, military elite that toppled three Shinawatra governments,

two in coups. Thaksin, 74, the only Thai leader to be re-elected, appeared in good health on his forays around Chiang Mai as a retired politician greeting supporters and meeting ministers. It was his first visit to his hometown since his 2006 ouster.

The scenes were a stark contrast to a month ago when he left hospital in a neck brace and arm in a sling. His apparent recovery has prompted cynicism from political opponents about the extent of his ailments and anger over his lenient punishment and failure to spend a single night in jail. Now that I have returned, those who dislike me they can live their life, I will live mine, Thaksin told reporters on Saturday, insisting he was not in good health, suffering from back trouble and problems with his bones and nerves. But some commentators say that while Thaksin's sway over politicians is not in question, his party's failure last year to win an election for the first time since 2001 demonstrates a weaker hand than previously, and limits to how much influ-

ence he can wield on a changing electorate. We are seeing how things are going smoothly, underneath is a wave of change that is about to disrupt Thai society, veteran journalist Suthichai Yoon on his online show on Saturday.

We see the differences between the old politics we saw in the past few days, and a new politics that wants to reduce disparity, that doesn't want to see a group of people using money and power to put themselves above the rules. Thaksin's return and rapid release has fuelled speculation that a deal was done with his enemies in the royalist-military establishment to curtail a more imminent threat to both camps, the popular, anti-establishment Move Forward Party, which won the last election but was blocked from forming a government by conservative lawmakers. Thaksin's family and party have denied any deal. But Move Forward's rise and continued popularity could eclipse that of Thaksin, who has returned to a new political landscape.

Al Jazeera journalist freed after 12-hour arrest by Israeli forces

GAZA: Al Jazeera Arabic correspondent Ismail al-Ghoul has been released after being arrested for 12 hours and severely beaten by Israeli forces in Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital.

Al-Ghoul was there with his crew and other reporters to cover the Israeli army's fourth raid into the hospital, where thousands of civilians are trapped, including medical staff, patients and displaced families. Witnesses said the Al Jazeera reporter was dragged away by Israeli forces, who also destroyed the broadcasting vehicles of news crews at the medical facility. He has since been freed after 12 hours in Israeli custody.

Al-Ghoul told Al Jazeera after his release that Israeli forces destroyed media equipment and arrested journalists gathered in a room used by media teams. He said the journalists were stripped of their clothes and forced to lie on their stomachs as they were blindfolded and their hands tied. Israeli soldiers would open fire to scare them if there was any movement, al-Ghoul said. He added that he had heard that some of his colleagues were also

released, but he did not have enough information about their whereabouts.

Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest in the Gaza Strip, has served as a base for journalists to report on Israel's more than five-month war on the Palestinian enclave. Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Rafah, said al-Ghoul was "tortured, beaten and detained by the Israeli military along with his crew member on the ground", Mahmoud, quoting witnesses, said many Palestinians were beaten and verbally abused, some blindfolded and their hands tied behind their backs. They were then put inside an Israeli military truck and taken to an unknown location, he said.

Gaza's Ministry of Health said Israeli forces launched missiles and opened fire on one of the hospital's buildings, killing and injuring Palestinians, and a section of the hospital's courtyard was bulldozed. According to Mahmoud, Israeli forces had also arrested more than 80 other Palestinians, including "women medical staff and [other] journalists". "The Israeli army

made a list of allegations that they are looking for wanted people inside the complex but so far haven't provided any substantial evidence ... to justify what is happening inside al-Shifa," Mahmoud said.

Israel has repeatedly said Hamas, the Palestinian armed group that governs the besieged Gaza Strip, has "regrouped" inside al-Shifa and is "using it to command attacks against Israel".

Mansour Shouman, a citizen journalist who has reported from al-Shifa and Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, described hospitals in the enclave as "small towns" where journalists are trying to "deliver news to the world". Hospitals are one of the very few areas that have generators, which are essential to provide internet service, Shouman told Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera Media Network demanded the immediate release of al-Ghoul and other journalists detained alongside him, it said in a statement.

The Qatar-based network said it held the Israeli army "fully responsible for their safety". "The Network emphasises that this targeting serves as an intima-

tion tactic against journalists to deter them from reporting the horrific crimes committed by the occupation forces against innocent civilians in Gaza," the statement read. It said the "targeting" of al-Ghoul is part of a series of "systematic attacks on Al Jazeera", including the killings of veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, Samer Abu Daqqa and Hamza Dahdouh, as well as the bombing of its office in Gaza. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Press Institute (IPI) also condemned al-Ghoul's arrest.

"Journalists play an essential role in a war. They are the eyes and the ears that we need to document what's happening, and with every journalist killed, with every journalist arrested, our ability to understand what's happening in Gaza diminishes significantly," Jodie Ginsberg, chief executive officer of the CPJ, told Al Jazeera. "This is the worst conflict for journalists that the Committee to Protect Journalists has ever documented, and the situation is simply getting worse." — Aljazeera

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Menace of terrorism and AfPak cooperation

PAKISTAN'S Armed Forces carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in the border regions inside Afghanistan against terrorist outfits launching attacks on Pakistan's LEAs and innocent people from Afghan soil. According to the details, the Pakistani forces targeted the terrorists affiliated with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which are responsible for the March 16 attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country, resulting in scores of deaths of Pakistanis including law enforcement officials and innocent civilians.

Pakistan faces a continued risk of cross-border terrorism from its joint border with Afghanistan, where the banned terrorist groups have made their sanctuaries on Afghan soil and attacked Pakistani troops and civil and military installations across the country. 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, the TTP and other Afghanistan-based terrorist groups have launched multiple large-scale attacks against Pakistani Security Forces and impounded significant human and material losses to the country. The government of Pakistan displayed utmost resilience and restraint in the face of unceasing incidents of terrorism against innocent civilians and huge life losses of its Security Forces, which the terrorists orchestrated from inside Afghanistan. Despite the continuous use of Afghan soil in the growing terrorism in Pakistan, Afghan nationals have also been involved in terrorist attacks against the national institutions on our soil, which clearly illustrates the magnitude and the volume of the terrorism threat animating out of Afghan soil against Pakistan.

Pakistan has publically voiced its serious concern over the presence of terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan, which are continuously weighing war against Pakistan and causing loss of lives and damage to critical infrastructure and properties. Islamabad called on the Taliban leadership to take action against the proscribed terror outfits based in Afghanistan and handed over the TTP leadership to Pakistan. Pakistan maintains that these terrorists pose a grave threat to Pakistan's security and have consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory. Meanwhile, these terrorist groups are a collective threat to regional peace and security which needs to be eliminated through joint efforts, teamwork, and cooperation between the two brotherly nations. Unfortunately, the Afghan interim government largely ignored Pakistan's concerns and continued its hidden support for the terror outfits that unceasingly trade in death dance and bloodshed in Pakistan.

Pakistan always prioritized dialogue and cooperation to confront the terrorist threat and sought cooperation from Kabul over the past two years. Due to the absence of necessary support from Afghanistan, Pakistan's political and military leadership unanimously decided to respond in the same coin to Kabul as it deals with Islamabad. Pakistan's yesterday's attack against terror outfits was a sensation to the Afghan interim government that Pakistan would not compromise on its security anymore. Pakistan always stood with the people of Afghanistan through thick and thin and presently seeks the same cooperation from Afghanistan. It is time that Afghan leaders rethink the policy of siding with Khwarij terrorists shedding the blood of innocent Pakistanis and making a clear choice to stand with the people of Pakistan. Otherwise, the Pakistani military would use all possible options to deal with the menace of terrorism to ensure the security and protection of its nation at all costs.

A high policy rate, lender, or regulator's need?

THE Central Bank Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to maintain the policy rate at 22% for the next two months. The committee was of the view that despite the sharp decline in February, inflation remained at an elevated level that is susceptible to continued risks in the coming weeks. According to the MPC, these circumstances warrant a cautious approach and continuity of the current monetary stance to bring inflation down to the target range of 5-7% by September 2025.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has continuously maintained a historically high interest rate of 22 percent over the past several months which indicates the South Asian economy persistently faces pressure and risk of unsustainability as there is no significant improvement in economic indicators of the country. Over the past months, the economy moved one step forward and two steps back, the inflation mostly remained high as the February gains have been reversed in March whilst there is no visible end to such ruckus shortly. The Central Bank's narrative regarding the improvement in economic conditions is a traditional ritual that our economists often repeat for face-saving and morale-raising purposes. Otherwise, there was no positive assessment from any third-party rating agency or independent analysts in the past couple of months. The continued high-interest rate is surely harmful to local industry, businesses, and trade activities but has a comparatively low risk for the government and the regulator to pass through crucial periods. The critics are of the view that the IMF desires a high interest rate and the business community needs a low interest rate to boost the local businesses thus the success goes to the global lender for another time.

Amid such scenarios, the newly elected government opted to continue its partnership with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and is preparing to negotiate a \$ 7 billion new bailout package with the IMF to meet the urgent needs of the country. That illustrates that the IMF's influence on Pakistan's economy will further grow and the public will get nominal relief from the government. There is a dire need for the adaptation of rational, unbiased, and liberal economic policies but strict governance, broadening of the tax base, frequent adjustment of policy rates, and rationalization of direct and indirect taxes to increase revenues and provide relief to businesses and the masses. Otherwise, the monotonous policy rate only maintains the status quo and sheds off the regulator's fear without bringing any positive change in the economic landscape of the country.

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Extremists cannot hold civilized world to ransom

Baria Alamuddin

THE Gaza conflict is fueling tension around the world in a multitude of ways, with huge pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Western capitals often triggering political backlashes. Increasing violence and hate speech against Muslim and Jewish communities threaten to take us back to the divisions and polarization of the post-9/11 years.

With some British ministers denouncing pro-Palestine protests as antisemitic hate marches, it is no coincidence that Muslim groups singled out by the government in its new definition of what constitutes extremism are outspoken critics of the UK's official position on Gaza. The new measure, announced last week, defines extremism as "the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; to undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally creating a permissive environment for others to achieve those results."

It is important because British government ministers and civil servants will be banned from talking to or funding any group defined as extremist. The minister behind the new definition, Michael Gove, exploited parliamentary privilege to disclose the names of some of the organizations likely to be covered by the new definition, several of which have threatened legal action. While extreme-right organizations will also be covered, the targeting of Muslim organizations appears designed solely to throw red meat to deeply Islamophobic grassroots supporters of the Conservative Party. No less than the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby warned that the new definition risked "disproportionately targeting Muslim communities."

As with much of Europe, the size of Britain's demographic minorities is growing rapidly, with nonwhite communities constituting about 20 percent of the population and Islam the second-largest religion. In Wales last week, Vaughan Gething became the first

Black leader of a national government anywhere in Europe. It is the backlash against this inexorably growing diversity that reactionaries have sought to exploit. Across Europe, extreme-right parties have experienced both victories and setbacks. In last week's Portuguese elections, the far-right Chega (Enough) party became the third-largest political force, while the Netherlands' far-right leader Geert Wilders was compelled to accept that he could not be the

suspended and defected to the even more right-wing Reform party. This Conservative government's revised definition of extremism perfectly encapsulates the intolerant, divisive entity the party is mutating into. A poll found that 58 percent of party members believe Islam poses a threat to the British way of life, while a majority also voiced agreement with the right-wing conspiracy theory that substantial districts of European cities have become no-go

address core challenges. Nowadays, as international policy figures such as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UN chief Antonio Guterres and EU foreign affairs representative Josep Borrell circle the globe in pursuit of solutions to various crises, London is notably absent from their list of priority destinations.

That former British Prime Minister Liz Truss could share a platform with toxic fascist-fringe figures such as Steve Bannon indicates how the once-centrist Conservative Party increasingly resembles other European extreme-right factions that exploit rabble-rousing racist rhetoric in pursuit of power. Braverman's hate-mongering language about "hurricanes" of migrants and the "misguided dogma of multiculturalism" is cynically calculated as a bid for a leadership role in a party that has consigned itself to the extremist fringes. Arab foreign ministers have been relatively muted in their responses to Gaza: what a contrast with Borrell rebuking US President Joe Biden that "maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people being killed," or US Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer bluntly calling for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be ousted. This illustrates how the Gaza crisis is not an "Arab" or a "Muslim" issue, but rather a humanitarian catastrophe of pressing concern to the entire civilized world.

Although terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh have sought to capitalize on the Gaza carnage, the extremists who have labored hardest to exploit this crisis are right-wingers, cynically exacerbating tensions and fueling social divisions in pursuit of power. Extremism, wherever it emanates, must not be allowed to hold the world to ransom. Over the past decade, the increasingly visible phenomenon of extreme-right political parties has had a toxic and divisive impact on Western societies, inflicting difficult-to-repair social fractures likely to haunt us for some time to come. Our troubled and traumatized planet has little need of the culture wars and civil conflicts these power-hungry extremists have to offer.

Arab News

Putin had to contrive a 'landslide'

Samantha de Bendorf

ALTHOUGH Vladimir Putin's landslide victory with 87% of the vote in the Russian election was no surprise, these elections were important both for the Kremlin and for those in opposition to Putin.

With voter turnout at 74% - the highest in history - anything less than a landslide victory would have suggested that those who did not vote for Putin represented a significant force in Russian politics. This would have been particularly awkward in the case of young upstart Vladislav Davankov, who, with 3.79% of the vote, came a close third place. Davankov has been mistakenly described as an anti-war candidate - he supports peace and negotiations, "but on Russia's conditions and without one step backwards" - but his platform also called for "freedom of speech and opinion, instead of intolerance and denunciations", and "openness and pragmatism instead of searching for new enemies".

Several opposition figures, including the well-known

blogger Maxim Katz, and barred candidate Boris Nadezhdin, publicly stated they would vote for him. According to Vote Abroad, Davankov gained the majority of votes at Russian polling stations in other countries. With such a "subversive" candidate on the ballot sheet, nothing other than absolute victory would have allowed Putin to sleep at night. It was clear for some time that the Kremlin saw this election as a test of the regime's legitimacy. It is reported to have spent close to 1bn on the election campaign, with funds overwhelmingly devoted to ensuring a large turnout. It was not enough for the Kremlin to win the election - it also had to demonstrate public engagement. There was a push for early voting, especially in the occupied territories in Ukraine, where electoral officials accompanied by armed men in uniform knocked on people's doors and politely asked them if they would like to vote early.

Those who did not yet have Russian passports were allowed to use their Ukrainian IDs. In Russia there were the usual raffles, discos and canteens at polling stations to entice people out.

The elections also marked the culmination of weeks of modest but consistent protest for those opposed to Putin. Alexei Navalny's widow called for his supporters to turn up at polling stations around Russia at noon on 17 March to show their solidarity with the anti-Putin movement. The turnout for these protests, both in Russia and abroad, was significant. Navalny's grave, which authorities had cleared of the flowers that mourners had brought since his funeral, was covered instead with balloons voters had brought from polling stations. Other acts of rebellion marked the elections as well, which even the official press could not ignore. State-owned news

agency Tass reported arrests after a number of fires and explosions, with voters throwing molotov cocktails at polling stations, or else ballot spoilage by pouring paint, or green disinfectant, known as zelyonka, into ballot boxes. The ironic symbolism of the latter will not have been lost on voters or the regime: Navalny was seriously injured in the eye when he was doused with the green disinfectant mixed with a corrosive substance in 2017.

In many ways, even though the result was known in advance, these elections have some telling lessons. We should be heartened by the acts of brave resistance, which show that Russian civil society is still alive in spite of Putin's attempts to repress it. However, the majority of the population still support the regime. Veteran Russia analyst Mark Galeotti suggests that without fraud, Putin would still have

Why is Biden unable to hear chants of his people?

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

WHEN the foreign policy of a country as large and significant as the US is governed by a case of cognitive dissonance, terrible things happen. These terrible things are, in fact, already taking place in the Gaza Strip, where well over 100,000 people have been killed or wounded or are missing and an outright famine is ravaging the displaced population.

From the start of Israel's latest war on Gaza, the US has mishandled the situation, although recent reports indicate that Biden has read the overall meaning of the events of Oct. 7 correctly. According to Axios, Biden said in an Oct. 8 meeting with special counsel Robert Hur that the "Israel thing" - Hamas' attack and the Israeli war on Gaza - "has changed it all." With this comment, he was referring to the fact that the outcome of these events will "determine what the next six, seven decades look like." Biden is not wrong. Indeed, everything that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government and war council have done in Gaza point to a similar Israeli reading of the significance of the "world-altering" events. Netanyahu has proven his willingness to carry out genocide and starve millions of Palestinians because he still feels that the superior firepower of the Israeli army means it will be able to turn back the clock and restore the country's military standing, geopolitical influence and global position. He is wrong - and more than five months of war and senseless killing demonstrate this claim.

But the American political gamble in the Middle East and the global repercussions of Washington's self-defeating foreign policy make far less sense. Considering Washington's historic support for Israel, America's behavior in the early days of the war was hardly a surprise. It quickly mobilized behind Netanyahu's war Cabinet and sent aircraft carriers to the Eastern Mediterranean, indicating the US was ready for a major regional conflict. Media reports began speaking of US military involvement, specifically through the Delta Force, although the Pentagon claimed that the 2,000 US soldiers were not deployed to fight in Gaza itself. If it was not obvious that the US was a direct partner in the war, American mainstream media reports ended any doubt. The Washington Post this month reported that "the United States has quietly approved and delivered more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel since the Gaza war began." With time, however, US foreign policy regarding Gaza became even more perplexing. Though, in the early weeks of the war-turned-genocide, Biden questioned the death toll estimates produced by the Gaza Ministry of Health, its counting of casualties is no longer doubted. Asked on Feb. 29 about the number of women and children killed by Israel during the war, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin answered without hesitation: "It's over 25,000."

Yet the numbers continue to grow, just like the American shipments of weapons to Israel. "We continue to support Israel with their self-defense needs. That's not going to change," John Kirby, US national security spokesman, said last week. This statement is

worth a pause since it came after many media leaks regarding Biden's frustration and even outright anger over the way that Netanyahu is handling the war. NBC reported last month that Biden has been "venting his frustration" over his administration's "inability to persuade Israel to change its military tactics in Gaza." Netanyahu, the outlet quoted Biden as saying, is "giving him hell." This is consistent with other recent reports, including one by Politico that claimed Biden has privately "called the Israeli prime minister a 'bad ... guy,'" also over his Gaza war stance. Yet Netanyahu remains emboldened to the extent that he gave an interview last week, in which he openly spoke about "disagreements," not only between their governments but between the US president "and the entire Israeli people." It is glaringly obvious that, without continued US military and other forms of support, Israel would not have been able to sustain its war on the Palestinians for more than a few weeks, thus sparing the lives of thousands of people.

Moreover, the US has served as Israel's vanguard against the vast majority of world governments who, daily, demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in the Strip. If it were not for repeated US vetoes at the UN Security Council, a resolution demanding a ceasefire would have been passed. Despite this unconditional support, the US is struggling to stave off a wider regional conflict, which is already threatening its political standing in the Middle East. Therefore, Biden wants to regain the initiative by renewing discussions - though without commitment to real action - about a two-state solution and the future of Gaza. Netanyahu is disinterested in these matters, since his single greatest political achievement, from the viewpoint of his right-wing constituency, is that he has completely frozen any discussions on a political horizon in Palestine. For Netanyahu, losing the war means an unceremonious return to the old American political framework of the so-called peace process. The embattled Israeli prime minister also knows that ending the war would constitute the end for his coalition government, which is mostly sustained by far-right extremists like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. To achieve his self-serving goals, the Israeli leader is willing to sustain a clearly losing war.

Though Biden has reportedly lost faith in Netanyahu, he continues to support Israel without openly questioning the disastrous outcomes of the war; not just on the Palestinian people but also on the region and the world, including his own country. Americans, especially those in Biden's Democratic Party, must continue to increase the pressure on their administration so that it resolves its cognitive dissonance in Palestine. Biden must not be allowed to continue to play this deadly balancing act, privately demanding that the war be stopped while openly funding the Israeli war machine. Though a plurality of Americans already feel that way, Biden and his government are yet to receive the message. How many more Palestinians would have to die for Biden to hear the chants of the people, "Ceasefire now?"

The Guardian

The case for no candidate like Biden ever again

THE past three years of United States President Joe Biden's administration have been perceived as an amazing success and dismal failure, depending on who you ask. Some see the successful rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, the economic recovery dubbed Bidenomics and the restoration of credibility to the executive branch as major accomplishments.

Others point to official rhetoric that downplays the devastating impact of COVID-19 subvariants and the end of pandemic mitigation measures and economic relief efforts, such as child allowances that helped reduce child poverty, as examples of the administration's failure to confront immediate and long-term social and economic issues. Worse still, Biden's declaration of unconditional support for Israel and his defence of its genocide along with the resurgence of naked white supremacy reflect the dominating atmosphere of Trumpism during his presidency.

In their decisions, Biden and his administration appear to be not all that dissimilar to their neoliberal and far-right predecessors spanning the past half-century from Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. No wonder many Americans lack enthusiasm for supporting a second Biden term. I am certainly among them. I will vote for Biden come November 5, but my vote will be with the sincere hope I will never have to cast another ballot for a politician who more than most has shaped the disastrous direction the federal government has taken over the past half-century.

As a registered Democrat since turning 18 in the late 1980s, I should be an avid supporter of the Democratic Party, Biden and his vice president, Kamala Harris. Thanks to them, all of my remaining student loan debt, which I began accumulating in 1987 as a college freshman and had been paying off since laying hands on my PhD diploma in 1997, no longer exists. In August, I was one of 804,000 borrowers, whose student debt was erased as part of a student loan forgiveness initiative by the Department of Education. Debt worth tens of thousands of dollars - all compound interest on my original principal of \$41,300 - was gone. As of December, the Biden administration has forgiven \$132bn in loans for 3.6 million

Donald Earl Collins

borrowers.

Admittedly, I was ecstatic. At first. Then I experienced a few days of sighs of relief, an occasional tear and, later, a bit of anger. It was debt I had struggled to repay for decades and couldn't discharge in a bankruptcy as a result of legislation that Biden, as a senator, had spent years lobbying for on behalf of banks and credit companies. When passed in 2005, the

low-income students once they earn their degrees. As of last fall, more than 43 million borrowers owed more than \$1.75 trillion on student loans. Biden's sponsorship of student loan programmes, his support for the slow rise of Pell Grant allotments lagging behind tuition increases and his standing against student loan borrowers seeking relief through bankruptcy have been part of efforts to defund

Or what jobs should I say yes or no to, especially with the conundrum of finding ethical work in social justice or in education versus work merely to pay my student loans and bills, eventual car notes and maybe a mortgage. Or whether I should stay in Pittsburgh with its low and stagnant wages but also low cost of living or move to the Washington, DC, area, one of the most expensive places to live in the US but with higher earning potential.

Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act closed the bankruptcy option for student loan borrowers.

It was debt I had accumulated while completing my three degrees because financial support through federal grants was limited. That was due to amendments to the Higher Education Act that Biden had also supported and that expanded student loans as the primary method to pay for tuition for first-generation students from families living in poverty. While in college, I received the Pell Grant, a federal government subsidy for low-income students, which at that time was about \$2,200 per year. It covered only about 17 percent of my total college expenses at the University of Pittsburgh and only about 29 percent of my out-of-state tuition. Even with me working all through my undergraduate years - including a year where I averaged 30 hours a week as a work-study student - I still had to take out \$16,000 in student loans. That was just for my bachelor's degree.

Today's Pell Grants cover less than 30 percent of college expenses at public higher education institutions, leading to more borrowing and more risks and limitations for

need-based aid over four decades.

That the president is now trying to undo some of the damage to the lives of tens of millions of Americans in no way makes up for his role in creating this crisis in the first place. Nor should it mean that any borrower who has benefitted should automatically grant him their vote. I think about what could have and should have been. Every decision I made in my education had to factor in how much more I would need to borrow to complete my degree. Every decision I came to had to account for this question: Can I afford to pay off these loans?

Decisions like whether I should continue to major in a practical field like computer science or switch to history, a subject I enjoyed and had an affinity for. Or whether I should take time off from school to work and figure out what I really wanted to do as a writer or just pass go and earn my master's degree and doctorate while still in my mid-20s. Or what jobs should I say yes or no to, especially with the conundrum of finding ethical work in social justice or in education versus work merely to pay my students loans and bills, eventual car notes and maybe a mortgage. Or whether I should stay in Pittsburgh

with its low and stagnant wages but also low cost of living or move to the Washington, DC, area, one of the most expensive places to live in the US but with higher earning potential.

And whether and when to buy a house, rent a house or rent an apartment, when to have a kid, when to buy a car, whether and when to leave a job for something slightly better. These were among the many debt-ridden questions and decisions I have faced. Despite my degrees and my middle-class-level income since 1999, I became overwhelmed and ended up declaring bankruptcy on my consumer loan debt in 2011. That still did not remove my obligation to pay my student loans, thanks again to Biden's work on behalf of banking lobbyists in 2005.

Whether fully employed or underemployed, I kept paying or making arrangements to pay. For 25 years, I kept paying, from November 1997 until the student loan pause hit for me in July 2022, some \$67,000 in payments in all. The pandemic pause for student loan payments enacted in 2020 did not initially apply to me because I had originally consolidated all of my student loans. Being able to pay on my loans at a lower interest rate could have helped me save more money for my son to attend college. It could have been the down payment for a new home. But not having to borrow at all could have made the difference between having a successful writing career in my late 20s and 30s instead of my mid-40s and 50s.

Just on the issue of student loan debt alone, Biden's body of work represents the past 50 years of economic stagnation and the rise of the super wealthy at the expense of the struggling American middle class and the expansion of poverty in the US. With friends like Biden, a Democrat working hand-in-hand with Republicans to keep millions of people locked in debt for decades, who needs enemies? Both parties cost me a decade to 15 years of lost income, lost sleep and lost opportunities for a quality of life I can now enjoy with nearly all of my youthful years behind me. I will only vote for Biden in November because the alternative is even worse. I will do so to buy time for a future without politicians like Biden compromising my life chances away.

Aljazeera

Governance space industry's key issue for 2024

Dr. Amal Mudallai

LAST week's UN-Portugal policy symposium on the "Management and Sustainability of Outer Space Activities" coincided with SpaceX's successful launch of its Starship, the most powerful rocket ever built. The Starship is important for NASA and the American space program because it is scheduled to take astronauts to the moon in 2026 - the first time humans will have landed on the moon since the Apollo 17 mission of 1972.

The conference, hosted jointly by the Portuguese Space Agency and UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, also came a few weeks after the landing of the first private sector lunar lander on the moon, the Odyssey. This opened a new chapter in space exploration but also raised important questions about the future of the space economy and of space governance and sustainability.

The joint UN-Portugal conference relied on the UN secretary-general's Policy Brief 7: "For All Humanity - The Future of Outer Space Governance." It aimed to "provide contributions" in preparation for the Summit of the Future, which the UN will host in September. The UN and Portugal will also hold another preparatory space conference on May 15 in Lisbon to prepare for the September summit.

Aarti Holla-Maini, the executive director of the UN's Office for Outer Space Affairs, called the secretary-general's policy brief "our North Star" because "it reminds us of the urgent need for a global inclusive and cooperative governance safeguarding outer space as a common good for humanity." The secretary-general's policy brief on space recommends the development of "a unified regime for space sustainability" to "foster transparency, confidence-building and, importantly, the effective interoperability of space operations in Earth orbit and beyond." A second option the policy brief recommends is that the UN's Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space "consider developing new governance frameworks for various areas of space sustainability."

If there is a single message to take away from the conference, it is that of the urgency of addressing the challenges in outer space and formulating inclusive

space governance. There is a feeling among space experts that the entry of the private sector is a game-changer. The UN is keen to advance space governance through a multilateral approach that is inclusive and sustainable. Holla-Maini warned that "time is of the essence" because "we stand at a watershed moment for governance" of the space domain. The consensus of speakers also focused on the urgency of addressing the global governance of space and emphasized the pivotal role that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space plays and must play in the future.

The rapid and exhilarating growth and technological leaps in the space domain are making it very attractive for exploration, economic opportunities and as a future warfighting domain. This is in addition to the challenges of space debris and congestion in space because of the mushrooming number of satellites in space and the rapid increase in satellite launches. While there is an acknowledgment of "some progress" in terms of debris removal, the situation is far from perfect because of the growing number of satellites that are expected to be launched in the next few years. Experts at the conference expected that, in the next three years, more objects will be launched into space than in the last 60 years combined. A report cited in SpaceNews predicted that "around 20,000 new satellites will launch by the end of the decade."

Space debris is not the only problem caused by the growth in the number of satellites in low Earth orbit and geostationary orbit - there is also situational awareness and the risk of collision among the thousands of satellites orbiting the Earth.

A lack of communication and coordination has already led to some close calls, although they are not publicized. These close calls can happen at any time in the absence of progress on situational awareness and coordination and cooperation in space. Tim Flohrer of the European Space Agency said 80 percent of these near-misses happen in low Earth orbit. But the new and most challenging issue on the minds of countries and the space community

today is the governance of space resources, the ownership of space resources and the space economy. There is agreement on the need for governance and regulations for space resources because the speed of the development and activities "are testing the boundaries of the currently existing legal frameworks," according to Artemis Papathanassiou, the "Space Resources" panel moderator. She added that "regulation is needed to ensure legal certainty, but it should not be too restrictive to allow economic growth."

A legal framework is not only attractive to the space legal community, it is also welcomed by the private sector. Gerald Sanders of NASA's Johnson Space Center told the conference that the private sector considers "having a regulatory regime as key to investment." Experts told the conference that the private sector is in favor of keeping the 1967 Outer Space Treaty because it "provides them with legal certainty," which is "important for business" and "gives confidence to their investors." The UN's treaties on space governance, especially the Outer Space Treaty, address some of these issues but not all. The gaps in this treaty are what is propelling space governance to the top of the agenda in the new space era.

The conference stressed the centrality of the UN and especially the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in leading the way on space governance. Holla-Maini made a strong case for it, saying "we can shepherd the long-term agreements we need to ensure the long-term sustainability of space. If (the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) does not step up, we can be sure other organizations will gladly step in to fill the void of inaction, and that would not be right." The problem is that communication about space issues and their relevance to people's lives is lacking.

For the Summit of the Future to reach a good outcome for space, much needs to be done between now and September to elevate the issue to the top of the world's agenda. This and the Lisbon conference are steps in the right direction. But the problem is the competition from other, more burning, issues on the agenda, especially the ongoing conflicts in two vital regions of the world: Europe and the Middle East.

US pursuit of 'democracy' puts world at risk

Jasna Plevnik

DEMOCRACY, in different forms, is the most followed political system in the world. But there are contrasting views on democracy, with the difference being like those between the two major world powers, China and the United States. The two sides strongly differ on key points of democracy related to social organizations and international relations.

However, no matter how big and worrying these differences are, we should not ignore the fact that the most valuable aspect of democracy is diversity and the right to differ. For China, democracy belongs to all; it is not the property of any one country, and is related to human values. China's fast-paced economic development and the eradication of extreme poverty show the Chinese government works for the common good of the people. According to an Open Society Barometer survey, published six months ago, many respondents said they believe China's growing global influence would be "a force for good".

Beijing has never been interested in imposing its political system or form of government on other countries, neither by using its soft power nor by triggering a war. China has been reiterating that the world should not be dominated by one country, though. The United Nations, according to China, should act as a central pole of international democracy, especially when it comes to global decision-making and enforcing international law. In contrast, the United States sees itself in the pole position, not the UN. Washington even wants Beijing to become a neoliberal democracy and pursue the values in which the US believes.

The US thinks the type of neoliberal democracy it follows has proved to be best for governance, both in theory

and praxis, even though many of its important allies think US-style neoliberal democracy is going through a crisis in the US as well as globally. In the US' foreign policy "democracy" is as significant as military or ecological security. The US' expanded approach to safeguard its national interests and national security, and the balance of power politics, mean Washington could force its model of democracy globally. The US has been pushing in different directions, while desperately pursuing neoliberal policies, which have resulted in economic and geostrategic gains for Washington.

In the interest of neoliberal democracy, the US has taken many anti-democratic actions, and triggered and/or fought wars, in order to engineer regime change in different countries. The results have been a devastated, unstable Iraq, a shambolic Libyan society and economy, and a war-ravaged Afghanistan now ruled by the Taliban, whose eradication the US had promised while invading the country in 2001. Yet the US does not see the chaotic and tragic developments as a defeat or debacle of its "global democracy spreading" campaign. Under the excuse of spreading "democracy", the US in the "Indo-Pacific" region has established new political and military alliances and is even flirting with idea of expanding NATO in the Asia-Pacific, so as to make the region an "open, democratic, peaceful" place governed by rule of law. Now the US' top geostrategic interest is to shield the values of "democracy" in Eastern Europe.

It seems that no cost for the Russia-Ukraine conflict is too high for them. The conflict has not only forced the civilian population in a life-threatening crisis, and destroyed the economy, cultural institutions

and political democracy in Ukraine but also made the EU less democratic and a more propaganda-loving narrative generator. In many parts of Europe, democracy has been under constant attack. Russian opera singers, conductors, writers, actors and athletes have been banned in much of the West, and historical monuments connected with Russia demolished. In the political sphere, former German chancellor Gerhard Schroder was almost expelled from Germany's ruling Social Democratic Party over his close ties with Russia. Anybody who does not see the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a way of protecting "democracy" has been called pro-Russia and/or morally corrupt, which perfectly reflects the hypocritical attitude of the US towards democracy in Europe. In Europe, it is no longer possible to support peace even for Pope Francis and peace organizations, let alone ordinary people, without being attacked as traitors of democracy. An additional blow to democracy and peace in Europe came when the Swedish government announced that it was ending the peace fund that had provided financial support to peace organizations since the 1920s.

It is strange that to strengthen democracy in Europe, the US decided to invest more than 1 billion in Germany to build the largest American military hospital abroad. With the Russia-Ukraine conflict entering its third year, the situation has become increasingly different for the EU. What is evident now is that the US has spread the battlefield from Ukraine to the whole of Europe, all in the name of spreading "democracy" while a nuclear Armageddon seems to be looming. The whole world is at risk, and that is a serious threat to the future of democracy. The question is: Can democracy survive without the people?

Why Russia's anti-Putin election protest matters

Ivan Fomin

ELECTIONS in Russia are neither free nor fair, and the 2024 presidential vote was no exception. Tens of millions of Russians know that. However, this does not mean that the Russian opposition could not use Putin's sham elections as an opportunity for political action. The Noon Against Putin campaign was an attempt to seize that opportunity. Proponents of the campaign called for every dissident Russians to come to polling stations en masse at noon on March 17 and vote against Putin.

To make sense of the strategy behind Noon Against Putin, one should take into account the fact that this campaign emerged as a response to what may be the most fraudulent elections in the history of Putin's Russia. In these voting, all of the Kremlin's usual electoral manipulation techniques were present, such as barring independent candidates from running, ballot stuffing, obstructing poll watchers, forcing state employees to vote, employing questionable online voting and early voting procedures, censoring the media, and persecuting any real opposition. The issues with the fairness of the elections did not stop there. Putin's re-election campaign is particularly controversial as voting was also claimed to be held in the four Ukrainian regions annexed by Russia in 2022. Although Moscow does not even control all of those regions and many residents were killed or had to leave their homes as refugees, none of this stopped the Kremlin opening polling stations.

Moreover, the elections were overshadowed by the death of Aleksei Navalny. Putin's main political opponent was killed in prison less than a month before the vote. Furthermore, even Boris Nadezhdin, a moderate anti-war candidate, was barred from running. After Russians all over the

country lined up in long queues to support his nomination, the regime decided not to take the risk of embarrassing Putin.

Lastly, even Putin's right to run in these elections was questionable. The only reason he was allowed to appear on the presidential vote ballot after serving four presidential terms is because he amended the constitution in 2020 to make it possible. Due to all these issues, one could criticize the Noon Against Putin campaign by pointing out that any participation in Putin's sham elections will ultimately contribute to legitimizing him. Although this position does have some moral validity, there are strong indications that Noon Against Putin was still a better political strategy than an electoral boycott.

Even from the point of view of Russia's electoral laws, voting against any candidate other than Putin is a more reasonable strategy than a boycott, as in Russia there is no minimum turnout threshold for elections. However, this is probably not even the most relevant argument to consider, as the Kremlin not only falsifies the results of the vote, but the turnout figures as well. The Noon Against Putin campaign was initially proposed by Maxim Reznik, a former St. Petersburg legislator, and his associates from the European Petersburg movement. Most of the leaders of the anti-war opposition supported the campaign.

For many, joining the initiative became a way to pay tribute to Aleksei Navalny, who advocated for the campaign shortly before his death. The initiative came to be seen as one of his final wishes. Overall, the initiative was based on the idea that even though Putin's elections are fake, Russians should still use them as an opportunity to express their dissent with Putin's policies. The Noon Against Putin

campaign allowed them to do this even though there were no suitable candidates on the ballot who took an unambiguously anti-Putin, anti-war stance. Russian authorities responded to the campaign by intimidating political activists with warnings qualifying the campaign as illegal "extremist activity."

Dozens of campaign participants were detained. Moreover, in some cases, attempts were made to disrupt the campaign by scheduling concerts and other festive events at polling stations for noon. The rationale behind Noon Against Putin is best understood if one considers the campaign not to be an electoral strategy, but a form of political protest. Most of the nationwide demonstrations held in Russia in recent years have been violently dispersed, and the protesters have been persecuted. Knowing this, the Russian opposition had to find alternative ways to show mass discontent. It made perfect sense for the opposition to use Putin's re-election attempt as yet another opportunity to mobilize the protest. The recent history of Russian protest movements demonstrates that, despite independent opposition candidates are usually barred from running, elections still mobilize protests. This was the case with the protests of 2011-2013 that were sparked by fraudulent State Duma elections, and the 2017-2018 protests organized by Navalny's supporters during his presidential campaign, and the 2019 protests in Moscow provoked by unfair City Duma elections.

One more success of the Noon Against Putin strategy was that it helped to bring together different factions of the Russian opposition. Some advocated casting votes for any randomly chosen candidate other than Putin. Others tried to convince Russians to spoil ballots. Others campaigned for Vladislav

Davankov, a fake liberal candidate controlled by the Kremlin. But despite these differences, all of these factions were united in urging their supporters to go to the polling stations at noon on March 17. Furthermore, in some cities outside of Russia, even advocates of the electoral boycott among Russian emigrants coordinated their protest actions with the Noon Against Putin initiative. The campaign mattered because it showcased the mobilizing potential of the Russian opposition. It demonstrated that despite obstruction from the authorities, the risk of repression, and activists being forced into exile, the Russian opposition can still mobilize its core supporters in large cities.

Apart from expressing dissent, the Noon Against Putin campaign was also designed to boost the morale of the Russian resistance and strengthen it as a community. Trust levels in Russian society are generally very low, hindering collective action. Additionally, the Kremlin deliberately used repression to stop the opposition from coming together in any way, something they have not demonstrated they can do. Putin's propaganda also either completely ignores dissidents or portrays them as an insignificant minority. Given all of this, the Noon Against Putin campaign is meaningful as an opportunity for dissident Russians to participate in collective action with like-minded individuals. Ultimately, regardless of how Putin's propaganda or radical boycott advocates will try to twist it, none of the people who joined the Noon Against Putin action did so to legitimize Putin. Their goal was to show opposition to his autocracy and war, and not to compromise with the tyrant. What was at the core of the protest was the understanding that the only way to succeed in a political struggle is to show up and engage in it.

The Moscow Times

Fukushima PR stunts fooling no one

Zhang Zhouxiang

TOKYO Electric Power Company says it completed the fourth round of nuclear-contaminated water discharges from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea on Sunday. The next round of discharges will start in April. TEPCO has discharged approximately 31,200 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated water since Aug 24 last year.

Although it was treated with an "advanced" liquid processing system, the nuclear-contaminated water still contains many kinds of radioactive elements. Japan is put-

ting lives and health the world over at risk. Also, there have been a series of accidents in the process. On Feb 7, approximately 1.5 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated water leaked from the Daiichi nuclear power plant and seeped into the soil, which means 6.6 billion becquerels of radioactive substances were released altogether. In the early hours of Feb 22, a fire alarm went off at a facility in the nuclear power plant used for burning waste, accompanied by the discharge of steam.

TEPCO and the Japanese

government are not unaware of the potential damage the discharging of the nuclear-contaminated water can cause. On Aug 21, in the face of protests from fishermen and their associations in and near Fukushima, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised they will provide full support to fishing communities during the period of discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water, which might last three decades.

Japan is busy carrying out public relations stunts. Its politi-

cians bow gracefully at news conferences while its ministers eat Fukushima seafood to suggest it is safe for consumption; even US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel visited Fukushima to savor the seafood there. But none of these PR efforts will prevent irreversible consequences caused by the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water. Japan is obliged to establish a substantive participation mechanism with neighboring countries and other stakeholders to decide the best way to treat the water.

The China Daily

Stock Exchange stays bullish, gains 612 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Tuesday, gaining 612.09 points, a positive change of 0.94 percent, closing at 65,502.60 points against 64,890.51 points the previous trading day.

A total of 323,281,871 shares valuing Rs.17.059 billion were traded during the day as compared to 211,758,341 shares valuing Rs. 7.785 billion the last day.

Some 341 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 184 of them recorded gains and 140 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 17 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 27,822,745 shares at Rs.1.38 per share, Telecard Limited with

20,828,617 shares with 9.23 per share and Bank of Punjab with 17,912,724 shares at Rs.6.14 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.200.00 per share price, closing at Rs.21,700.00, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Tobacco Company Limited with a Rs.67.20 rise in its per share price to Rs.1,059.20.

Sapphire Fibres Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.91.67 per share closing at Rs.1,415.00, followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs.80.00 decline to close at Rs.7,420.00.

Rupee remains flat against dollar

The Rupee on Tuesday remained unchanged against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.63.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.6 and Rs281.2, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs1.26 to close at Rs302.35 against the last day's closing of Rs303.51, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs1.85, whereas a decrease of Rs1.22 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs353.78 compared to the last closing of Rs355.00.

The Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal remained stagnant to close at Rs75.87 and Rs74.29.



ISLAMABAD: Country Director of KOICA Pakistan Office Je Ho Yeon meeting with Chairman of CCP Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu.

PCAA achieves another significant milestone with support of UK Dept



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Civil Aviation achieves another significant milestone with the support of the UK Department for Transport. Today, the partnership between the Department for Transport and the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) reached a new level as the UK government

generously provided Aviation Security Screeners Computer Based Training and Checking Programme to the PCAA, along with computers for the Directorate of Aviation Security PCAA.

In a brief ceremony at Islamabad International Airport, Air Cdre Retd Shahid Qadir, Director Aviation Security PCAA,

and Airport Manager Mr Aftab Gillani received the equipment from Mr Mohammad Abdul Gaffar, First Secretary Aviation UK High Commission Islamabad.

Mr Gaffar reiterated the UK DfT's commitment to supporting PCAA in its efforts to enhance aviation security measures in Pakistan. He also com-

mended PCAA for its exceptional performance in the recently concluded ICAO full-scale security audit.

The provision of the computer-based 'Threat Image Recognition' training program and its hardware to PCAA will enable timely compliance with another ICAO requirement of checking screeners of aviation industry inclusive of airlines, ASF, cargo, etc., through a computer-based system.

This collaborative effort demonstrates the dedication of both organizations to enhancing aviation security regulatory capabilities in alignment with the standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The computers provided will be utilized to operate the Computer Based Training program and enhance the effectiveness of the screeners' checking mechanism.

AWE 2024: Pakistani dealer marvels at integration of home appliances

BEIJING (APP): Pakistani dealer Muhammad Khurram Shahzad Alan, who has been doing business with China for over two decades, expressed his amazement at the seamless integration of various home appliances displayed at the Appliance and Electronics World Expo (AWE) 2024 held in Shanghai.

Considered one of the world's largest gatherings showcasing the latest in electronics and appliances, attracting dealers, manufacturers, and technology enthusiasts from around the globe, AWE2024 continues to focus on live displays of smart homes. Smart life solutions such as smart cities, smart healthcare, smart travel, and smart education, as well as innovative products such as VR/AR, wearable devices, service robots, outdoor appliances, and e-sports peripherals, are all on dis-

play at AWE2024.

Khurram Shahzad Alan, who specializes in distributing home appliances in Pakistan, was particularly impressed by the innovative products showcased at the expo. He noted the trend towards smart home technology, where appliances can be seamlessly connected and controlled through a single interface.

"The level of integration and connectivity displayed here is truly remarkable. I have seen many advancements in home appliances over the years, but the extent to which these products can now work together, enhancing our daily lives, is truly mind-boggling," he told CEN. The integration of home appliances is the future. The products here are not just standalone items; they are part of a larger, interconnected system that promises to revolutionize our domestic lives."

During his visit, Alan

also interacted with several exhibitors and learned about the latest advancements in smart home technology. He was particularly impressed by the high level of innovation displayed by Chinese brands. Lauding Chinese brands for their cutting-edge technology and commitment to innovation, he added, "The Chinese brands have truly excelled in this field. Their products are not only technologically advanced but also user-friendly and aesthetically appealing."

He also expressed his appreciation for the diversity of products on display, noting that it represents a global melting pot of ideas and innovations. He believes that such platforms are crucial for promoting cross-cultural exchange and collaboration in the field of electronics and home appliances.

Looking ahead, Alan is optimistic about the potential of the Pakistani market

for these integrated home appliances, with a focus on collaboration with China.

He plans to bring back insights and ideas from the expo to his business, aiming to introduce more innovative and connected products to Pakistani consumers.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Fiveships namely, MSC Precision-V, Xpress Salween, Kotka, Crater and Umm Bab, carrying Container, Wheat and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Grain Terminal and Engro Elengy Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile two more ships, Nimble Nicky and MSC Shy scheduled to load/offload Iron Ore and Container also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim during last 24 hours.

A total of eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, Kotka, Xpress Salween and Hafnia Shanghai left the Port on today morning, while three more ships, MSC Precision-V, Elephanta and Melody are expected to sail on today afternoon.

Cargo volume of 191,327 tonnes, comprising 117,963 tonnes imports cargo and 73,364 tonnes export cargo carried in 5,520 Containers (2,194 TEUs Imports and 3,326 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 298/I Institution. 4/10/2023. Date of hearing 27/3/2024. Shafia VS Habibur Rehman. Notice to No. 1. Habibur Rehman s/o Fazal Rabi. 9. Raza Khan. 10. Bakhti Rawan. 11. Abdullah Khan sons of Habib Rasol. 12. Mst Fatwami w/o Zaren. 13. Mst Rokhan Zari w/o Muben. 14. Mst Tahirun Bibi. W/o Fazal Rasol. 19. Mst Mashoqa d/o Mohamad Rasol resident of Amnawar Tehsil Gagra District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 27/3/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Vietnam, Pakistan can use each others strength: Envoy

LAHORE (APP): Vietnam Ambassador Nguyen Tien Phong said on Tuesday that Vietnam and Pakistan can use each other's strength. Pakistan can avail the opportunities from FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) of Vietnam with EU (European Union), USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and others and similarly Vietnam can benefit from Pakistan's GSP Plus Status.

He was talking to President of Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Kashif Anwar here at LCCI Executive Committee Members Mian Attiq-ur-Rehman, Raja Hassan Akhtar and Hakeem Muhammad Usman were also present.

The Ambassador said that Pakistan is a big country and has vast potential which can be used to promote trade between

Vietnam and Pakistan.

He called for promoting business-to-business and people-to-people contacts, and said that e-visa is important to promote business activities. The Ambassador also highlighted the potential sectors where the two countries can collaborate. He mentioned tourism and said that the delegations and contacts are important.

While highlighting textile sector, he said that Vietnam imports yarn and cotton from Pakistan, makes garments and exports to EU, Japan and USA and Pakistan can also import fibre from Vietnam to produce fabric for export purposes. He said that the IT is another field where affiliations are important as Vietnam currently affiliated with Japan, India, South Korea and other countries. He said that Pakistan has a very strong IT labour force

and both the countries can have joint ventures in this field.

The Ambassador said that agriculture is also a very important sector which can produce many fruitful results. He mentioned the Vietnam success from starving insecure food supply before 1986 to third biggest rice exporter in 1989. He also highlighted the potential sectors including Halal food, sea food, fish farming and others.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that both Vietnam and Pakistan enjoy more than 50 years of sound diplomatic relations that were formally established in 1972. Besides these ties, both countries enjoy trade and economic cooperation in diverse fields. He said that despite starting as one of the weaker economies in the mid of 1970s and

1980s, Vietnam emerged against all the odds. Following the path of rapid economic growth, Vietnam showed impressive progress in industrial, agricultural and services sectors. That was the result of a broad-based economic transformation which opened the Vietnam economy to international markets and foreign trade. It is pertinent to mention that the global exports of Vietnam have surpassed US \$ 370 billion while the global imports of Vietnam have crossed US \$ 358 billion. "We have a lot to learn from Vietnam economic model," he added.

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, he said, Pakistan's exports to Vietnam dropped from US \$ 261 million in 2021-22 to US \$ 244 million in 2022-23. In the same period, the imports from Vietnam also decreased from US \$ 578

million to US \$ 229 million. In the first seven months of the current financial year (July 2023 to January 2024), Pakistan's exports to Vietnam stood at US \$ 248 million while the imports were US \$ 165 million.

He added, "We should target to take the level of bilateral trade volume to at least US \$ 2 billion through providing better market access to exporters in both countries." Pakistan's main exports to Vietnam consist of corn, woven fabrics of cotton, and leather. On the other hand, Pakistan imports from Vietnam include electronic equipment, synthetic filament yarn, natural rubber and tea etc.

The LCCI President said that the potential sectors where Pakistan can enhance its exports to Vietnam includes seafood, processed meat, pharma-

ceutical products, fruits and vegetables. Moreover, there is tremendous room for collaboration in the Information Technology and Tourism sectors.

He said that there is a need to find new avenues of trade between Pakistan and Vietnam because Vietnam being an active member of ASEAN, holds great importance for Pakistan. Both countries should explore the possibility of a signing Free Trade Agreement which can provide better market access to business communities from Pakistan and Vietnam.

He particularly mentioned about the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) established by the Government of Pakistan to primarily focus on expediting new investments in five areas including Defence, Agriculture, Minerals, Information

Technology / Telecommunication and Energy. He hoped the Ambassador would apprise the investors from Vietnam about these investment opportunities in Pakistan under SIFC.

Kashif Anwar was of the view that increasing the frequency of direct flights, strengthening of banking channels, organizing trade delegations and holding single country exhibitions on reciprocal basis would prove to be effective in opening new avenues that are much needed for enhancing the mutual trade relations.

He said that respective commercial sections of our missions can play an important role in enhancing the knowledge about each other's markets by sharing market survey reports with their chambers of Commerce on regular basis.



KARACHI: Consul General of United States of America in Karachi, Conrad Tribble, receiving memento from Chairman NAPA Syed Jawaid Iqbal.



In brief

National Tchoukball C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Tchoukball Federation (PTF) would be organizing the 7th National Tchoukball Championship would be played from May 2 here at Liaquat Gymnasium of the Pakistan Sports Complex. The preparations for the championship are underway and ten teams from across the country were participating in the championship, Secretary General Emmanuel Asid told APP. The participating teams include Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Navy, Police, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad. The championship would continue till May 6 and prizes will be distributed among the winning players at the end of the championship.

Raducanu pulls out of Miami Open

MIAMI (AFP/APP): Britain's Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the Miami Open with a lower back injury, tournament organisers said on Tuesday, the latest setback for the 21-year-old. Raducanu spent eight months out with wrist and ankle problems last year but returned to action in January and had an encouraging performance at Indian Wells last week where she reached the third round. "I have been experiencing lower back pain and at this stage of my return to competition I don't want to risk anything happening," said Raducanu. "I really tried my best to be ready and I'm sad to be pulling out of Miami as it's a cool tournament but wish the event all the best." The 2021 US Open winner, a wildcard entry at Miami, was scheduled to play China's Wang Xiyi in the first round on Tuesday. Raducanu had surgeries on her ankle and both wrists during last year. She was beaten in the Indian Wells third round by world number two Aryna Sabalenka. Wang will now face Slovakian qualifier Anna Karolina Schmiedlova. Tuesday's action sees Romanian Simona Halep return to action after her four-year doping ban was reduced to nine months and she was cleared by the Court of Arbitration for Sport for an immediate return. Halep, given a wildcard entry, will take on Spain's Paula Badosa.

Mohsin Naqvi inspects Stadium

KARACHI (APP): Federal Minister for Interior and Chairman of PCB Mohsin Naqvi inspected the National Bank Stadium, Karachi after the conclusion of the HBL PSL 9 final. He observed various facilities at the venue across all the enclosures. COO PCB, Salman Naseer was also present on this occasion. The Chairman expressed his reservation on the lack of quality infrastructure at the venue and instructed swift upgradation of the stadium and pressed upon the importance of enhancing the fan's view from enclosures. According to the new upgradation plan, the chairman asked for the protective palisade in the stadium to be moved further towards the boundary to minimise the hindrance concerning the view of fans. Naqvi also met the groundsmen of National Bank Stadium and lauded their hard-work throughout the HBL PSL 9. He said, "As part of our plan to upgrade the three major venues in the country, I have tasked the team to finalise National Bank Stadium's upgradation plan swiftly and start the work as soon as possible.

Pakistan to host T20 Blind Cricket World Cup

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) would host the 4th T20 Blind Cricket World Cup in two provinces Punjab and Sindh from November 20 to December 3. Chairman Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) and President World Blind Cricket Limited Syed Sultan Shah said the World T20 Blind Cricket Cup would be played in Pakistan from November 20 to December 3 in Sindh and Punjab. In this regard PBCC has decided to approach the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and both provinces to host the Blind T20 World Cup in a befitting manner, he told APP.

Shah said the expenses for organizing the World Cup would be around Rs 60 million. PBCC will approach the Pakistan Cricket Board and both provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab in this regard, he said. He said hosting the fourth T20 Blind Cricket World Cup was an honor for Pakistan. In the 25th Annual General Meeting on February 27 in Dubai, Pakistan was given the hosting rights for the 4th T20 Blind Cricket World Cup, he said. Shah said a total of seven countries besides Pakistan have confirmed their participation in the World Cup, including India, Sri Lanka,

South Africa, Bangladesh, West Indies, New Zealand and Nepal. Meanwhile Australia will soon confirm its participation in the event, he said. He said during the General Council meeting, talks were also been held with officials of various countries, including India, who have assured participation in the World Cup. India Blind Cricket Council Chairman Mahantish GK has also assured to come in the World Cup in Pakistan, he said. Shah said Pakistan Cricket Board was in contact with Punjab and Sindh governments to prepare for the event. The venues for the matches of the event are yet to be decided, he said.

PM felicitates Islamabad United over PSL 9 win; says cricket unites whole nation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday congratulated the Islamabad United team for winning the 9th Pakistan Super League, saying that the cricket was a uniting factor for the whole nation. In the last ball thriller, Islamabad United defeated Multan Sultans by two wickets in the PSL final at National Bank Stadium, Karachi on Monday, becoming the first team to have won the title for the third time as the team already championed the PLS in 2016 and 2018 as well. "Both teams played a fabulous game. This is the victory of whole nation, not any single team. The cricket game unites the whole nation," the prime minister said in a statement. He also lauded the Pakistan Cricket Board, security forces, administration, all the organisers and the spectators for ensuring the success of the PSL 9. The whole PLS Series presented the great con-

Ayaz, Mustafa felicitates Islamabad United

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah have felicitated Islamabad United for winning the finale of PSL Season-9. While appreciating the successful holding of PSL Season-9 in Pakistan, Ayaz Sadiq said that the revival of sports in Pakistan is essential for a positive outlook of the country. He also applauded the sportsmanship of Islamabad United for winning the final match after an exciting play. He added, "Sports are pivotal for promoting healthy trends in Society, especially among youth." In his congratulatory message, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah commended the performance of Islamabad United in the final match of PSL Season 9. He added, "As winning in sports is interlinked with focusing on performance, winning in life is also attached with focusing on performance."

tests as well as the sportsman spirit, he said and particularly thanked the international players who had participated in the tournament. "The PSL did not only provide recreation to the cricket lovers but also played a key role in exploring the sports talent

at the grassroots level. It also helped revive the international cricket in Pakistan," Prime Minister Shehbaz remarked. He also reiterated that the incumbent government was determined to take all-out measures for promotion of cricket and other sports in the country.

Squash Open to be held in April

ISLAMABAD (APP): Defending champion Nouran Gohar and World No.1 Ali Farag have been named as the top seeds for the Black Ball Squash Open 2024 after the draws for the PSA World Tour Gold event were released. The event would take place from April 11 to 16 from the Black Ball Sporting Club in Cairo, Egypt said a press release. Women's top seed Gohar would be looking to defend her title from 2023 and claim her first title of the season. The World No.3 was sidelined for four months with a plantar fascia injury earlier in the season but bounced back strongly to reach the final of both the J.P Morgan Tournament of Champions and Windy City Open. She will open her tournament campaign against either Emilia Soini or Fayrouz Abolkheier after a round one bye.

USA's Olivia Weaver is the No.2 seed for the event. The American has produced some of the best squash of her career this season, winning two events on home soil as well as recorded a semi-final finish at the U.S Open in October. The 28-year-old has never progressed past the semi-final stage at a Gold event and will be determined to achieve that milestone as she looks to break into the world's top five. World No.6 Nour El Tayeb is the No.3 seed and finds herself in the same side of the draw as top seed Gohar. El Tayeb claimed her third title of the season in Cleveland recently and will be looking to cause an upset to reach the final and give herself a chance at making it four wins for the season. El Tayeb will need to overcome either Zeina Mickawy or Alicia Mead in her opening match on day two. Belgium's

Tinne Gilis and Egypt's Rowan Elaraby are the No.4 and No.5 seeds and are due to meet in the quarter finals if they get through their opening matches. Gilis reached a career-high ranking of No.6 last month but now sits two places off that at No.8. She'll be hoping for a big performance in that potential clash to giver herself an opportunity to reach the final. After a difficult year on tour Rowan Elaraby has shown her true fighting spirit this season and produced several impressive wins, none more notable than over top seed Gohar in Detroit. World champion and runaway World No.1 Ali Farag is the top seed for the men's event, looking to secure a seventh title of the season. The 31-year-old is a three-time finalist at the Black Ball Sporting Club, therefore will be extra determined to claim one of the only Gold events titles that has eluded him so far.

Russia's planned 'Friendship Games' a 'cynical attempt' to 'politicise sport', says IOC

MOSCOW (BBC): Russia's plan to host a 'Friendship Games' is "a cynical attempt" by the country "to politicise sport", says the International Olympic Committee. Russia wants to hold the event in September this year, with a winter Games planned for 2026. The IOC said the plan is a "blatant violation of the Olympic Charter". The first Friendship Games were organised by the Soviet Union and eight other countries after they boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. Russia is currently banned from the Olympics following the invasion of Ukraine. The IOC added: "The Russian government has launched a very intensive diplomatic offensive by having government delegations and ambassadors,

as well as ministerial and other governmental authorities, approaching governments around the world. "To make their purely political motivation even more obvious, they are deliberately circumventing the sports organisations in their target countries. "This is a blatant violation of the Olympic Charter and an infringement of the various UN resolutions at the same time. "It is a cynical attempt by the Russian Federation to politicise sport." It added the Russian government is showing "total disrespect for the global anti-doping standards and the integrity of competitions". After the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian and Belarusian athletes were widely banned

from international sport. However, athletes from both countries who have qualified for the Paris 2024 Olympics will be allowed to participate as neutral individuals. For this summer's Games in Paris, the conditions of their inclusion include competing without flags, emblems or anthems of their country. The IOC also highlighted unnecessary pressures athletes could face if they are forced to participate in the Friendship Games, stating they could be at risk of being "exploited as part of a political propaganda campaign". Last week, the World Anti-Doping Agency, external (Wada) raised concerns about unsanctioned multi-sports events at its meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Australia pull out of Afghanistan T20 series

DUBAI (BBC): Australia have withdrawn from their men's T20 series against Afghanistan in August because of continued restrictions on women and girls in the country under the ruling Taliban. The three-match series was scheduled to take place in the United Arab Emirates. Cricket Australia (CA) says government advice is that conditions for women and girls "are getting worse". It is the third time Australia has declined to play Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. A one-off Test match in September 2021 and a three-match men's one-day series in March 2023 were also cancelled. Australia will continue to play Afghanistan in tournaments, having beaten them by three wickets at the T20 Cricket World Cup last

November. A CA statement said: "Following consultation with the Australian Government, CA previously postponed the ODI series against Afghanistan scheduled for March 2023 after a marked deterioration in human rights for women and girls in Afghanistan. "Over the past twelve months CA has continued to consult with the Australian Government on the situation in Afghanistan. The government's advice is that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse. For this reason, we have maintained our previous position and will postpone the bilateral series against Afghanistan. "CA continues its strong commitment to supporting participation by women and girls in cricket around the world and will continue to actively

engage the International Cricket Council and work closely with the Afghanistan Cricket Board to determine what actions could be taken to support the resumption of bilateral matches in the future." The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 and have placed restrictions on the rights of women to work and study. Girls in Afghanistan are only allowed to attend primary school. Teenage girls and women have also been barred from entering school and university classrooms. They are not allowed in parks, gyms and pools. Beauty salons have been shut, while women must dress in a way that only reveals their eyes. They must be accompanied by a male relative if they are travelling more than 72km (45 miles).

Hasaranga out of retirement for Bangladesh Test series

DHAKA (AFP/APP): Sri Lankan all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga has come out of Test retirement for the two-match series in Bangladesh starting on Friday. The 26-year-old, who announced his retirement from Test cricket in August to prolong his limited-overs career, was included in Sri Lanka's 17-man squad on Monday. Hasaranga is one of two changes from the one-off Test against Afghanistan in February, with left-handed batsman Nishan Peiris getting his maiden Test call-up. Hasaranga and Peiris replaced Asitha Fernando and Milan Rathnayake in the squad. Hasaranga's inclusion means he will miss the start of the Indian Premier League with Sunrisers Hyderabad.

The opening Test begins on March 22 in Sylhet while Chittagong will host the second Test from March 30. Tourists Sri Lanka won the Twenty20 series 2-1. Bangladesh clinched the one-day series 2-1. Sri Lanka Test squad: Dhananjaya de Silva (capt), Kusal Mendis, Dimuth Karunaratne, Nishan Madushka, Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Kamindu Mendis, Lahiru Udara, Wanindu Hasaranga, Prabath Jayasuriya, Ramesh Mendis, Nishan Peiris, Kasun Rajitha, Vishwa Fernando, Lahiru Kumara, Chamika Gunasekara.

Karachi Kings' Irfan Niazi gets dual honors

KARACHI (APP): In a thrilling culmination to the HBL Pakistan Super League 9, Islamabad United clinched the title, but it was Karachi Kings' emerging talent Muhammad Irfan Khan Niazi who stole the spotlight in the post-match ceremony. Hailing from Mianwali, Niazi was named both the Fielder of the Tournament and the Emerging Player of the Tournament.

Having debuted for Karachi Kings in the 2023 season, Niazi continued to make his mark in the 2024 edition as one of the retained players from the previous squad. His outstanding performance throughout the season included scoring 171 runs in 8 innings at an impressive strike rate of 140.16. Notably, he played a pivotal role in securing a crucial victory against Lahore Qalandars with a match-winning knock in a must-win game for Kings, earning widespread acclaim. Additionally, he ranked fifth in the list of highest run-scorers for Karachi Kings in PSL 9.

Irfan Niazi's fielding prowess was evident throughout the tournament, with the emerging player taking 8 catches in 9 matches, further solidifying his reputation as a dynamic asset on the field. His exceptional contributions have not only bolstered Karachi Kings' performance but have also underscored his potential as a rising star in Pakistani cricket. Karachi Kings congratulated Irfan Khan Niazi on his well-deserved accolades and look forward to witnessing his continued success in the future.

Shadab Khan named captain of Team of HBL PSL 9

PESHAWAR (APP): Shadab Khan of Islamabad United was appointed as the captain of the HBL PSL 9 Team of the tournament. The panel was led by Usman Wahla, Director – International Cricket, comprising independent members, Danny Morrison, Mark Butcher, Tariq Saeed and Urooj Mumtaz. During the selection process, the independent panel considered various aspects of T20 cricket, including consistency, impact on the team, overall performance, and best possible team combination. 25-year-old Shadab, led United to the third title in HBL PSL, was also named player of the tournament for his all-round performance, which included 305 runs and 14 wickets from 12 matches.

Along with Shadab, two Islamabad United players – Imad Wasim and Naseem Shah also made it to the team of HBL PSL 9. Imad, played a vital role in United's winning campaign in HBL PSL 9, as his five for 23 in four overs and unbeaten 19 off 17 balls in Monday's final led his side to a two-wicket win over Multan Sultans at the jam-packed National Bank Stadium. 21-year-old Naseem Shah, who returned from shoulder injury after six months, was another vital cog in United's success. The right-arm pacer bagged 15 wickets at an economy rate of 7.56. Multan Sultans' who played their fourth HBL PSL final (2021, 2022,2023, 2024) on



Monday night, had five players making it to the playing XI, which included three foreign players – Usman Khan (430 runs, 2x100s, 2x50, strike-rate 164.12), Chris Jordan (six wickets, 8.42 eco.) and David Willey (15 wickets, 7.46 eco.). The two local players from the Sultans' side are leg-spinner Usama Mir, who topped the bowling charts with a record 24 wickets from 12 matches, with six for 40 being his best figures, and Iftikhar Ahmed, who scored 259 runs with a strike rate of 193.28. Multan Sultans' captain Mohammad Rizwan is named as 12th man of the side. The team also includes Karachi Kings emerging category player Muhammad Irfan Khan, who scored 171 runs at a strike rate of 140.16 and also bagged eight catches. Peshawar Zalmi's opening pair of Babar Azam and Saim Ayub also made it to the HBL PSL 9 Team. Right-handed Babar topped the batting charts with 569 runs from 11 matches at an average of 56.9 and a strike rate of 142.6. He also struck one century and five half-centuries during the

course of the tournament. 22-year-old Saim scored 345 runs from 11 matches at a strike rate of 157.53. Zalmi player also bagged eight wickets and was named the all-rounder of the tournament for his heroics with the bat and ball. Team of HBL PSL 9 (in batting order) Saim Ayub (Peshawar Zalmi) (345 runs, 2x50s, strike-rate 157.53; eight wickets, 7.45 eco.) Babar Azam (Peshawar Zalmi) (569 runs, 1x100, 5x50s, strike-rate 142.6) Usman Khan* (Multan Sultans) (WK) (430 runs, 2x100s, 2x50, strike-rate 164.12; six catches and one stumping) Shadab Khan (Islamabad United) (captain) (305 runs, 3x50, strike-rate 128.57; 14 wickets, 8.54 eco.) Iftikhar Ahmed (Multan Sultans) (259 runs, 1x50, strike-rate 193.28) Imad Wasim (Islamabad United) (126 runs, 1x50, strike-rate 128.57; 12 wickets, 6.60 eco.) Muhammad Irfan Khan (Karachi Kings) (emerging) (171 runs, strike-rate 140.16; eight catches) Chris Jordan* (Multan Sultans) (six wickets, 8.42 eco.) David Willey* (Multan Sultans) (15 wickets, 7.46 eco.) Usama Mir (Multan Sultans) (24 wickets, 8.13 eco.) Naseem Shah (Islamabad United) (15 wickets, 7.56 eco.) Mohammad Rizwan (Multan Sultans) (407 runs, 4x50s, strike-rate 122.22; 12 catches)

England cruised to a comfortable 27-run victory

DUNEDIN (BBC): England cruised to a comfortable 27-run victory over New Zealand in the first T20 in Dunedin.



Captain Heather Knight's classy 63 from just 39 balls led the visitors to 160-4 after losing the toss, supported by Maia Bouchier's unbeaten 43. White Ferns skipper Suzie Bates struck 65 in reply but struggled for middle order support as they were restricted to 133-5. Seamer Lauren Bell starred in England's dominant bowling performance with 2-29. England's victory was impressive in the absence of key players Nat Sciver-Brunt, Danni Wyatt, Sophie Ecclestone and Alice Capsey, who are missing the first three T20s because of the clash with the end of the

Women's Premier League in India. Opener Tammy Beaumont returned to the XI after an absence of more than two years from the T20 side, managing 15 in her 100th match in the format. Fellow opener Sophia Dunkley added a dynamic 32 from 24 balls before an entertaining partnership of 91 between Knight and Bouchier propelled England to their competitive total. New Zealand

fought admirably with the ball on a flat pitch but were let down in the field, with three dropped catches and a missed stumping. They were also without important players in usual captain Sophie Devine and Amelia Kerr because of the WPL, and their absence piled the pressure on Bates in the chase as the rest of the line-up struggled to counter England's discipline in the middle overs.

Early completion of renovation of Arbab Niaz Stadium

PESHAWAR (APP): Adviser on Sports and Youth Affairs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Fakhr Jahan Tuesday directed that the construction project for the improvement of Arbab Niaz Stadium Peshawar should be accelerated on an emergency basis so that this important project can be completed this year. He expressed these views while presiding over the review meeting regarding the construction work of the "Feasibility and Improvement of Arbab Niaz Stadium Peshawar" development project here on Tuesday. In the

meeting, Director General Sports Abdul Nasir Mohmand, Chief Planning Officer Sports Hamid Naveed, Chief Mega Projects of Communications and Construction Department Ijaz Khan, Superintending Engineer Quadratullah Marwat, XEN Riaz Bangash and other relevant officials attended the meeting. Adviser on Sports and Youth Affairs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Fakhr Jahan was briefed on this occasion regarding the so far work over the project which has been delayed from the last three years. The sports adviser

directed that the construction work of this important sports ground of the province should be accelerated and its civil work should be completed by June this year. He said that this was in the province. There is an important project for the revival of world cricket, and we are trying to prepare it for international cricket and other league matches as soon as possible. In this regard, he directed to call the concerned officials of WAPDA in the next meeting to solve the problems related to electricity from the WAPDA department.



In brief

ANF recovers 52 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover 52 kg of drugs and arrested four suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that in an operation, 440 grams of Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Qatar at Islamabad Airport. In another operation at Islamabad Airport, 54 heroin-filled capsules and 4 suspicious materials were recovered from a Karachi-bound passenger. In the third operation, 70 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Abu Dhabi at Lahore Airport. 50 kg hashish was recovered from the Turbat area and 1 kg hashish was recovered from a woman arrested near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

Gas leakage explosion

RAWALPINDI (APP): A citizen injured due to a gas leakage explosion Tench Bhatta area this morning. The spokesman 1122 informed that rescue teams were immediately dispatched to the incident spot. The fire erupted with a gas blast which resulted in burn injuries to a 55 year old man, identified as Riaz. He was shifted to the hospital by giving first aid. The victim's family confirmed that Riaz got 25 percent burnt. The spokesman urged citizens to remain vigilant on such continued issues and be careful while handling the domestic fuel system.

6,000 adulterated milk destroyed

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a significant move to tackle the issue of adulterated milk, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has taken action to destroy 6,000 liters of milk. Under the directive of Director General Asim Javed, rigorous operations have been initiated to curb the supply of adulterated dairy products. During the inspection process, it was discovered that the milk lacked essential fats and natural nutrients, indicating it had been tampered with. As a result, two milk-carrying vehicles were scrutinized in Chongi No. 8 and Iqbal Town. Subsequently, the 6,000 liters of adulterated milk were confiscated and destroyed to prevent further harm to consumers. Furthermore, the suppliers responsible for the distribution of this adulterated milk have faced penalties amounting to 80,000 rupees for breaching hygiene regulations. This decisive action by the PFA underscores the commitment to ensuring the safety and quality of food products available to the public.

Police conducted search operation

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police on special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Mehmood Hamdani on Tuesday launched a search operation in Dhoke Gangal and adjoining areas, said a police spokesman. He informed that heavy police contingent, Elite Force, Special Branch personnel and Ladies police under the supervision of Airport SHO Police Station carried out operation in the area. During operation, police searched 52 houses, 10 shops while 96 suspects were also interrogated. According to police spokesman, the search operations to net criminals and proclaimed offenders were regularly being conducted under National Action Plan in different areas of the district particularly to ensure law and order.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui chairing a meeting.

Govt committed to provide low-cost, affordable living opportunities: Pirzada

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada has said that the government is committed to providing low-cost and affordable living opportunities to the poor and vulnerable segments of society.

While chairing a meeting of the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA), he emphasized the importance of ensuring that plots are allocated strictly on merit.

During the meeting, Riaz Pirzada was apprised

about the management and working of the department by Director General FGEHA Capt. (R) Muhammad Zafar Iqbal.

Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada urged the identification and removal of any irregularities to uphold transparency in the allotment process.

Furthermore, he directed the Director General to conduct a thorough and transparent audit of the authority stressing the need for stringent meas-

ures against corruption, as no one will be spared on any irregularity.

"We must deliver what we committed to the allottees and highlighted the urgency of completing ongoing and stalled development projects to facilitate the government employees and the general public," he added.

Secretary Ministry of Housing and Works Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash and other senior officers of the ministry and FGEHA were also present during the meeting.

Film legend Muhammad Ali remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 18th death anniversary of legendary Pakistani actor Muhammad Ali was observed. Mohammad Ali was born on 19th April 1931 at Rampur in India. Muhammad Ali's family migrated from India to Karachi after the partition in 1947, a private news channel reported.

He joined Radio Pakistan Hyderabad station as a broadcaster in 1956.

Later, he moved to Radio Pakistan Karachi where its then Director General Zulfikar Ali Bukhari became his mentor for his acting career.

He started his film career in 1962. He was the lead actor and 'hero' in 94 films. He won ten Nigar awards in his career. He died on this day in 2006 in Lahore due to a heart attack.

‘Sri Lanka keen to boost bilateral trade with Pakistan upto \$800 mln’

ISLAMABAD (INP): Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ravindra Chandrasiri Wijegunaratne has said that his country was keen to enhance the bilateral trade with Pakistan up to \$800 million, for which the potential in various sectors of the two countries has to be exploited.

The High Commissioner said that at present, the bilateral trade potential between the two countries was \$1 billion, which was achievable, but he was committed to take the bilateral trade to the target of \$800 million during his tenure.

This was stated by him while talking to a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) led by its President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari which called on him on Tuesday.

Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and United Business Group, FPCCI Secretary General, Zafar Bakhtawari and Executive Member of ICCI, Amir Hamza were also included in the delegation.

Ravindra Chandrasiri Wijegunaratne envoy said that the bilateral trade between the two countries was \$400 million last year, which was less than that of \$510 million in year 2018.

He added that Pakistan and Sri Lanka signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2005, which was Pakistan's first FTA with any country.

He said that there were multiple cooperation opportunities between the two countries especially in agriculture,

industry, tourism and religious tourism. The envoy further said that geo-strategically Pakistan was of utmost importance especially its land link with Central Asia and that its economic integration was also very useful for Sri Lanka.

He expressed the hope that strengthening of economic and trade relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka will take the bilateral trade between the two countries to a higher level once again.

The High Commissioner said that at one time Pakistan used to import 70 percent of Tea from Sri Lanka, which has now reduced to 2 percent, which needs to be increased. He went on to say that Pakistan's Basmati Rice and Citrus were very popular in Sri Lanka so Pakistan's trade in this field can be increased.

The envoy said that Pakistan has many opportunities in religious tourism for Sri Lankans, there are Buddha relics from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Taxila. He said that 5 flights are coming to Karachi and Lahore every week from Sri Lanka, which can have a good impact on tourism and trade.

He further said that a ceremony will be held at the beginning of the new year of Sri Lanka in coming April 24, and a Sri Lankan restaurant will be opened in any major city including Islamabad and Lahore.

Speaking on the occasion, President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the Free Trade Agreement between Pakistan and Sri Lanka was signed in 2005, but its true potential has not been exploited.

Khalid calls for tangible steps to develop technology

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui Tuesday emphasized transitioning from technology adopter to generator. He stressed the need to take concrete steps to address the ministry's challenges and enhance its functionality.

During the discussions with the heads of different wings of the ministry, Dr. Maqbool Siddiqui

stressed cooperation to streamline ministry functions and tackle existing issues.

The Pakistan Halal Authority's role in promoting 'Halal' trade and monitoring imports was highlighted in the meeting.

It was briefed that the Council for Works and Housing Research, in Karachi, requires restructuring for improved efficiency, as conveyed to the

minister. Notably, the Technology Commercialization Corporation of Pakistan will be replaced by the IRADA to enhance collaboration for technological progress. The insights on the National Institute of Electronics' work on electric vehicles and high-demand chip designs were also shared, reflecting a focus on advancing technology in Pakistan.

Scrutiny concludes for nomination papers of 48 Senate seats

ISLAMABAD (APP): Scrutiny of nomination papers for 48 Senate seats, including 12 each from Punjab and Sindh, 11 from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and two from the federal capital, was completed on Tuesday.

In the federal capital, National Assembly members will elect representatives for one general seat and one seat for tech-

nocrats, including Ulema, in the Senate.

Meanwhile, members of the four provincial assemblies will elect senators, including seven for general seats, two for women seats, and two for technocrats, including Ulema, from each province. Additionally, one seat for non-Muslims will be elected from both Punjab and Sindh provinces.

Polling for the Senate's

vacant seats from the federal capital will take place at Parliament House on April 2, 2024. The returning officer's deadline to file appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers is March 21, 2024. The Tribunal is scheduled to dispose of appeals by March 25, 2024. Revised lists of candidates will be published on March 26, 2024.

TDACP launches plantation drive at Murree tourist spots

ISLAMABAD (APP): Tourism Development Corporation Punjab (TDACP) on Tuesday launched a plantation campaign at the tourist spots of Murree with the support of the Forest Department and the district administration under the Clean and Green Punjab program.

Murree is a center of tourism due to its natural beauty as tourists coming from various

parts of the country at large to enjoy their trip. The plantation drive would not only further enhance its beauty, but also encourage the tourists throng to Murree to observe the nature, said a press release issued here. Deputy Commissioner Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi inaugurated the plantation campaign, adding that all the plants have been donated by a charitable organization.



RAWALPINDI: Volunteers distribute food among the people in fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan at Satellite Town.

Hur Movement in Sindh



M Khalid Mairaj Abbasi

The only guerilla war against British imperialism in Sindh was waged by Hur community. Hundreds of Hur fighters sacrificed their lives and properties for their homeland. Hur freedom fighters struggled and resisted for one hundred years till the time Britishers left the subcontinent in 1947.

Pir Pagaro-I Syed Sibghatullah Shah Rashidi named his devotees with HUR and ordered them to be alert, take arms to defend motherland against nafareous designs of Ranjit Singh of Punjab and to foil the ill intentions of British colonial forces.

Just seventeen years before the invasion of British army, Syed Ahmed Shaheed Bareilvi (1786-) on his way to Balakot visited Pir jo

Goth in 1826 AD and called on Pir Pagaro-I Syed Subghatullah Shah Rashidi (1780-1831 AD). The Pir extended support to him in the form of 500 soldiers, weapons, boats and assisted him financially to fight against Sikh regime at Balakot where he embraced martyrdom with his soldiers in a furious war. He wrote letters to Hur community across Sindh, Thar desert, Run of Kuch and Rajistan India to prepare for the Jihad.

When British forces conquered Sindh in 1843, the ruler of Mirpurkhas Mir Sher Mohammad Talpur known as Sher-e-Sindh started guerilla war against them. After ten years he was martyred. Sher-e-Sindh was devotee of Pir Pagaro. That's why, Mir Ali Murad Talpur Ruler of Khairpur State warned the English forces that it was Pir Pagro, not Sher-e-Sindh, who was fighting you.

British government had the confirm reports of strength and following of the spiritual seat of Pir Pagaro. It is reported that all Pirs and Mirs of Sindh attended the Darbar on May 24, 1844 to show allegiance to the British Crown except for Syed Ali Gohar Shah Rashidi (1816-1847) Pir Pagaro II. Sensing possible resistance from Hurs, the government kept a vigilant eye on Pagaro and the Hur community.

It is pertinent to mention that Hur movement is divided into two phases; first movement from 1843 to 1896 and second movement from 1040 to 1952 AD. Let us have a glance on both movements.

1st Hur Movement (1843-1896) First Hur uprising began in 1869 led by Darya Khan Nizamani against British forces who were detained in Kot Diji Fort at Khairpur wherefrom he fled and then martyred. later on, Bachu Badshah and Piru Wazir along with his twelve companions called Behroothia in Sindh established a parallel government called Sanghar Sarkar for eight years from 1888 to 1896 at Makhi forest in district Sanghar, Sindh. Makhi forest - a cluster of 200 lakes and spread over 1,124 miles, remained their main hideout during both Hur movements.

The British administration including William Henry Lucas Deputy Commissioner Tharparkar, notorious cruel Inspector Police Julia Singh and others used all tactics against them but failed to overpower Sanghar Sarkar. Julia Singh was later killed along with his other policemen by Hurs in an ambush. The British government left no stone unturned to either kill or arrest Bachu Badshah and Piru Wazir but to no avail. As a last resort, British government put pressure on their spiritual leader Pir Pagaro to direct

Bachu Badshah to surrender. In the meanwhile, the cases were lodged against Pir Pagaro on false allegations to bow him down. Simultaneously, he was stopped to visit Hur dominant districts as his visits were, supposedly, giving impetus to resistance against the government. Many a Hur was arrested and put behind the bar in Jails. Eleven concentration camps, reportedly, were established in India for Hur captives. Some of them were sent to Kala Pani "Andoman" Poona and other Indian Jails. Govt put pressure on the Pir and promised general amnesty to those who will lay the arms down. In those days, a delegation of notables met Pir Sahib. On their request the Pir directed Bachu Badshah to fight unto death or surrender. Piru Wazir attacked British army and fought unto death. It is said that Bachu was on his visit to India when he came back he received the message of his spiritual leader Syed Shah Mardan Shah Pir Pagaro-V to surrender. He and his five companions surrendered but later on were publicly hanged in Sanghar city on June 10, 1896. Thus, the movement cooled down for years.

The most of the historians and Hurs opine that Pir Pagaro-II Syed Ali Gohar Shah known as "Asghar Saen" was secretly poisoned by British government.

Syed Hizbullah Shah Rashidi Pir Pagaro III (1890 AD) wrote a Letter in Persian language to Khalifa Sultan Abdul Hameed Pasha of Turkey to draw his attention towards the atrocities of British invaders and urged him to play his role. Pir Syed Ali Gohar Shah-II Pir Pagaro-IV (1858-1896 AD) and Syed Shah Mardan Shah-I Pir Pagaro-V (1860-1921 AD) avoided agitational and confrontational policy towards British Government throughout their lives with few exceptions without compromising their religious dignity and personal pump and show.

It is worth mentioning that in order to bring Hurs under pressure, a large number of retired army personnel was settled in Sanghar. British Army Officer Mr. James brought a large number of Punjabis, Pathans, and Baloch people to settle near Hurs. The people of Nawab Shahbaz Khan Bugti were too settled there. The settlers were allotted the lands and properties which were confiscated from Hur community. There were about 200 Chaks which were developed under supervision of the Military. In Punjabi language, Chak means a village. Each Chak comprised 80 blocks spread over 1300 acres of land.

Eminent politician Sardar Sher Baz Mazari writes in his autobiog-

raphy that the English sought help from Bahram Khan Mazari to crush the Hur rebellion but he refused and then the elders of Nawab Akbar Bugti supported the English forces and in return they were granted 23,000 Acres of land in Sanghar area.

Moreover, British authorities closed Dim Canal for ever to punish Hurs of Makhi area who used to cultivate their crops taking water from it.

2nd Hur Movement (1941-1952) Second Hur movement started with the arrest of Syed Sibghatullah Shah Pir Pagaro-VI (1909-1943 AD) who is lovingly called Sureh Badshah which means a brave King in Sindh language.

To sum up, on the death of Syed Shah Mardan Shah Pir Pagaro-V, his minor son Syed Sibghatullah Shah succeeded him. British government tried to befriend young Pagaro Syed Sibghatullah Shah Rashidi-VI by presenting him with sword and a title through Deputy Commissioner Sukkur in recognition of his services and security provided to Hindus during Manzalgalh Masjid riots at Sukkur. He categorically refused to accept saying that he needed not any title or gift from the government as Allah had gifted him with the title of Pagaro and The British government decided to eliminate him.

To Be Continued....

2 people drowned in river

LASHKARGAH (Pajhwok): Two people have been drowned during swimming in the Gerishk district of Helmand province, an official said. Mawlawi Mohammad Qasim Riyadh, the governor's spokesperson, told Pajhwok Afghan News that two people had drowned in the river water while swimming in the Helmand River in the Sayed Tajdar Agha locality. He said the deceased persons hailed from the Nawzad district and their bodies had been sent to their families.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 09, 1445 — Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Needy families receive aid

KABUL (Ariana News): Dozens of needy families in the western suburbs of Kabul have been given much needed food aid for Ramadan. Officials said the campaign is conducted during the holy month of Ramadan in order to help those in need. The aid packages include essential food items such as flour and oil. Residents in the west of Kabul, who received the packages, welcomed initiative but appealed for more assistance from other organizations.

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

Afghanistan fails to gain international recognition

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) spent this past solar year – 1402 – trying to gain international recognition and take up its seat in the United Nations.

Due to certain policies, and restrictions against Afghan women and girls, the international community has not only imposed sanctions on the government but has also worked to isolate the IEA.

Western consensus has been that the IEA needs to revise some policies including those relating to human and women's rights.

But in addition to these problems, the Islamic Emirate made progress in diplomatic relations with some countries in 1402 – China being the first to send an official ambassador to Kabul. In turn, Beijing followed suit by welcoming

the IEA's ambassador.

Some Afghan embassies, however, that are still run by diplomats appointed by the previous government, slowly started forging ties with the IEA – including the Netherlands and Spain.

Over the past year, diplomats aligned with the Islamic Emirate also took control of the Afghan embassy and consulates in India.

In 1402, Turkmenistan removed the name of the Islamic Emirate from the list of sanctions and terrorist groups in that country.

In the meantime, Iran, Afghanistan's western neighbor, became embroiled in a spat with the IEA over the issue of water rights from the Helmand River.

Relations with Pakistan also soured somewhat, as Islamabad has accused the IEA of letting Tehreek-e-Taliban hideout in the

country.

These tensions came to a head when Islamabad implemented the process of forced deportation of more than one million Afghan immigrants.

But analysts believe that the neighboring countries and the region have not been able to agree on a specific policy for interaction with the Islamic Emirate.

According to them, the realization of this agreement requires the implementation of conditions set by these countries and the international community, including the formation of an inclusive government, and respect for the rights of women and girls; and ethnic and religious minorities by the Islamic Emirate.

This year, the IEA's cabinet remained a caretaker government, although dozens of former

government officials and politicians continued to return home.

However, the Islamic Emirate considers the year 1402 as full of achievements and emphasizes that in this year, progress has been made in all fields, especially in terms of expanding relations with other countries.

However, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate considers the lack of global legitimacy to be driven by a few countries – countries which influence the UN.

The Islamic Emirate currently has 38 active diplomatic missions in countries. In addition, Azerbaijan recently said it wants to open an embassy in Kabul.

Experts say however, 1403 will be a telling year, in terms of whether the IEA is recognized as the legitimate government or not.

Hundreds tonns of drugs seized

LASHKARGAH (Pajhwok): Hundreds of tonnes of drugs have been seized in the Sangin, Baghran and Khanshin districts of southern Helmand province and destroyed, an official said.

Police Spokesperson Mullah Ezzatullah Haqqani told Pajhwok Afghan News that based on intelligence information Oman factory was recovered in Malmal locality of Sangin district.

Nearly 400 kilograms of Oman, five plastic containers, two metallic containers and three small packets of acid were recovered during the forces operation.

He said in Baghran district 1,040 kilograms of China while in Khanshin district 2,150 kilograms of color and 16 kilograms of Soch were recovered. He said some individuals had been arrested in connection to drug production and referred to judicial organs.

Investment in mineral resources encouraged



KABUL (BNA): Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, recently held a meeting with a Kyrgyzstan investor.

During the meeting, Delawar emphasized that investments in Afghanistan's mineral resources should be made with full transparency and confidence.

As per the Ministry's statement, Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar met with the CEO of the Kyrgyzstan Mining Company and his delegation.

The Kyrgyzstan investor expressed interest in investing in Afghanistan's mineral resources, particularly gold and antimony mines, leveraging their modern mining experiences and equipment. The company also offered to provide practical and technical training to Afghan engineers across various mining sectors.

He welcomed all investors interested in the country's mineral resources, assuring them of the opportunity to invest with complete transparency and confidence.

In addition to the Kyrgyzstan investor, Delawar also met with an Indian investor who recently returned to the country for mining investment.

The investor expressed satisfaction with the Islamic Emirate's recent decision regarding the restitution of properties seized from Hindus. They also showed interest in investing in Afghanistan's mining sector, particularly in coal, marble, and lead.

He appreciated the inter-

est of the Indian investor in the country's mineral resources.

He stated that Afghanistan is home to all Afghans, and Hindu compatriots, like all other citizens, have equal rights to Afghanistan's resources and wealth. They can invest in all of Afghanistan's mines as per the principles and regulations.

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum is prepared for any kind of cooperation, the minister added.

Journalist Day celebrated

KABUL (BNA): Afghanistan commemorated the 17th of March as National Journalist Day, honoring the contributions of journalists in the country.

The ceremony was primarily organized by the heads of information and culture departments and institutions that support journalists. It saw participation from central and local officials of the Islamic Emirate, media representatives, scholars, dignitaries, and journalists.

Speakers at the event, as reported by the Bakhtar News Agency, praised the nationwide security as a favorable environment for media activities in Afghanistan. Media officials at the ceremony expressed their commitment to journalistic activities within the framework of Islamic law, national interests, and the preservation of the Islamic system.

1402, a difficult year for Afghan women and girls



KABUL (Ariana News): As this solar year, 1402 draws to a close, the suspension of high school and higher education for girls continues, despite repeated calls to the Afghan government to reconsider this decision.

This year, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) officials repeatedly said they plan to reopen schools above grade 6, and universities, to girls – once plans were finalized. However, nothing has come of this.

In many meetings, both in Afghanistan and outside the country, repeated requests were made to the

IEA to provide education for everyone – and some officials of the Islamic Emirate even expressed their dissatisfaction over the decision.

Representatives of the United Nations and countries of the world have repeatedly emphasized that the right to education should be given to women and girls, but these requests were not accepted by the Islamic Emirate.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said: "Supporting the rights of women and girls is a central part of our foreign policy. Over the past three years, we have put forward

concrete strategies, policies and programs to support women and girls around the world. It's not just rhetoric, it's action."

Spokespersons of the Islamic Emirate said many times in interviews with the media that schools and universities for girls would reopen. However, they did not say when the wait for girls would end.

Now, almost three years after schools, above grade

6, were closed to girls, the hope is that in the new academic year there will be changes in the policy of the Islamic Emirate and the school bell will ring with a good news for girls.

Girls continue to call for access to schools

KABUL (TOLONews): With the 1403 academic year starting in two days, there is still no news of the reopening of secondary and high schools for girls in the country.

Some girls above the sixth grade asked the Islamic Emirate to reopen girls schools in the new academic year.

Mozghan hopes to go to school in the new academic year.

"We hope that a decision will be made and the girls of this land will come out of this uncertain future they are facing," she told TOLONews.

"My request of the Islamic Emirate is to reopen the schools for us and allow us to be educated and study," said Maryam, a student who should be in the eleventh grade.

So far, the final decision of the Islamic Emirate regarding the reopening of schools for girls above the sixth grade has not been clarified.

"An illiterate mother cannot offer a better child to society, so these restrictions have a direct impact on the security of the whole country in the future," said Sona Shirzai, a women's



rights activist.

Yesterday, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai also asked the Islamic Emirate to reopen the schools and universities for women and girls in the new academic year.

Head of Chinese Embassy awards cash to outstanding students

KABUL (TOLONews): The Chinese Embassy praised outstanding students of Kabul University by awarding them cash scholarships in a ceremony.

Zhao Xing, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Kabul, said during the event that the Chinese Embassy supports higher education in Afghanistan.

"The Chinese Embassy supports higher education in Afghanistan. As the head of Kabul University mentioned, we are committed to continuing our assistance in various sectors with Afghanistan," Zhao Xing said.

Osama Aziz, the head of Kabul University, said in the award ceremony that strengthening higher education in the country is a fundamental need.

Osama Azizi also stated that based on an agreement with the Chinese University of Technology and Science, this university will cooperate with Kabul University not only in the field of literature but also in technology.

"The cooperation between the two universities in the field of science and technology, as well as in literature as before, will expand," he added.

Mufti Mohammad Taher, the deputy of the Ministry of Higher Education, described the history of Afghanistan-China relations as good in the program and asked Beijing to expand its cooperation in various sectors, including higher education, with Afghanistan.

"China can cooperate with our scientific institu-



tions as before, will expand," he added.

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"China can cooperate with our scientific institu-

tions in various fields, which we need in our scientific sectors," said Mufti Mohammad Taher.

Meanwhile, some students of Kabul University asked the Islamic Emirate to facilitate education for girls in the country as well.

"I ask the officials of the Islamic Emirate to open the doors of universities to our sisters so that we can see them participating in such programs and meetings in

the coming years," Ramin, a student, told TOLONews.

"My request of the Islamic Emirate is to open the doors of schools and universities to our sisters with the arrival of the new academic year so they also can participate in these meetings," said Maiwand, a student. In this program, sixty outstanding students of Kabul University for the year 1402 were awarded certificates and cash prizes.

Farmers turn to fruit gardening as Asafoetida rate declines



AIBAK (Pajhwok): Some farmers in northern Samangan province have turned to almond and other fruit gardening following a decline in the rate of Asafoetida.

Earlier, most farmers chopped off their almond trees and cultivated Asafoetida because of higher income but the situation has changed and now they started the plantation of almond saplings again.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News findings three years ago one kilogram of the substance obtained from Asafoetida was sold against 28,000 afs but this year the same quantity of the product was sold against 2,500 afs.

Islamuddin, one of the farmers, who came to the Municipality sapling market in Aibak, said as a result of the decline in the Asafoetida rate he had been forced to purchase almonds and other saplings because the removal of the garden was

not in his interest.

He said: "Two years ago, with my available budget, I bought and planted Asafoetida seeds, and at the same time chopped off my garden's trees, and now I am experiencing the biggest economic loss, earlier I earned up to 100,000 afs annually from my garden, but in these two years, in the past two years I spent all I had on Asafoetida cultivation."

Mohammad, another gardener in Samangan, said he cultivated 10 kilograms of Asafoetida seed on a piece of his irrigated land and it cost him 100,000 afs but he was unable to sell even one kilogram of Asafoetida product.

He added: "I had no option but to cultivate fruit and non-fruit saplings on our land, planting saplings did not cost much, and it is clear that after a few years, it will pay off, and at the same time, it also

improves the environment."

Meanwhile, several sapling sellers in Samangan said that with the arrival of the spring season, the market for fruit and non-fruit saplings, flowers and other beautification plants had tripled compared to two years ago, and the price of one almond seedling has increased from 5 to 70 afs. Nooruddin, one of the sapling sellers in the Municipality market, said: "For the past two years, the sapling market in Samangan was weak, because a large number of the people cultivated Asafoetida, and no one bought the saplings, and we had to sell a sapling for 5 to 10 afghanis."

However, he expressed satisfaction with the improvement of the sapling market, saying that one almond plant is sold for up to 70 afs and one apricot plant for up to 80 afs this year.

Khalbai, another sapling seller, said Last year, he sold 2,000 saplings, but this year he has sold more than 7,000 saplings of different types, and it is still the beginning of the spring season, so his sales figures may increase.

Local officials in Samangan acknowledged that the decline in the Asafoetida substance rate affected farmers and by the start of the spring season farmers started the plantation of different types of fruit trees such as almonds.

Najibullah Khuram, director of Natural Herbs Plants Management, said his department has planted more than 11,000 fruit and non-fruit saplings in various departments and government offices to beautify the city and reduce pollution.

He said in the previous years, gardeners of this province had cut off their trees and cultivated Asafoetida.

Unfortunately, due to the decrease in demand and the increase in the number of growers, the price of Asafoetida decreased significantly, which has caused a number of gardeners to suffer.

Khuram said this year, several gardeners have planted fruit saplings, adding that the provincial Agriculture Department welcomed the increase in the plantation of saplings and would cooperate with the farmers on maintenance of their gardens so they could get high yield.

Spring plantation drive kicks-off in Maidan Wardak

MAIDAN SHAHAR (Pajhwok): The Agriculture and Irrigation Department, Environmental Protection Authority and the Municipality Departments have jointly launched the plantation drive in central Maidan Wardak province, an official said.

The plantation drive is named "Elimination of Drought" in which one million fruit and non-fruit trees would be planted.

Governor Qari Bakhtyar Maaz during the launch of the plantation drive stressed the protection and maintenance of saplings and asked relevant institutions and residents to plant saplings that suited the climate of the province and play their role in the protection and maintenance of these plants.

He assigned some institutions to pay special attention to the protection and



maintenance of newly planted saplings and ensure that these saplings are properly looked after.

Maidan Shahr Mayor Mawlawi Abdullah

Darwish asked government officials, applicants and citizens to look after the newly planted saplings and play their role in its maintenance.

It is pertinent to mention that every year thousands of saplings are planted in Maidan Wardak but due to the lack of care, most of these saplings dried up.

Gaza hunger warnings grow as hopes build for ceasefire

GAZA STRIP (AFP): Efforts to hammer out a temporary truce in Gaza intensified Tuesday after months of war that have devastated the Palestinian territory and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine.

While a UN-backed assessment said 300,000 people in Gaza's north would face famine by May without a surge of aid, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said everyone in Gaza was now in need of humanitarian aid. UN human rights chief Volker Turk blamed Israel for the hunger crisis, telling reporters in Geneva they were blocking aid and conducting the conflict in a way that "may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war."

Israeli troops on Tuesday pressed an assault on Gaza's biggest hospital, which they allege is being used for military purposes. The military said more than 50 fighters had been killed. Hamas said the assault on Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital was a war crime.

Israel's spy chief David Barnea was in Qatar on Monday for a new round of talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators, after they failed to secure a truce for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began last week. Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the latest negotiations but it was "too early to announce any successes." The new push for a truce follows a Hamas proposal for a six-week ceasefire, an increase in aid and the initial release of about 42 hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners

held by Israel.

During the proposed truce, Israeli forces would withdraw from "all cities and populated areas" in Gaza, according to a Hamas official. Ansari said they were expecting a counter-proposal to be presented to Hamas and technical talks would continue. The bloodiest ever Gaza war broke out after Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Militants also seized about 250 hostages, of whom Israel believes 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 who are presumed dead. Israel has responded with a relentless offensive against Hamas that Gaza's health ministry says has killed at least 31,726 people, most of them women and children. Blinken, who will travel to the Middle East this week to try to shore up support for the temporary truce and an increase in aid, highlighted that everyone in Gaza was now suffering "severe levels of acute food insecurity."

"That's the first time an entire population has been so classified," he said during a visit to the Philippines. On a related diplomatic track, US President Joe Biden has been attempting to put pressure on Israel to call off a threatened ground assault on the southern city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere in the territory. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted troops will be sent into Rafah to root out Hamas in the area. The city is

already under frequent bombardment by the Israeli military, with AFP TV footage showing residents picking through debris of buildings on Tuesday after another night of bombardment.

Gaza resident Ibrahim Jarhun, at a funeral on Tuesday for those killed in the latest Rafah bombardment, told AFP the killings were shattering Ramadan customs like the traditional pre-dawn "suhoor" meal. "For us, our suhoor is blood," he said.

In Washington, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan reported the death of senior Hamas official Marwan Issa. Israel had on March 11 said an air strike on an underground compound in central Gaza targeted Issa, whom it called the deputy head of Hamas's armed wing. At the time it was unclear if he had been killed. In January, Israel said it had "completed the dismantling" of Hamas's command structure in northern Gaza, but on Monday military spokesman Daniel Hagari said Palestinian militants and commanders have since returned to Al-Shifa "and turned it into a command center."

Witnesses reported air strikes and tanks near the hospital compound which is crowded with thousands of displaced civilians as well as the sick and wounded. The Israeli army identified one of the dead as Hamas internal security official Fayq Al-Mabhouh. A Gaza police source confirmed his death and said he was a brigadier general in the force. Israeli troops previously raided Al-Shifa in November, sparking an international outcry.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari welcoming Commander of Bahrain National Guard, General Sheikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

FO denounces curbs on Kashmiri political parties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has denounced the Indian authorities' decision to declare the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Freedom League and four factions of Jammu and Kashmir Peoples League as "unlawful associations".

In a statement, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Bloch said Pakistan also denounces the decision to extend the ban on Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (Yasin Malik faction) for five more years.

With the fresh notifications, a total of 14 Kashmiri political parties have become outlawed in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The Spokesperson said the affiliates of these parties are also facing persecution.

She said most notably, a death penalty has been sought for Yasin Malik, who has been awarded life sentence in 2022. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said such oppressive tactics cannot suppress the Kashmiri people's aspirations for realization of their inalienable right to self-determination, as enshrined in the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

She said India's ongoing campaign to crush dissent in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) contravenes the international human rights and humanitarian law as well as democratic norms. The Spokesperson said the Indian Government is urged to lift the curbs on the banned Kashmiri parties; release all the political prisoners, including Yasin Malik; and implement the UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir.

Israel hits Hezbollah arms depots in Syria

BEIRUT (AFP): Israeli raids hit warehouses storing weapons for the Lebanese Hezbollah group in Syria Tuesday, a war monitor said, as a Syrian military source said air defenses had intercepted several missiles.

Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes in Syria since civil war broke out in 2011, targeting Iran-backed forces including Hezbollah as well as Syrian army positions. The strikes have increased since Israel's war with Palestinian militant group Hamas, a Hezbollah ally, began on October 7.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the latest strikes near the capital Damascus Tuesday had destroyed weapons and ammunition, causing secondary explosions and fires. A military source quoted by Syrian state media said Israeli "air aggression" had targeted several military positions near Damascus.

"Our air defenses took action and shot down several missiles," the source added. The Britain-based Observatory said it was the second such strike in two days, coming after raids on Sunday hit another Hezbollah weapons depot and a separate site near Damascus. Earlier this month, an Israeli strike reportedly killed an Iranian Revolutionary Guard and two other people in Banias on Syria's Mediterranean coast.

Pakistan greatly values its ties with Bahrain: Zardari

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan attaches great value to its fraternal ties with Bahrain which are based on shared religion, culture and history.

He highlighted the need to translate the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Bahrain into a mutually rewarding economic partnership. The President expressed these views while talking to the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain, General Sheikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Tuesday.

The Ambassador of Bahrain to Pakistan, Mr Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Abdul Qader, was also present during the meeting.

Welcoming the visiting Commander, the President said that Pakistan and Bahrain enjoyed excellent relations, which needed to be further strengthened in the areas of mutual interest. He stated that it was his firm belief that Pakistan would grow stronger as it had immense potential to become a prosperous country.

During the meeting, the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain felicitated the President on assum-

ing the office for the second time and expressed the hope that Pakistan would move forward under his leadership. He said that both countries enjoyed excellent defence cooperation and expressed his gratitude for the supportive role of the Armed Forces of Pakistan.

He also reiterated Bahrain's continued support to Pakistan. General Sheikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa extended an invitation to the President to visit Bahrain. The President thanked the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain for his visit and felicitations.

UNSC calls for halt to Houthi attacks

NEW YORK CITY: The UN Security Council on Monday condemned "in the strongest terms" Houthi strikes against international maritime traffic in the Red Sea and demanded that all such attacks "cease immediately."

The Iran-backed Houthis have been targeting vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since November and say their assaults will continue until Israel ends its war on Gaza. The attacks highlighted by the council included one on March 6 on the Barbados-flagged merchant carrier True Confidence in the Gulf of Aden, which left two Filipino nationals and a Vietnamese citizen dead and several crew members injured. It was the first fatal strike against shipping by the Houthis.

Another was an anti-ballistic missile attack on Feb. 18 that targeted the Belize-flagged, UK-owned cargo ship Rubymar and caused it to sink. The vessel was carrying 21,000 tonnes of fertilizer, raising fears of environmental damage to the Red Sea, including its coral reefs and marine life. Council members reiterated the importance of the "full

implementation of Resolution 2216" and subsequent resolutions that call for an end to the violence in Yemen and to all unilateral actions that threaten the political process in the country.

They emphasized the need for "practical cooperation, including with the government of Yemen, to prevent the Houthis from acquiring the arms and related materiel necessary to carry out further attacks," and reiterated that all member states must adhere to "their obligations in regards to the targeted arms embargo." The council also demanded the immediate release of the Japanese-operated cargo ship Galaxy Leader and the 25 members of its crew, who have been unlawfully detained by the Houthis for more than 100 days.

Members emphasized the importance of Red Sea maritime routes to humanitarian operations in Yemen and beyond, and to the local fishing industry and the Yemeni people whose livelihoods it supports. They reaffirmed that "the exercise of navigational rights and freedoms by

merchant and commercial vessels of all states transiting the Red Sea and Baab Al-Mandab, in accordance with international law, must be respected." With that in mind, council members warned of the adverse effects of a "March 4 Houthi decision purporting to require ships obtain a permit from their 'Maritime Affairs Authority' before entering Yemeni waters, on the freedom of commercial navigation and humanitarian operations, including into Yemen."

Last week, UN officials expressed concern that parties involved in the conflict in Yemen might engage in "risky military adventurism" that could push the country into a new cycle of war. "Although we have tried to shield the peace process from regional developments since the war in Gaza, the reality is (that) what happens regionally impacts Yemen, and what happens in Yemen can impact the region," Hans Grundberg, the UN's special envoy for Yemen said during a meeting of the Security Council to discuss the latest developments in the country and the Red Sea. — Aljazeera

Siraj concerned over law and order situation

F.P. Report

KASHMIRE: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Sirajul Haq expressing dissatisfaction over the prevailing law and order situation especially in Sindh has said that the populace feels unprotected as lawlessness and reign of dacoits prevails.

Speaking to media persons after leading the funeral prayer of JI local leader Maulana Abdul Hafeez Bajarani on Tuesday, he emphasized the necessity for the government to ensure security for the masses. Despite assuming power through a contested mandate, he urged the government to prioritize peace-building efforts and economic development.

Sirajul Haq highlighting inflation, unemployment, and lawlessness as the primary challenges confronting the populace, criticized the government's reliance solely on IMF intervention to address economic woes, stressing the need for alternative solutions. He lamented the rampant abduction-for-ransom has become a business in Sindh, attributing it to the protection provided by feudal lords and local politicians to criminals, rendering it unsafe for citizens to venture out after dark.

He asserted that corruption and poor governance were impediments to economic growth and underscored the importance of electing honest and dedicated leadership to address these issues. He reaffirmed Jamaat-e-Islami's commitment to advocating for the rights of the people and striving towards the establishment of an Islamic welfare state.

Siraj extended condolences to the family of the deceased JI leader, praising Bajarani's lifelong dedication to promoting the Islamic system in the country. He stated that Gaza has transformed into the world's most oppressive prison, with the city ablaze from artillery fire and its inhabitants succumbing to hunger and disease.

SC abolishes disqualification of Samina

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The disqualification of former MPA Samina Khawar Hayat in fake degree case was abolished by the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Tuesday.

Quoting the seven-member larger bench's declaration, the court said that one couldn't be disqualified in a suo-motu case. This case would also be seen in light of the judgment of seven member bench.

Advocate Tariq Mehmood, the petitioner's lawyer was of the opinion that the top court disqualified his client in a suo-motu case. Chief Justice of Pakistan, during hearing, questioned that whether the ECP has any objection over the abolishing of disqualification of the petitioner.

Pakistan ranked 2nd most polluted country in 2023

ISLAMABAD: Like many South Asian countries Pakistan has been facing an alarming surge in pollution indicators with the country having one of the worst air quality in the world.

As per IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, Pakistan maintained the second worst air quality in the year 2023 with an average PM2.5 concentration of 73.7 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³). IQAir measures air quality levels based on the concentration of lung-damaging airborne particles known as PM2.5 which shouldn't exceed 5µg/m³. Health Organisation (WHO).

As per the report, the PM2.5 levels in Islamabad rose to their highest ever levels recorded in the city's seven-year history to 42.4µg/m³. Meanwhile, Lahore, which was record-

ed as the world's most polluted city in the world in March 2023, has also witnessed an increase of over 20µg/m³ in its PM2.5 levels which have reached 99.5µg/m³ with the city's monthly average of PM2.5 level reaching 251µg/m³ in November last year leading to the courts directing the government to impose a "smog emergency" in the provincial capital.

"Every city in Pakistan included in the 2023 report measured concentrations above 30µg/m³, at least six times the recommended WHO annual PM2.5 guideline," the report said.

Apart from Lahore, several other cities including Faisalabad, Karachi, Peshawar and Rawalpindi have also recorded significantly high PM2.5 levels compared to the WHO guidelines As per the

report, multiple factors contributed towards such hazardous levels of air quality including crop burning stubble, deforestation, industrial and vehicle emissions, smoke emitted from brick kilns etc.

Owing to the alarming situation, the government even imposed a lockdown in multiple cities across Punjab in the wake of thick smog that engulfed several districts. In December 2023, Lahore even witnessed the country's first-ever artificial rain after planes equipped with cloud-seeding equipment flew over the city's 10 areas to battle the dangerous air quality levels in the metropolises. Pakistan's average PM2.5 levels are only exceeded by Bangladesh's 79.9µg/m³. Meanwhile, India is ranked third with 54.4µg/m³ PM2.5 levels. — Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Soldiers hanging with the help of rope from helicopter flying during rehearsal of Pakistan Day parade.

New political party set to emerge by June: Abbasi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has made a significant announcement regarding the formation of a new political party, set to emerge by May-June of this year.

Addressing the media outside the accountability court, Abbasi stated that consultations are underway, and preparations are in motion for the establishment of this party. Prominent figures such as Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Miftah Ismail, and several others are anticipated to join the ranks of this forthcoming political entity. Abbasi emphasized the need for a fresh approach in the political landscape, advocating for change and a departure from the status quo.

In addition to outlining plans for the new party, Abbasi addressed the ongoing legal challenges he faces, labeling the cases against him as baseless. Expressing dissatisfaction with the accountability process, he urged for an end to what he perceived as the

undue influence of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in hindering governance.

Moreover, Abbasi highlighted concerns over the recent electoral process, citing discrepancies and alleged rigging tactics. He called upon the Supreme Court to intervene, suggesting a scrutiny of electoral practices, particularly focusing on the authenticity of Form 45 and 47 documents. Abbasi proposed that presiding officers take oaths on the Quran to verify the integrity of these forms, underscoring the need for transparency in the electoral process.

Asserting the importance of national unity, Abbasi underscored the necessity for dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders, including political, judicial, and military leadership. He urged for consensus-building efforts to address the challenges facing the nation, emphasizing the imperative of inclusivity and collaboration in steering the country forward.

As anticipation builds for the emergence of the

new political party led by Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, political dynamics in Pakistan are poised for potential transformation in the coming months. Moreover, Abbasi highlighted concerns over the recent electoral process, citing discrepancies and alleged rigging tactics. He called upon the Supreme Court to intervene, suggesting a scrutiny of electoral practices, particularly focusing on the authenticity of Form 45 and 47 documents. Abbasi proposed that presiding officers take oaths on the Quran to verify the integrity of these forms, underscoring the need for transparency in the electoral process.

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