

Rupee strengthened
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani Rupee has shown a slight but steady appreciation against the US Dollar in the inter-bank market. On Monday, the local currency strengthened by 14 paisas, settling at 278.60 as reported by the SBP. This is a slight increase from the previous rate of 278.74. The Rupee maintained stability against the Dollar on Friday, appreciating by 0.01%.



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TALAGANG: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif offering condolences to the family of Captain Ahmed Badar Shaheed at their residence.

SBP keeps policy rate unchanged at 22 per cent

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 22%, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said on Monday, adding that the continuity required to bring inflation down to targeted range of 5-7% by September 2025.

The MPC, at its meeting today, noted that inflation, in line with earlier expectations, has begun to decline noticeably from H2-FY24. It also observed that despite the sharp deceleration in February, the level of inflation remains high and its outlook is susceptible to risks amidst elevated inflation expectations. Citing indicators, the central bank's committee decided to continue the current monetary stance required bring inflation down to the target range of 5-7% by September 2025.

As per the SBP statement, the MPC reiterated that this assessment is also contingent upon continued targeted fiscal consolidation and timely realisation of planned external inflows. The committee also discussed a few key developments since its last meeting, which have implications for the macroeconomic outlook.

First, the latest data continues to depict moderate pick-up in economic activity, led by rebound in agriculture output. Second, the external current account balance is turning out better than anticipated and has helped maintain FX buffers despite weak financial inflows. Third, while inflation expectations of businesses have shown a steady increase since December, those for consumers have also inched up in March.

Lastly, on the global front, while the broader trend in commodity prices remained benign, oil prices have increased; partly reflecting the continued tense situation in the Red Sea. Moreover, amidst uncertainty regarding the inflation outlook, key central banks in both advanced and emerging economies have continued to maintain a cautious monetary policy stance in recent meetings.

Incoming data supports the MPC's earlier expectation of moderate recovery in economic activity in FY24 with real GDP growth to remain in the range of 2-3%. The agriculture sector remains the key driver.

After a strong performance of

Kharif crops (especially cotton and rice), prospects for wheat crop also look promising due to increase in area under cultivation, better input conditions, and higher output prices. Denser vegetation of wheat crop, as captured by satellite images, also support this assessment. In the industrial sector, large-scale manufacturing, despite a slight decline of 0.5% during July-January is expected to recover in the coming months due to improved capacity utilisation and employment conditions and favorable base effect.

Furthermore, knock-on impact of commodity producing sectors and other leading indicators point towards gradual recovery in the services sector. The current account recorded a deficit of \$269 million in January 2024 which resulted in a cumulative deficit of \$1.1 billion during July-January FY24, which is down by around 71% year-on-year. The MPC noted that the improvement largely owes to narrowing of the trade deficit, driven by both an increase in exports and a decline in imports.

The exports have risen on the back of higher food exports, whereas import payments have remained subdued due to better domestic agriculture output, moderate domestic demand and supportive global commodity prices. Moreover, workers' remittances have been rising consistently on year-on-year basis since October 2023, supported by incentives and regulatory reforms to channelise inflows via formal channels.

Financial inflows showed a modest decline in January amidst continuing public debt repayments in the absence of significant official and private sector inflows. The MPC assessed that the current account deficit is likely to remain closer to the lower bound of 0.5 to 1.5 per cent of GDP forecast range for FY24, which will support the FX reserves position.

The latest data on fiscal accounts shows continuing fiscal consolidation. During H1-FY24, the primary surplus improved to 1.7% of GDP from 1.1% in the same period last year, while the overall fiscal deficit deteriorated to 2.3% of GDP from 2.0% in H1-FY23. Improvement in the primary surplus to GDP ratio is mainly contributed by better revenue collection, primarily from non-tax sources, and relatively contained non-

interest expenditures.

Sizeable increase in interest payments amidst high debt levels and increasing reliance on costly domestic financing led to an expansion in the overall deficit. The MPC emphasised that the continuation of fiscal consolidation is essential for ensuring overall macroeconomic and price stability. "Since the last MPC meeting, as expected, the broad money (M2) growth (y/y) has moderated to 16.1% in February 2024 from 17.8% in December. This moderation came from lower growth in net domestic assets of the banking system, owing mainly to a broad-based contraction in private sector credit and commodity financing operations," the statement read.

The MPC also noted that the growth in reserve money continued to decelerate sharply to 8.2% in February. Moreover, the currency to deposit ratio continued to decline due to the strong growth in bank deposits along with a declining trend in currency in circulation. The trends in monetary aggregates bode well for the inflation outlook.

The central bank's committee noted that headline inflation registered a broad-based and considerable year-on-year decline from 28.3% in January to 23.1% in February. While food inflation continued to trend down, core inflation, which had been sticky, also decelerated to 18.1% in February from 20.5% in January. The improvement in inflation broadly reflects the combined impact of contractionary monetary policy, fiscal consolidation, better food supplies, moderating global commodity prices and favourable base effect.

The MPC noted that while energy inflation also decelerated on year-on-year basis in February, the adjustments in administered energy prices have continued to contribute to inflation directly and indirectly. "This has implications for the needed sustained decline in inflation expectations of both consumers and businesses. Going forward, any further adjustments in administered prices or fiscal measures that may push prices up pose risk to the near- and medium-term inflation outlook." Cognisant of the risks, the committee assessed that it is prudent to continue with the current monetary policy stance at this stage.

PM visits residence of martyrs' family

F.P. Report

TALAGANG: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday visited the residence of Captain Ahmed Badar Shaheed to offer his heartfelt condolence to the members of the bereaved family.

Expressing sympathies with the bereaved family, the prime minister said, he was very impressed by their patience and determination. Earlier, the prime minister visited the residence of Lt. Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed in Rawalpindi and offered his heartfelt condolence to the family.

He prayed to Allah Almighty to grant eternal peace to the martyrs and patience to the bereaved families to bear the loss with courage. He said that brave jawans and officers of the Pakistan Army had sacrificed their lives to safeguard their motherland. He said that entire nation including himself pay tributes to them.

"The families of martyrs are a matter of pride for the entire nation", he remarked. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the whole nation stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Pakistan Armed forces till the complete eradication of the menace of terrorism. Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Information Minister Attaullah Tarar also accompanied the Prime Minister.

SNGPL seeks hike in gas price

F.P. Report

LAHORE: After Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has also requested the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) to jack up the price of gas, media reported on Monday. The company has sought 147% hike in gas prices from the regulator that would put more burden on the inflation-weary masses.

The SNGPL is the largest integrated gas company serving more than 7.22 million consumers in North Central Pakistan through an extensive network in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. According to the TV report, the utility company has requested an increase of Rs2,646.18 per metric million British thermal unit (mmbtu) in gas price and asked that the new average gas price be fixed at Rs4,446.89.

Facing an estimated revenue shortfall of Rs189.18 billion, it has requested to implement the enhanced gas price from July 1. The petroleum sector regulator will hear the SNGPL plea on March 25 in Lahore and on March 27 in Peshawar.

It may be noted that the SSGC has also submitted a request to the regulator for further hike in gas price, seeking an increase of Rs274.40 per mmbtu. On March 17, a month after the caretakers burdened the masses with gas price hike on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demand, the SSGC had requested the Ogra to further increase gas prices from July 2024.

The caretaker government had approved a 67% increase in the natural gas tariff with effect from February 1. The tariff was hiked to meet the deadline of the IMF for hiking the gas prices under structural benchmark criteria till February 15, 2024.

Citing an estimated Rs79.63 billion revenue shortfall, the SSGC had urged the Ogra to set average price of one mmbtu gas at Rs1740.80. A public hearing on the petition is scheduled on March 18 in Karachi, during which the regulatory authority will determine the gas prices. The Ogra will also hear the petition in Quetta on March 20.

Pakistan hits TTP hideouts in Afghanistan

Islamabad carried out intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations in Kabul: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani forces this morning carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in the border regions inside Afghanistan against terrorists launching attacks in Pakistan from Afghan soil, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said on Monday.

The target of Monday's operation was the terrorists belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which along with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is responsible for the March 16 attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country, resulting in deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials.

The Foreign Office (FO) issued a detailed statement on the matter, saying that Pakistan, for the past two years, has repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits including TTP inside Afghanistan.

It said that these terrorists pose a grave threat to Pakistan's security and have consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory. Pakistan accords prime importance to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. It has, therefore, always prioritised dialogue and cooperation to confront the terrorist threat.

"We have repeatedly urged the Afghan authorities to take concrete and effective action to ensure that the Afghan soil is not used as a staging ground for terrorism against Pakistan. We have also called on them to deny safe havens to TTP and to hand over its leadership to Pakistan," the FO said. The statement added that Pakistan has great respect for the people of Afghanistan; however, certain elements among those in power in Afghanistan are actively patronising TTP and using them as a proxy against Pakistan.

"Such an approach against a brotherly country, which stood with the people of Afghanistan through thick and thin, manifests shortsightedness. It ignores the support extended by Pakistan to the people of Afghanistan over the last several decades. "We urge these elements in power to rethink the policy of siding with Khwarij terrorists shedding the blood of innocent Pakistanis and to make a clear choice to stand with the people of Pakistan," it

added.

The FO further stated that terrorist groups like TTP are a collective threat to regional peace and security. "We fully realise the challenge Afghan authorities face in combating the threat posed by the TTP. Pakistan would therefore continue to work towards finding joint solutions in countering terrorism and to prevent any terrorist organization from sabotaging bilateral relations with Afghanistan," the statement concluded.

However, the Afghan Taliban claimed that two air strikes carried out inside Afghanistan by Pakistani forces had killed right people in the war-torn country. "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not allow anyone to compromise security by using Afghan territory," said Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman of the Taliban administration, in a media report.

He added that the strikes took place in the eastern border provinces of Khost and Paktika. As the country witnesses another wave of terrorist activities, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has said that the continuous use of Afghan soil is behind the "growing terrorism in Pakistan". A statement issued by the military's media wing on Monday said that Pakistan's security forces have been engaged in the war against terrorism for the past two decades.

"It is clear to all that the recent wave of terrorism in Pakistan has full support and assistance of Afghanistan," it added. The communique further stated that the rise in terror attacks in Pakistan is a result of supply of modern weapons into the country "with the help of Afghan Taliban".

The ISPR said that there is clear evidence of Afghan terrorists' involvement in attack on Zhob Garrison on July 12, 2023, in which nine soldiers embraced martyrdom and five terrorists were killed. Clear evidence of terrorists coming from Afghanistan, the military's media wing said, is the reason behind growing incidents of terrorism. A day after the attack, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif had said militants were using Afghanistan soil to carry out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. "Terrorism against us is mostly being conducted from Afghanistan," the defence minister had said while speaking to the media in Sialkot.

Six family members killed as roof collapses

F.P. Report

WANA: As many as six members of one family dead and four others sustained critical injuries when the roof of a house collapsed at Raghzai area of Barmal Tehsil of South Waziristan while the serious injured were shifted Dera Ismail Khan for further treatment.

As per details, the incident occurred in the Raghzai area of Barmal Tehsil where a roof collapse claimed the lives of six including two children, a woman and three men. The rescue sources said that four others of the family who got injured in the roof collapse have been shifted to the nearby hospital.

The deceased were identified as family's head Afsar Khan, Din Shafa, Ajwa Bibi, Sultan, Naseema Bibi

and Haleema Bibi. The injured identified as Noor Ayaz, Ahmad Ali, Abdullah, Asima Bibi, Nakhmina Bibi, Shana Bibi, Aqal Mina Bibi, Rehmat Bibi, Tariq Khan and Amir Ullah. It is worthy to mention that more than 30 people died in rain-related incidents in Pakistan during days of heavy downpours, with thousands of schools closed. In a separate incident, two children were also killed when the roof of a house collapsed in Nazimabad village of Kalam, Swat.

According to the details, two children were killed, one injured after the roof of the house collapsed on them. The rescue officials shifted the bodies and injured individuals to the hospital while indicating that the roof was deteriorated which caused its col-

lapse. The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur on Monday condoled the tragic incident in which six members of a single family lost their lives due to the roof collapse of a house in the Raghzai area of South Waziristan.

In a condolence statement, he expressed grief and sorrow over the loss of precious human lives and extended heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the affected family.

He prayed for the departed souls and for patience for the bereaved, as well as for the speedy recovery of the injured. The Chief Minister directed the relevant district administration to provide immediate relief to the affected family and timely medical assistance to the injured.

Senate elections: MQM-P 'ready' to induct Vawda

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Monday expressed willingness to see former federal minister Faisal Vawda join its ranks ahead of the Senate elections set to take place on April 2. "We had invited Vawda to join [MQM-P] in the past [...] I pray that he joins the party's ranks," MQM-P leader Rauf Siddiqui said while speaking with journalists in Karachi.

Commenting on the upcoming Senate elections, MQM-P's Siddiqui — who himself is a candidate for the polls — said the party has fielded a total of eight candidates for the upper house. However, Vawda has reiterated that he's still an "independent" political leader. "I'm still independent,"

Vawda said during a presser in Karachi, adding that he would consider joining a political party when it's in "season", as independent candidates are currently trending. Expressing his views on the political landscape and prospects of the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) role in the Centre, Vawda — who's contesting the Senate elections in an independent capacity — said he doesn't see the Bilawal Bhutto-led party securing power in Islamabad.

Without taking any names, the ex-minister recalled his 14-year-long association with the PTI stressing that both the party and its founder were full of themselves during their time in power. Vawda, whose party membership was terminated by the PTI in 2022 over

his remarks on the party's long march, has been quite vocal in the political arena.

Last week, the ex-minister had termed Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz as "Buzdar II" — a reference to ex-CM Usman Buzdar who served as the province's chief executive during PTI's tenure. Ever since his departure from the PTI, Vawda has often been found critical of former prime minister and party founder Imran Khan.

Last week the ECP announced holding of Senate elections on 48 seats after the expiration of the six-year term of the incumbent senators on March 11. The polling for the Senate elections will be conducted in Islamabad's Parliament House, as well as all four provincial assemblies from 9am to 4pm.

Shaukat to pay Rs150m in defamation suit to Asfandiyar

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: District and Sessions Judge (D&SJ) ordered Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former provincial minister Shaukat Yousafzai to pay Rs 150 million to Chief of Awami National Party (ANP) Asfandiyar Wali Khan in defamation lawsuit, on Monday.

As per details, the district and session judge issued the five-page written verdict stating that Shaukat Yousafzai did not appear before the court despite summon notices.

In 2019, Chief of Awami National Party (ANP) Asfandiyar Wali Khan served a defamation notice to the then KP Information Minister Shaukat Yousafzai for 'libelous statements' without the support of any reasonable proof or justification.

The notice was issued through late senior lawyer Abdul Latif Afridi asking the then provincial minister to tender a public apology and get it published with the same prominence as the 'defamatory remarks', otherwise, Asfandiyar will proceed to prosecute him in a criminal court of law.

The notice is issued under section 8 of the Defamation Ordinance 2002 asking the minister to retract statement within 14 days failing which as per his right under the law will initiate a defamation suit of worth Rs 100 million in damages in the competent court of law. After the opposition parties political gathering in Peshawar on July 25 Yousafzai in his press confer-

PHC stops FIA from adverse action against Shandana

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Waqar Ahmad stopped Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) from taking any action against Sunni Itehad Council (SIC) member Shandana Gulzar in anti-state rhetoric as well as campaigning against national institutions case, on Monday.

Additional Attorney General Sana Ullah raised objections to the jurisdiction of the petition, questioning the authority of the FIA Lahore to conduct an inquiry against a resident of another province. "The notice was issued to her from Lahore," he argued. In the meantime, Justice Waqar Ahmed echoed this concern, asking whether the FIA's jurisdiction was limited to Lahore and not extended to other regions. "How does FIA Lahore conduct an inquiry against a resident of this province?" he asked. The judge further asked if the FIA only had an office in Lahore and no other location. However, Justice Syed Arshad Ali questioned what violations the suspect has committed. In response, the AAG cited alleged statements made against national institutions as the basis for potential action. However, Justice Ali requested detailed information regarding the nature of these violations. The parties involved were instructed to provide comprehensive explanations, and the court adjourned the hearing until March 25.

ence has said that opposition parties couldn't gather even 2000 people. He has alleged that during ANP government in the province, Asfandiyar has sold Pakhtuns on 25 million dollars.

The notice said that Asfandiyar Wali Khan is the son of late Khan Abdul Wali Khan and grandson of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan alias Bacha Khan who is amongst the prominent and internationally known leaders of the freedom movement and they have left an impact on the politics in Pakistan.

Asfandiyar Wali Khan is the central president of ANP and is a well-known politician in Pakistan. He is four times elected as MNA, served four times elected as MNA, served as a Senator and was also elected to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly. "That your defamatory accusation against Asfandiyar has left an adverse effect on the public minds and thus Asfandiyar's status has been tarnished in the eyes of the general public which is not permissible under the law," said the defamation notice.



Interprovincial drug trafficking gang members busted by SIU

KARACHI (APP): In an operation conducted by the Special Investigation Unit (SIU)/ Crome Investigation Agency (CIA) of Karachi Police, two individuals allegedly members of an inter-provincial drug trafficking gang were apprehended. The operation was prompted by intelligence suggesting that the suspects were stationed under a bridge near Qalandria Chowk, Shahra-e-Noor Jahan.

The arrested individuals, identified as Khalil and Aamir, were found in possession of approximately 4 kilograms and 215 grams of hashish. Following their apprehension, a case has been filed against them for their involvement in drug trafficking.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the suspects sourced their drugs from individuals known as Kakki and Bhai Jan in Quetta. The accused operated in Faqir Colony, Orangi Town. Subsequently, the drugs were distributed to various consumers in areas including Katti Pahari, Nazimabad, Baldia, Sultanabad, and others, using motorcycles.

Authorities have indicated that further investigation is ongoing to unravel additional details and potential accomplices connected to the drug trafficking network.

Minister visits examination centre

LAHORE (APP): Education Minister Rana Sikandar Hayat paid a surprise visit to the Lahore Board Examination Center where he observed the matriculation examination process and reviewed the facilities provided to the students in the examination center.

Rana Sikandar Hayat visited the control room established in Lahore Board examination center and reviewed the process of monitoring the candidates.

During the visit, Rana Sikandar Hayat interacted with the students appearing for the exam and inquired about the environment and attitude of the staff.

He reviewed the measures taken to prevent duplication in the examination center as well as observed the attendance process of the candidates through the thumb machine.

On this occasion, the Provincial Minister expressed his best wishes to the students taking the exam and prayed for success and directed them to study hard and with dedication.

The Education Minister also praised the board administration and the examination staff for better arrangements in the examination center. Rana Sikandar Hayat also directed the board to maintain transparency in the examination centers, provide a better environment to the students, launch biometric system for attendance as soon as possible and directed to prepare a plan for screen marking.

CM seeks Turkish help for setting up Sufi university

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that his government is working to boost industrial and agriculture sector by inviting foreign investment here to achieve the objectives.

The government will offer different incentives to foreign investors, he said while talking to the Consul Generals of China Yang Yundong, Japan HATTORI Masaru, Turkey Cemal Sangu, and Russia Andrey Fedorov who called on him separately here at the CM House. The consul generals congratulated him on his election as Sindh CM for the third time and wished him all success. Apart from discussing matters of mutual interest, they discussed investment and exchange of trade delegation to promote business, and commerce activity in this region.

The CM Sindh and Consul General of China Yang Yundong, held talks on CPEC projects, the Karachi Circular Railway, and agriculture sector. Syed Murad Ali Shah said that

some lines of the BRT bus system have started functioning while two are under construction. "The KCR would be the feeder of the BRT lines and with its construction, the transport issue would be resolved in this city," he said. The Consul General said that KCR was a priority project of the CPEC and it would be approved shortly.

Murad Shah said that during the last tenure of President Asif Ali Zardari, various projects of agriculture were discussed and MoUs were signed to achieve the progress. Now, the time has come to implement the agriculture projects under which scientific methods would be adopted to improve the yields of the crops. The CM and CG Japan HATTORI Masaru discussed investment in different sectors including electronics and automobiles. During discussion, it was decided that a meeting between Sindh Investment Department and Consulate's top officers would be organised to

select the sectors for investment. The CG Turkey Cemal Sangu while meeting with CM said that they wanted to expand their education system in the rural areas. Currently, the Turkish schools are operating in Karachi, Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas.

Murad Ali Shah said that he would arrange a meeting of the education minister with him regarding establishing Turkish schools in rural areas. The CM Sindh said that President Asif Zardari was interested in establishing Sufi University at Bhit Shah. He said that Turkey has a strong Sufi culture, and Turkish scholars could help establish Sufi universities here in this area.

The CG assured the CM about arranging a delegation of Sufi scholars for visiting Sindh areas to discuss modalities for realizing the idea of the university project here. Russian Consul General, Andrey Fedorov in his meeting with the CM discussed matters of mutual interest.

Commissioner seeks plantation targets from all depts

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Divisional Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa, during a strategic meeting convened at his office on Monday, meticulously reviewed the arrangements underway to commemorate International Forest Day 2024 on March 21 across the division. Accompanied by Secretary Forests Mudassir Waheed Malik, Commissioner Randhawa underscored the significance of the occasion, emphasizing the implementation of practical initiatives this year. March 21 marks the International Day of Forests, a global event aimed at highlighting the importance of forests, he said.

Commissioner Randhawa also sought plantation targets from all divisional departments. To ensure a coordinated effort, a joint committee comprising representatives from the Forest Department, Parks and Horticultural Authority (PHA), and Lahore District Administration was formed to devise a comprehensive plan.

The Commissioner announced plans to distribute awareness brochures and saplings to citizens at prominent locations such as major roads and restaurants in the city on March 21. Additionally, cooperative societies, LDA societies, and private organiza-

tions will spearhead special plantation drives. Emphasizing community involvement, he urged all colleges and schools to actively participate in tree planting activities according to designated targets. He expressed confidence that citizens engagement would significantly enhance the impact of International Forest Day celebrations. The initiative aims to see millions of trees planted across Lahore, with records meticulously maintained through a dedicated app.

Furthermore, Commissioner Randhawa advocated for the planting of local fruit-bearing and flowering plants to ensure environmental suitability. Secretary Forests Mudassir Waheed Malik encouraged citizens to contribute by uploading pictures of tree planting activities on the Forest Department's app, with rewards offered for the best submissions. The meeting witnessed the participation of key stakeholders including DC Lahore Rafia Haider, Additional Commissioner Hamid Malhi, Cooperative Society Registrar, representatives from the Higher Education Department, PHA, City Traffic Police, LWMC, School Education, LDA, and various other officials.

Best facilities await Vaisaikhhi Mela visitors

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Chairman & Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora on Monday strongly condemned the recent attack on the Mir Ali check-post and said that such cowardly acts cannot dampen the spirit of the nation. At a press conference at the Evacuee Trust Property Board office along with ten other committee members, Arora expressed determination to provide better facilities to Sikh pilgrims, and affirmed plans to operationalize three Gurdwaras. He added that the Sikh Marriage Act had been passed in 2018 and now it would be implemented soon after the approval of the provincial cabinet.

He said that the Pakistan Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had been notified and the ten-member committee would be responsible for all its affairs and a secretariat would be established soon.

Ramesh Singh emphasized that land of Gurdwaras would be reclaimed from squatters and special trains would be run to ensure best transportation arrangements for Sikh pilgrims while Gurdwaras would provide the facility of accommodation.

He said that all Sikh pilgrims would be issued visas under the set protocol between Pakistan and India while the government of Pakistan had approved the schedule for holding Vaisaikhhi Mela celebrations. "Pilgrims from India will reach Pakistan via the Wagah check post on April 13 and they would be provided with free accommodation, food and medical facilities in Pakistan while foolproof security arrangements are being ensured," he maintained.

He said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz had ordered best arrangements for the pilgrims.

"The stay of Indian Sikh pilgrims in Lahore has been extended for two days, while a five-dollar fee at Kartarpur has been eliminated. A 10-member Sikh International Advisory Council is being formed, and the government will follow its recommendations," he added.

In response to questions, Ramesh Singh Arora said that the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee would establish a central office in Lahore while sub-offices of the committee would be established in four provincial capitals.



KARACHI: The Federal Minister for Interior Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi lays flower wreath at the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

Frontier Corps North facilitates educational tour for Bajaur students

F.P. Report

BAJAUR: Under the "Education for All" initiative, Frontier Corps North continues to empower tribal students with enriching experiences. Recently, a group of 30 students from various schools and colleges in Bajaur district embarked on a four-day educational tour across prominent cities in Pakistan.

The tour aimed to broaden the students' horizons by acquainting them with historical landmarks and educational institutions. Commencing in Islamabad, the students visited iconic sites such as the Pakistan Monument and Faisal Mosque. In Rawalpindi, they explored the Army Museum, delving into the nation's military history. Continuing their journey, the students ventured to Lahore, where they immersed themselves in the cultural heritage of Pakistan.

They visited renowned landmarks including Minar Pakistan, Badshahi Masjid, Allama Iqbal Residency and Wahga border. Additionally, they had the privilege of exploring educational institu-

tions like the Army Institute of Military History and NUST.

The tour concluded with a visit to the historic Fort Balahisar in Peshawar, offering the students a glimpse into the region's rich past. Throughout the excursion, students received informative briefings, expanding their knowledge and appreciation for their country's

heritage.

Expressing gratitude, the students extended heartfelt thanks to the senior officials of Frontier Corps North for organizing such a transformative experience. They emphasized the importance of continuing such initiatives to provide tribal students with exposure and learning opportunities.



No compromise on quality of essential items: Azma Bukhari

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari has said that no compromise is being made on quality of essential items across the province.

In a statement issued here on Monday, she said that provincial ministers and district administrations were monitoring the quality of essential items on a daily basis. She said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz had zero tolerance on the quality of daily use items. Azma Bukhari said that prices of potatoes, onions, tomatoes and other essential items were decreasing. She said that a historic Ramadan package was being implemented successfully.

Rangers arrest three suspects for fraud, extortion

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Rangers Sindh and police conducted a joint operation in Karachi's Orangi Town. Three suspects involved in fraud, abduction for ransom, and extortion have been apprehended. The arrested individuals are identified as Kamal alias Kami, Shiraz Khan alias Shizi alias Boss, and Rao Irfan.

According to the spokesperson of Sindh Rangers, upon apprehension, fake documents including two fake South Defense Department cards and extortion notes were recovered from the suspects. The suspects had been portraying themselves as Rangers and police personnel on social media, using various videos in uniform for nefarious purposes. During initial interrogation, the suspects confessed to abducting numerous citizens from various areas of Karachi, including Orangi Town, Steel Town, and Sultanabad, transferring them to rented accommodations, and releasing them after ransom payment. Raids are underway to apprehend their accomplices.

The arrested suspects, along with confiscated items, have been handed over to the police for further legal proceedings.

62 arrested, 88 cases registered over profiteering

LAHORE (APP): The district administration has intensified price control measures following the Chief Minister's directives and conducted raids at 2,438 points resulting in the arrest of 62 violators during the last 24 hours.

Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told media here on Monday that the price control magistrates imposed hefty fines on 279 shopkeepers and sealed three sale points.

Around 88 individuals are facing cases over illegal 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 37,792 locations were inspected and 45 points were sealed during the last month, while 947 individuals were arrested over profiteering and a fine was also imposed on 3,478 shopkeepers. Cases were also registered against 1,350 individuals.

The DC emphasized zero tolerance on profiteering as per directives of Punjab

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and urged price control magistrates to remain proactive. Rafia Haider also advised the public to check prices on the price check App before making purchases and in case of any profiteering, contact Punjab Chief Minister Helpline or tag them on social media.

Meanwhile, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Finance and Planning) Umer Maqbool visited the fruit and vegetable market Multan Road and inspected prices, facilities and other arrangements.

Similarly, AC Cantt Nabeel Memon inspected facilities and implementation of official rates at the Model Bazaar China Scheme.

AC Shalimar Anum Fatima inspected facilities at the Model Bazaar Harbanspura, while AC Raiwind Zehab Tahir visited Model Bazaar Sher Shah Clooney to monitor the arrangements and directed the bazaar management to increase the number of sales counters for onions and tomatoes in order to improve public convenience.

No new taxes in Punjab budget : minister

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Finance Minister Muftaba Shuja-ur-Rehman assured the public on Monday that no new taxes were being introduced in the provincial budget.

Talking to the media at the Punjab Assembly, the minister highlighted that the assembly would pass the budget for the past 9 months and the next three months today. Emphasizing the implementation of the development roadmap outlined by the Punjab Chief Minister, the finance minister

underscored that visible progress would be observed.

Muftaba Shuja-ur-Rehman clarified that the caretaker government had made expenditures under Article 126 of the Constitution, indicating that the elected government would have approved all expenses through the assembly. Furthermore, he asserted that the elected government has the authority to audit not only the caretaker setup but also the previous government.

KU, PBSA signs MoU to promote awareness about bio-safety

KARACHI (APP): The University of Karachi and the Pakistan Biological Safety Association inked a memorandum of understanding to promote awareness regarding bio-safety, bio-security, and risk management in the labs of the KU, on the campus, and in society.

The KU VC Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi and the President PBSA Professor Dr Saeed Khan inked the MoU documents at the VC Secretariat on Monday. The KU and the PBSA agreed to encourage academic, scientific, and biological research and collaboration to train biological scientists and researchers.

As per the MoU, the PBSA will provide technical support to the KU and they will jointly conduct regional bio-safety and

bio-security trainings in the province. The PBSA has offered to facilitate KU faculty members to receive training on the International Federation for Bio-safety Association certification exam.

On this occasion, the KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi mentioned that academic collaboration is essential to move forward and stressed that such initiatives would help match the developed nations.

He said that people gradually understand the benefits of safety measures at work and hoped that with the training the staff, students, and teachers of the campus would learn a lot about the importance of bio-safety, bio-security, and risk management.



LAHORE: Vendor busy in arranging and displaying beautiful dolls to attract the customer at his roadside setup.

Minister resolves to protect children against diseases

PESHAWAR (APP): Minister Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Monday emphasized the importance of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), playing a positive role in protecting the children from dangerous diseases.

Chairing a meeting for the Expanding Program on Immunization (EPI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah highlighted the necessity for establishing district-level outbreak response committees to ensure prompt action in the event of any health crisis. He ensured all kinds of support to provide the best health facilities to the people of the province.

The meeting, attended by key stakeholders including Director General Health

Services Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dr Shoukat Ali, and representatives from WHO and UNICEF, witnessed a comprehensive presentation by Director EPI Dr Muhammad Arif Khan. Dr Khan detailed the achievements, targets, and challenges faced by the EPI.

Highlighting recent accomplishments, Dr Muhammad Khan informed that from January to March 2024, EPI successfully vaccinated 26,725 children in response to outbreaks across various areas of the province. Moreover, an additional 200,000 children received measles vaccinations during the Intensified Outreach Activity conducted from February 12 to 24, 2024.

Dr. Arif Khan also announced the ground-breaking launch of the

National Electronic Immunization Registration (NEIR) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, making it the first province to implement this system. NEIR aims to register all vaccinated children under 2 years, facilitating nationwide tracking and ensuring completion of vaccination courses.

To tackle ongoing challenges, Dr Muhammad Arif Khan outlined initiatives such as piloting a Surveillance App in Peshawar, generously supported by WHO, to enhance real-time reporting and response to cases.

However, Director EPI underscored persistent obstacles, including vaccination staff strikes, logistical constraints, and vaccine shortages, necessitating urgent attention and support.

Looking ahead, Dr. Arif Khan outlined future plans, including the "Big Catch-up" initiative targeting children older than 23 months, scheduled for implementation in June 2024. Additionally, the first round of the Intensified Outreach Activity is set to commence on March 25, covering 69 Union councils in South Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Director EPI urged hospital administrations and healthcare workers to prioritize isolating suspected patients to curb disease spread effectively.

The commitment of the Ministry of Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains steadfast in ensuring the health and well-being of every child, reaffirming its dedication to combating diseases and promoting a healthier future for all.



PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to CM Muzammil Aslam addressing a press conference at Civil Secretariat. DG Information and Public Relations Muhammad Imran also present.

KP CM condoles loss of six lives

PESHAWAR (INP): Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur on Monday condoled the tragic incident in which six members of a single family lost their lives due to the roof collapse of a house in the Raghza area of South Waziristan.

In a condolence statement, he expressed grief and sorrow over the loss of precious human lives and extended heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the affected family.

He prayed for the departed souls and for patience for the bereaved, as well as for the speedy recovery of the injured.

The Chief Minister directed the relevant district administration to provide immediate relief to the affected family and timely medical assistance to the injured.

DG condoles over demise of Shakir

PESHAWAR (APP): The Director General Information and Public Relations KP, Muhammad Imran on Monday went to Mohalla Ghiyasabad in Bhanamari here and offered Fateha with senior journalist Asif Nisar Ghiyashi over the demise of his father, senior journalist Nisar Ahmad Shakir.

On the occasion the DG Information stayed there for some time and prayed for eternal peace to the departed soul.

He said the services of late Nisar Ahmad Shakir for the cause of journalism will long be remembered.

He also met with other members of the bereaved family and prayed for patience to them to bear the irreparable loss with fortitude.

SACM condoles with senior journalist over demise of father: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Abdul Karim Tordher on Monday, visited Bhana Mari Mohalla Ghiyasabad Peshawar wherein he offered fatiha with senior journalist Asif Nisar Ghiyashi and other mourners on demise of his father and senior journalist Nisar Ahmad Shakir.

Minister for provision of books to students

PESHAWAR (APP) was said that so far about 28 percent of the supply of books has been completed while the total demand is about 39.3 million books.

It was added that 354 circles at the primary level and 28 circles at the secondary level have been established for timely supply of books across the province.

The minister was told that the supply of books would start from the second week of April.

He was further informed that this year the supply of books has been kept low and according to the government's policy, books used by former students would be provided to the children at high and higher secondary school level with a view to control the expenditures besides ensuring the

timely supply of books to the children.

Education Minister Faisal Khan Tarkai directed the authorities to be in constant contact with the publishers and continue the work on the supply of books as per the timeline.

He said that education was first priority of the government and it was committed to providing quality education to the children in schools.

He directed chalking out a timely plan for supply of books to schools in remote and hilly areas without any delay adding that the principals and in-charges of the schools should be instructed encouraging students to submit old books to school administrations and bring those into use.

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Concerns of FMCG over POS system: SCCI chief apprises chief commissioner RTO

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) president Fuad Ishaq apprised Chief Commissioner Regional Tax Office Peshawar Zafar Iqbal about concerns of the business community attached with the distribution sector over enforcement of the Point of Sale System.

According to detail, a delegation of Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCG) headed by SCCI president Fuad Ishaq held a meeting with Commissioner RTO Peshawar at regional tax office Peshawar on Monday.

The delegation consisted of president of Fast Moving Consumers Goods (FMCG) Atif Shahzad, General Secretary Khalid Farooq Malik, Azhar Khan and others. Additional Commissioner RTO Peshawar was also present during the meeting.

Fuad Ishaq informed the meeting about concerns of distributors over enforcement of the POS system through an SRO by FBR.

He urged FBR to review its decision and implement the POS system with due clarity.

The SCCI chief said the

business community wants to pay all taxes because the national economy would be stabilized by timely payment of all taxes and the country will lead toward prosperity and sustainable progress. Fuad Ishaq urged FBR to make consultation with chambers and the business community before introduction of new policies, rules and regulation, SROs so that there will be no hurdle to their smooth implementation.

In Particular, he mentioned it will prevent the creation of any gulf between government institutions and business community in execution of all orders and policies while it will also help to achieve the tax-collection targets.

Earlier, the FMCG president Atif Shahzad apprised the meeting comprehensively about implementation of POS system on distribution sector and concerns of the community.

Zafar Iqbal, Chief Commissioner RTO Peshawar on the occasion assured the issue of POS system will be taken up with FBR and high level and will try to resolve it.

He said FBR has under-

taken initiatives to simplify the existing tax system through which the business community provided relief and mitigated their suffering and problems.

The Chief Commissioner RTO Peshawar fully assured of every possible step to provide relief, facilities and resolve of the business community problems in an efficient manner.

PESCO imposed fine

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) during its ongoing operation against power pilferers imposed Rs 1610 million fine on over 51,000 individuals in six months.

According to PESCO spokesman, the crack-down against electricity theft started in September 7, 2023. During the period more than 51,000 electricity thieves were held, while 12,252 cases were registered.

As many as 5022 electricity thieves were arrested on the spot by police in the joint operations.

Faiq calls for a broad-based alliance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chairman and founder of the Amun Taraqqi Party Muhammad Faiq Shah suggested formation of a broad-based alliance among all stakeholders to jointly frame policies and to bring economic and political stability in the country.

Shah informed while chairing a meeting of the party's central executive committee here on Monday that his party has already outlined a viable plan for overcoming current economic and political chaos.

He claimed if the proposal ATP-designed would be implemented with true spirit so the change will definitely come.

The party leader once again suggested the formation of a joint board of wisdom and honesty, which would consist of all institutions, including judiciary, military, media, traders, think tanks, intellectuals and political and financial experts.

We have lost precious 75 years while the politics of hate and division has brought only destruction into the country.

The ATP chief called to revisit policies to tackle growing challenges to the country at internal and external front.

He furthermore emphasized the need for formation of an alliance to combat poverty, hunger, starvation, illiteracy, backwardness and deprivation.

Everyone should think above their personal and political interests to put the country on sustainable progress and stability, Shah asserted.

Shah, while reacting to Indian false propaganda against Pakistan, called upon the government to frame vibrant state policy so that no one will get a chance to defame our country for the fulfillment of vested interests.

The party leader said no one will think about compromising on Pakistan's assets.

Scrutiny of documents for Senate polls to be finalized tomorrow

PESHAWAR (INP): The scrutiny of documents for Senate election had started and would be finalized by March 19, said the spokesman of provincial election commission. Appeals against acceptance and rejection of papers can be filed till March 21 while a decision on the appeals would be taken by March 25.

The revised list would be released on March 26 and candidates would be able to withdraw their nomination papers till March 27. The spokesman said that so far 42 candidates have submitted papers including 25 for general seats, seven for women and 10 for technocrats.

Pakistan's democracy

Sameer Shoaib

Pakistan has grappled with persistent challenges in establishing a stable and flourishing democracy, raising questions about the factors contributing to its struggles. One notable obstacle is the historical interference of the military in politics, with numerous coups disrupting the democratic process. This recurring pattern has undermined the development of consistent civilian institutions and eroded public trust in democratic governance.

Political instability is another crucial factor hindering the success of democracy in Pakistan. Frequent changes in government, often attributed to corruption, weak institutions, and a lack of policy continuity, have created an environment of uncertainty. Corruption, pervasive in both political and bureau-

cratic spheres, further weakens democratic institutions, erodes public confidence, and obstructs economic progress.

Ethnic and religious divisions pose a significant challenge to national unity and the democratic process. Political parties often align along these lines, exacerbating regional and sectarian tensions. Economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, compound these issues by contributing to political discontent.

Security concerns, such as terrorism and insurgency, divert attention and resources away from democratic governance, with a focus on maintaining stability. The lack of education among a substantial portion of the population also presents a hurdle, as an uneducated electorate may be susceptible to manipulation

by politicians, hindering the effectiveness of the democratic process.

Media influence, marked by censorship and accusations of biased reporting, further complicates the democratic landscape. A free flow of information is essential for an informed electorate and robust democratic functioning, but challenges in the media environment limit these crucial elements.

In conclusion, the struggles of democracy in Pakistan are multifaceted, intertwined, and deeply rooted in historical, political, social, and economic factors. Addressing these challenges comprehensively, fostering good governance, promoting the rule of law, and encouraging civic participation are crucial steps towards establishing a resilient and successful democratic system in the country.



PESHAWAR: Vendor busy in making traditional sweet item Jalebi for customers during Ramadan.

Drug shortage prompt research for alternate cure of overlooked Leishminiasis

PESHAWAR (APP): Experts in medicine, entomology, dermatology and zoology are raising voices for holding clinical trials to find out alternate treatment for Cutaneous Leishminiasis (CL), an overlooked skin ailment of tropical region emerging as third most important vector borne disease after malaria and dengue.

The concern by experts has been exhibited in wake of the limited cure options due to complete reliance on Meglumine antimonite, a decades old imported drug used as first line treatment for cutaneous leishminiasis requiring injections for 21 to 30 consecutive days.

Meglumine antimonite is not produced locally and health authorities completely rely on its procurement through imports by international organisations such as the World Health Organization, making it difficult to properly treat this parasitic disease widening its horizon from endemic to non-endemic regions due to rapid urbanization, climate change and large scale dispersion of population," they explained.

In many areas the doses each patient receives are

insufficient, because of the drug's limited availability and lack of suitably trained medical staff.

Recent reports regarding exhaustion of glucantime vials stock in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gave impetus to experts' call.

"The bulky stock of 180,000 jabs imported by Health Department of KP through WHO in 2018 after the outbreak of cutaneous leishminiasis in the province, has been finished in December 2023 and we are currently short of medicine to treat the patients," disclosed Salaudain Marwat, Entomologist at Integrated Vector Control Programme KP.

Due to lack of first line medicine, doctors are opting for alternate treatment procedures including cryotherapy, applying minor volumes of liquid nitrogen at -196C to affected portion of skin once or twice on weekly basis up to six weeks and Thermotherapy, applying heat at the scar.

The Integrated Vector Control Programme has supplied equipment for both the therapies in some leishminiasis hotspot of KP including D.I.Khan, Mohmand and Karak for

treatment.

While for proper treatment through glucantime injections, patients are visiting centers established by Medicines Sans Frontier (MSF), an international medical humanitarian organization, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Salaudain told APP.

"After analyzing data of Public Health Department indicating sharp increase in Leishminiasis infection in the region and its impact on physical and mental health of patients, its time for Drug Regulatory Authority (DRAP), to take measures for availability of a proper, latest, effective and affordable medicine for its treatment," suggested Dr. Rafiq Hayat Malezai, District Health Officer (DHO) Mohmand District, a hotspot of Leishminiasis registering around 5,283 cases in 2023.

In 2023 around 25273 cases of cutaneous leishminiasis have been recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, registering a spike of 7093 cases from preceding year.

Dr. Rafiq informed that he has around 439 cases of follow up to be examined in coming few days, but due to dearth of medicine, he is

unable to provide treatment to patients.

"While realizing surge in spread of Leishminiasis infection during the last few years from its pocketed ranges to other parts of the country, it's time to give serious consideration to its prevention and cure by involving different departments including Health, Epidemiology, Entomology and microbiology," suggested Dr. Muhammad Akram, former Chairman Zoology Department Peshawar University with PhD on Leishminiasis.

Dr. Akram also insisted for advanced study of parasites causing Leishminiasis and control of sand flies vector involved in spreading of the contagion.

Majority of the medicines used for treatment of Leishminiasis are around 70 years old and of third generation, not showing better results, he claimed.

"Dependence on WHO should be ended by allowing some pharmaceutical companies to prepare or import required stock of glucantime or some other relevant medicines for provision to patients at affordable prices," Akram went

on to say.

Apart from cryo and thermo therapies, we are also prescribing Miltefosine, a broad spectrum antimicrobial and anti-leishmanial drug, as an alternate of glucantime which is easily available in open market," informed Dr. Asad Zahoor, Focal Person for Leishminiasis treatment in Karak district where around 11,000 cases are reported in 2023.

However, some dermatologists were of the view that available stock of glucantime and related medicine in open market are not reliable and pirated.

"In so many cases, medicine obtained from open markets, especially those famous for selling smuggled goods, did not give desired results and found to be spurious," shared Dr. Hafza Usman, a dermatologist serving at Kuwait Teaching Hospital in Peshawar.

On August 5, 2022, DRAP also issued an alert about presence of falsified glucantime vials in market purported to be prepared by TILLOTTS Pharma AG, Switzerland.

The company later confirmed over contact by

DRAP that it does not manufacture this product.

All Pharmacists and chemists working at distributions and Pharmacies were alerted and directed to immediately inform DRAP upon presence of this falsified product in the market or any information related to the supply of this falsified product.

Realizing increase in number of patients and difficulties faced in getting proper treatment, MSF is planning to hold CL clinical trial to investigate alternative treatment for cutaneous leishmaniasis in Pakistan," informs Dr. Muhammad Shoaib, Medical Coordinator MSF.

Talking to this scribe, Dr. Shoaib said in this "randomized control clinical trials" different treatment methods will be compared with the current first line drugs use.

Our clinical trial is already in progress in Quetta and if we get approval from DRAP (Drugs Regulatory Authority Pakistan) clinical trials will get started in Peshawar to find out alternative treatment measures for cutaneous leishmaniasis, Dr. Shoaib added.

Since its intervention in 2018 for treatment of Leishminiasis at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, MSF has so far treated around 11, 260 patients in its three centers including two in Peshawar and one in Bannu.

"There is acute shortage of Glucantime injections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and presently we don't have the medicine due to biennial closures," confirms Dr. Babar Alam, Head of WHO in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Talking to APP, Dr. Babar said our fiscal year ends in December and this December was closure of two years.

Now work plans of next two years are in process for finalization after which WHO can procure new stock of glucantime, Babar informed.

He said a meeting is also going to be held soon with representatives of KP Health Department and MSF for chalking out future line of action to overcome shortage of medicine.

"A demand for acquiring of glucantime at urgent basis has been forwarded by Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and if approval is granted, medi-

cine would be purchased through WHO at a cost of around Rs. 40 million," tells Dr. Irshad Ali Roghani, Director Public Health KP.

Dr. Irshad said WHO and MSF have also been contacted for arranging of medicine on urgent basis.

An appeal has also been made to MALC (Marie Adelaide Leprosy Center) for arranging medicine, he went on to say.

Dr. Roghani said KP Health department is doing its best to procure required stock of glucantime either through purchasing it through WHO or getting as donation from any international humanitarian organization.

While concurring with the call of experts for finding new cure procedure of Leishminiasis, Dr. Roghani said Health department is already working over it with collaboration of Khyber Medical University (KMU).

We are working over preparation of a local product to serve as a useful and affordable antileishmanial drug and hopefully will become successful in coming few months, Dr. Roghani hoped.



In brief

Fayyaz defends PhD thesis F.P. Report

KOHAT: A Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph. D) in Micro-biology scholar Fayyaz-ul-Hassan defended his thesis successfully from Kohat University of Science and Technology. The Ph. D thesis titled with "The immune system of typhoid patients". Professor Dr. Mubashir Hussain supervised the Ph. D scholar during his thesis. The scholar dedicated his success to prayers of parents and hard work of teachers as well as encouragement provided by the friends.

Murderer gets death penalty F.P. Report

BUNER: District & Session Judge (D&SJ) Buner Samira Wali while convicted murderer for death penalty along with fine of Rs1 million, on Monday. According to details, a murderer named Aqal Zaib has convicted for killing a person resident of Sar Banda area of Buner. As per the FIR the convicted Aqal Zaib was shot dead his rival Noor Mohamad son of Gul Mohamad of Sar Banda over old enmity at Car Parking in the district court Daggar premises. The district & Session Judge Madam Samira Wali after hearing the case established the accused proved guilty of the crime 302.

Senior villager shot dead F.P. Report

SWABI: A senior villager was killed when unknown masked assailants fired at him inside the masjid during Fajr prayer in Moza Kalabat here on Monday. Police said the assailants riding a motorcycle escaped the area after shooting the old man, named Sayyed Muhammad. A complainant, Zain Muhammad of Kalabat told police that he received information that his 75-year-old uncle had been shot dead inside the masjid. He said he rushed towards the masjid and found the body of his uncle littered with blood. He told police that his uncle had no enmity with anyone however, police have started investigation after registering a case.

Army organizes 4-day study tour F.P. Report

KHAR: Pakistan Army organized a four-day study tour for thirty students of various schools and colleges of Bajaur district. The students were taken to historical buildings and important educational institutions in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Peshawar and were briefed in this regard. In Rawalpindi, the students visited Army Museum, Army Institute of Military History, NUST, and Pakistan Monument and Faisal Mosque in Islamabad. In Lahore, the students were taken to Minar-e-Pakistan, Badshahi Mosque, Mazar-e-Iqbal, Army Museum Lahore, Allama Iqbal Residency and Wagah Border. The students thanked Pakistan Army for organizing the study tour.

10 shopkeepers arrested

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): The district administration has arrested ten shopkeepers and booked 12 others over profiteering during a crackdown launched across the district on Monday. In line with special directives of the provincial government, the district administration under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mian Usman Ali, launched a special crackdown against profiteers across the district.



KALAYA: Local administration holding jirga between Boland Khel tribe of Upper Orakzai and North Waziristan District.

Admn put masses at the mercy of mafias

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: District administration along with food authority has left the consumers on the mercy of the profiteers and the so called complaint centers established by the district administration giving deserted look as there were just display of rate lists and no one was there who can record complaints and take action against the violators as much hue and cry was made by the divisional administration for the relief and actions against profiteers and had made some complaint centers in the city and these are just looks like showpiece and are an eyewash.

The district administration threw down its arms in front of the wholesalers. All the meetings held to curb hawking in Ramadan also proved futile.

Bureaucracy is completely absent from the scene. Clerk mafia of the departments left the people to be slaughtered in front of the high street vendors. The markets of the district turned into arenas due to fights. Just with the starting the holy month of Ramadan markets in Abbottabad witnessing a significant surge in prices, leaving residents grappling with the burden of increased expenses. Daily use commodities, especially vegetables and fruits, have experienced notable price hikes, eliciting

widespread concern among consumers. It may be pointed out those vegetables such as tomatoes were priced which were being sold at Rs120 per KG have increased to Rs180 per kg. Peas, once priced at Rs120 per kg, have seen a sharp increase to Rs200 per kg.

Similarly, price of onion has shoot to 250 from 150 per kg while Prices of other vegetables have also experienced substantial spikes. Similarly, fruits have not been spared the price surge. Bananas, which were previously available at Rs100 per dozen, are now being sold at Rs350 per dozen. The price of apples has surged from Rs200 to Rs400 per kg.

Before the start of the holy month of Ramadan, the district administration including Commissioner Hazara. Several meetings were held to control hawking. Being the divisional headquarters, these meetings were presided over by Commissioner Hazara every time, in which instructions were issued to the Deputy Commissioner and other officials to take strict measures to control hawking were done and only AC Havelian looks busy while at Abbottabad and surrounding areas, no activity of administration was noticed.

The orders of Commissioner Hazara were thrown into the air and arbitrary rates were set

trary rates were set trampling the issued official list under foot. Despite the ban on the sale of slaughtered chicken, it is still being sold. Buffalo meat with bones is 850 rupees and herb 1100 rupees.

As well as, goat meat is being sold up to 2200 rupees. The price of everything was doubled. Due to which fights started between people and shopkeepers. The game that started from the first Ramadan did not stop until the third Ramadan and the wholesalers continued to do what they wanted. On the other hand, by spending millions of rupees from public tax money before Ramadan, the results of district and divisional administration meetings were limited to photo sessions and papers instead of people.

Similarly, complaint points were also made at some specific places in the market, but those points were also proved to be fake when the person harassed by the peddlers went to them, instead of taking actions, the affected person was charged at higher rates than the same shopkeeper. Advises to buy items and says you take the items then show us and take it with you we will invoice it and that will be the end of the matter. Instead of stopping the sale of goods, the house is cleared by calling a few shopkeepers.

Every nook & corner to be clean: LG Minister

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Provincial Minister for Local Government, Punjab, Zeshan Rafique has said that 'Suthra' Punjab Campaign of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif is historic and people welfare campaign for ensuring cleanliness in urban and rural areas of the province and this campaign will be made successful still March, 31. This he claimed while inaugurating cleanliness campaign at Model Village Peer Kot Saani under 'Suthra' Punjab Campaign near Hafizabad. Chairperson Chief Minister's Special Imitative Committee, Saira Afzal Tarar, Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad, MPs Mian Shahid Hussain Bhatti, Mian Aoun Jhanghir Bhatti and officers of local government were also present on the occasion.

Provincial Minister

Zeshan Rafique directed the officers of district administration, local government to prepare schedule and ensure cleanliness under comprehensive plan. He also directed the officers to inspect cleanliness campaign to visit Rural and Urban areas for making the campaign result-oriented. In case of any deficiency or negligence, officers concerned will be held responsible and strict departmental action would be initiated against responsible officers, he warned.

Minister also visited Ramazan Bazar, fair price shops, utility store setup at model bazar and reviewed prices, quality of essential commodities and other arrangements. He also checked process and record of distribution of ration at door steps of the poor under 'Negheban' Ramzan Package and took feedback from beneficiaries.

Earlier, DC Sundas Irshad informed the Minister in a meeting held

to review progress on 'Suthra' Punjab Campaign that with launching the campaign in the district Hafizabad, improvement in cleanliness in the great extent was witnessed and special teams consisting of citizens were constituted for making the campaign successful.

She also apprised that new machinery was provided to district council with the cost of Rs. 35 million for lifting garbage from various palaces and to carrying at dumping points. She further told that ration under 'Negheban' Ramzan Package had been distributed among fifty percent people in the district so far.

Meanwhile, Saira Afzal Tarar informed the problems of drainage and sewerage in Pindi Bhattian and Jalpur Bhattian. The Minister asked the district administration to submit proposals and scheme to address problems of the people of the both cities.

Former DC transferred land to mafia, claims MPA

F.P. Report

THATTA: Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Sindh Syed Riaz Hussain Shah Shirazi has accused former district Commissioner Thatta of selling land illegally. This he claimed while addressing a press conference and also displayed documents claiming that the land stretching up to 40 kilometers in the Kohistani area of district Thatta has been illegally and fraudulently transferred to land grabbing mafia by the former Deputy Commissioner who took charge during the regime of caretaker government.

The law authorizes an assistant Commissioner to allot land but here district Commissioner has allotted land to the land grabber, that is an abuse of power by the DC"; he mentioned adding that the former DC restored 17 judicial orders that were rejected by the commission formed during the previous PPP government. The restoration of orders aimed at facilitating the land grabbers; MPA alleged.

Local land owners, he said, had been deceived by the corrupt bureaucracy of the district. He urged Chief Minister Sindh for holding fair and transparent inquiry into the matter and called for regularizing 800 villages through a resolution in the provincial assembly.

Balance diet key for diabetics F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Director Sakeena Hospital Kamalia and Dr. Shahid Iqbal Gill while talking to daily The Frontier Post said that diabetic patients should not eat too much, avoid cold drinks and sweet things.

Because the use of these things increases the sugar and the patient's sugar continues to increase, due to which the eyes, kidneys and heart veins are weakened. Due to the lack of sugar control, the diabetic patient becomes prone to different diseases. He said that a diabetic patient should walk continuously and should avoid eating drinking wasteful things.

Always use the medicine as direction by the doctor. By doing this sugar is controlled and the patient is protected from various diseases. Diabetes is a disease that weakens a person from within. It is an incurable disease and must be controlled otherwise it can kill a person.

Laborers condemns Afghan Taliban for restricting entry

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Local daily wagers and local laborers criticized the Afghan border security officials for banning their entry to Afghanistan via Torkham border.

In a pretest camp sit-up at Landi Kotal-Torkham highway, they said that they said that due to lack of job opportunities locally, hundreds of tribesmen crossed the border legally to Afghanistan to earn three times meals for their family; however, since last day the Afghan authorities had restrained their movement

that was injustice to them.

Because of the constrained policy of the Afghan officials at the crossing thousands of poor families have been compelled to starve, they added and said since long the laborers have been teased at the border on pretext of new exit and entry rules to deprive them of their manual work (job). They demanded of the Afghan border security officials to have mercy on them, relax restrictions and permit them to cross the border to earn bread for their families.

The protestors threat-

ened an indefinite agitation till acceptance of their demands. Meanwhile Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid along with a number of village and neighborhood chairmen visited the protest camp of the laborers and exposed their solidarity with them.

Speaking on the occasion he said that the area was short of source of income and Torkham border was the lonely opportunity of earning for the locals therefore efforts should be made to provide relief to the laborers and daily wagers at the crossing.

Residents flay bike snatching on gun point

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Unknown culprits snatched a motorcycle on gun point at Haider Khan village area of Takhtbhai tehsil Mardan district while the armed men escaped from the scene, on Monday.

The police registered a case and started investigation. The incident spread panic in the area. It was reported that Farman Ali resident of Shah Baig along with his partner Sameen Khan were coming towards the market on their motorcycle number 1122 Mardan Honda 125 for some work near Haider Khan kali chowk on Ring Road, three armed motorcycleists pulled out pistols and managed to escape after snatching the motorcycle and cash from

them.

The Saddar Police Station registered a report and started the investigation. The political, social and public circles of the area have expressed deep grief and regret over the incident and demanded the arrest of the accused soon and to maintain law and order while the incident has created fear and harassment in the area.

Two killed, two injured in road mishap: Two persons were killed and two youths were seriously injured as a result of a collision between high-speed motorcycles near Lala Jan Kali on Hathian-Juwar Road.

The accident took place around 9 pm. It is said that Zeeshan Khan son of Muhammad Bilal and his companion were going on

their motorcycle when the speeding motorcycle coming from the opposite direction collided with the motorcycle on which Muhammad Saad and Uzair were riding all four youths were seriously injured.

The victims were immediately transferred to the hospital by Rescue 1122, where Zeeshan and Saad succumbed to their injuries, while Uzair's son of Parvez resident of Gharib Abad and the other Matta Khan resident of Bajaur are undergoing treatment. It is said that Zeeshan used to work as a laborer in Dubai and returned from Dubai last December and got married in January while Saad was the elder of the siblings the two youths were later laid to rest in Hathian with groans and sobs.

Youth killed at bright daylight in Larkana

F.P. Report

LARKANA: A 18-years youth named Abbas Ali Khuhawar was shot dead by unknown motorcycle-riding in Luhar Colony on the outskirts of Larkana. As soon as the body reached home, a scene of apocalypse was overshadowed.

On the complaint of Raqia Khatun khuhawar, the mother of the deceased youth, a case was registered against the three accused involved in the murder, Bashir Ahmad Khuhawar, Waqar Ahmad Bhutto and an unknown person. The mother told the media while crying with her husband Ali Gul Khuhawar that the tyrants. They have killed my young son for no reason and they have ruined my house, she demanded from the Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana

Division and SSP Larkana to immediately arrest the influential accused involved in the murder of my son.

On the other hand, when contacted, the in-charge of concerned Hydari police station said that the raids are going on to arrest the accused. It is hoped that an effort will be made to provide justice to the victims.

Meanwhile, General Secretary of Pakistan Sunni Tehreek Shamsuddin Sirohi said while talking to the media that inflation has reached its peak in Larkana city and surrounding areas, while the welfare month like Ramadan-ul-Kareem. The unscrupulous shopkeepers and traders are robbing the daily citizens with both hands by setting their own prices, but unfortunately, the high officials and elected representatives

of the Sindh government, district administration and Larkana police have chosen to remain silent. We strongly condemn it.

SIC general secretary said that no action is being taken on the Ramadan Ordinance in Larkana city, while in most areas of the city open hotels, pans, cigarette shops, food centers and other food stalls are running, against which anyone action is not being taken, from which it seems that the district administration and the police are not implementing the Ramadan ordinance. He demanded that immediate action be taken against the shopkeepers and businessmen who are extorting money and the Ramzan Ordinance should be implemented, otherwise the PST will start a protest movement.

15 arrested during raid

F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: As many as 15 people including five women were arrested during raiding on a prostitution den in Shahdadt for the recovery of a girl kidnapped from Punjab province, on Monday.

In order to recover the girl Sobia, the Punjab police team raided the prostitution den in Shahdadt and arrested 15 women including Anwar Bibi, Yasmin, Dua, Momal, Seema, Kiran, Kashif, Nabiullah, Abdul Hameed, Abdul Sattar, who were arrested. The section was kept in the quarter of the jail, on this occasion the

police said that the arrested Anwer Bibi runs prostitution dens with her colleagues and the alleged abducted girl, 14-year-old Sobia, was engaged in prostitution. No action of Punjab Police has been registered.

Meanwhile last day, the FIA Larkana team along with the staff raided a shop in Kanbhar Shopping Center in Nasirabad of Qamber Shahdadt district and arrested two brothers Amir Ali Kanbhar and Abdullah Kunbhar on the charge of illegal hundi business, his reference hundi record was confiscated, both the arrested brothers

were transferred to Larkana for further investigation on the spot, while any record or entry of this action of FIA was registered at Nasirabad Tehna. When contacted in this regard, SHO Nasirabad told the media that we have not been informed about this action of FIA.

On the other hand, Arbab Ali Kunbhar, the father of the arrested youth, said that my son's are whole seller cosmetic accessories & they are doing sales business while the allegations of the reference handi are baseless. We will approach the Supreme Court against this action of FIA.

Chitral Shandur road protection wall damaged before completion

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: Construction work on the Chitral-Booni Shandor road continue for the last 4 years under the supervision of the National Highway Authority (NHA). On one hand, the construction work on this road, at the cost of billions of rupees, suffered from unnecessary delay, while on other hand, the quality of work is also substandard. This is why most of its protection walls are automatically falling before its completion.

Members of the CDM (Chitral Development Moment), a volunteer organization that raise voice and advocates for the construction and repair of roads in Chitral, inspected the road. Experts revealed that contract of this road construction was

awarded to Umar John & Company but they have divided the work among small (PT) contractors. They said that the retaining, breast walls on road bank towards Chitral river have been built on sandy ground without any foundation, as well as in its construction it seems that very less cement used and only garbage and small pieces of stones have been put inside the protection wall and plastered it with cement on the outside. There was no curing on cement work timely water has not been showered on it, due to which these cements are also decaying, decomposed and these retaining walls falling without any flood or avalanche.

Apart from the CDM members, the passers-by also broke the cement walls with their

hands and described it as very substandard quality and poor work. Prominent lawyer Syed Burhan Shah advocate, social activist Inayatullah Asir, Muhammad Ashraf, student Kamran, Sultan Mehmood, Zakaria and other people walking on the road also expressed their concern that such a poor work was done on the Chitral-Boni main road on which thousands of people pass on daily basis, then what will be the standard of NHA's work where there is not much traffic.

The residents said that usually, if common man done construction work in house, they first dig three to four feet of foundation for the wall and put cement in the stones to build the wall. But in this unique retaining wall small stones and garbage

have been put inside the protection walls without any cement inside and the wall has been plastered from the outside which gives the impression that cement has been used throughout the wall but the wall is without cement inside.

As well as the contractor also not properly, its curing and no water were put on it due to which the cement has become rotten and useless without water in July and August, that is why these walls are falling down on their own. Where the walls have fallen, there is neither flood, avalanche nor any big stone falling on them, but because of the lack of cement and no foundation, the wall has slipped beneath and collapsed.

The CDM members also disclosed that Irfan-ul-Haq,

Consultant Resident Engineer on behalf of NESPAK i.e. National Engineering Services Pakistan, did not visit the site even once to check the quality of the work. They further said that his complaint was also brought into the notice of project director of NHA but his reply was that he is a heart patient and is not able to walk on road. Our representative tried repeatedly to contact the officials of NHA and NESPAK but failed and a message also sent to them on their number with a request to give their version on the matter so that the statement of both sides can be given in the media but for now. So far, no response has received from them.

Syed Burhan Shah Advocate and other members of CDM have demanded from the Chief

Justice of Pakistan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Federal Minister and Secretary Communications and Chairman NHA to conduct a judicial inquiry into this faulty work and rectify it, so as it should be built according to the prevailing standards, and specification of NHA so that after completion of this road, when heavy trucks and passengers coaches pass on this road these substandard quality retaining walls will be not bear their load and lest they fell down in the river. Because these retaining walls have been damaged at so many Places where neither heavy debris has fallen on it nor flood water has passed over it, rather they are collapsing automatically due to not existing its foundation and substandard quality work.



Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Ukraine war: Multiple drone attacks repelled, says Russia

MOSCOW (BBC): Russia's defence ministry says its forces have destroyed dozens of drones in several regions across the country, including Moscow. The biggest attack happened in the southern Russian region of Krasnodar, where an oil refinery was targeted. The attacks come as Russia holds a general election in which President Vladimir Putin is guaranteed to win.

In Ukraine, officials reported an overnight barrage of Russian drones and missiles on the port city of Odesa. The Ukrainian governor of the north-eastern city of Kharkiv said 15 settlements had been shelled by Russia over the past 24 hours. In Russia, authorities said 17 drones had been launched against an oil refinery and had been neutralised, but one sparked a fire as it fell. No deaths were reported as a result of the fire, which has been extinguished.

One person is thought to have died of a heart attack during the strike. It is the sixth oil refinery attacked in Russia over the past week. A source has confirmed to the BBC that Ukrainian forces targeted the Slovyansk oil refinery in the Krasnodar region of southern Russia. The security source referred to a "successful result", and a "large fire". It said again that Ukraine's aim was to undermine the Russian economy and its oil exports. The Krasnodar attack is the latest in a number of similar drone attacks, with 12 oil refineries targeted in recent times. Meanwhile, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanyin wrote on Telegram that five drones were downed in different areas while flying towards the capital. And two Moscow airports have imposed flight restrictions for security reasons, state media report.

Another area of Russia - the Belgorod region, near northern Ukraine - has also come under attack, according to its governor. He said a teenage girl had died when a shell hit a residential building. Vyacheslav Gladkov said drones dropped explosive devices in the village of Oktyabrsky - damaging electricity and gas supply lines. Later, Mr Gladkov said a man died "before an ambulance crew arrived" after air strikes hit a car park in Belgorod. Eleven others were injured, the governor added. It is the second time Belgorod has been targeted this weekend. At least two people were killed in a bombardment the authorities blamed on Ukraine. Shops and schools were closed afterwards as a safety precaution. According to Ukraine's southern defence forces, 13 Iranian-made Shahed drones were shot down. No injuries were reported, but the attack caused fires at two agricultural sites and destroyed build-



ings. The fires have since been put out. Another drone was shot down in the Mykolaiv region. While Russia claims that Ukraine is attempting to disrupt the presidential election that is certain to give President Putin another six years in power, it also launched a wave of drones against Ukrainian cities overnight - as it has done since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Ukrainian forces managed to intercept most of them, but two struck sites in the port city of Odesa - days after a double missile attack killed at least 20 people and left dozens more wounded. In his evening address, President Volodymyr Zelensky referred to the success of Ukraine's long-range drones in recent weeks exposing what he called "vulnerabilities" in Russia's "war system". "Ukraine will now always have its own strike force in the sky," he said. Shops and schools have been closed in the Russian city of Belgorod after bombardments that authorities there have blamed on Ukraine. Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said two people were killed - as voting continues in a general election Vladimir Putin is certain to win.

Air defence systems downed eight Ukrainian missiles, Mr Gladkov said. Mr Putin accused Ukraine of trying to disrupt his bid for another six-year term. Students in Belgorod - which is near the border with Ukraine - will not attend school, the governor said. While shopping centres in Belgorod will be closed, Mr Gladkov added. Mr Gladkov said one woman was killed in a car park while with her son, as they walked a dog. "Medics are fighting for her son's life," the governor added. Images circulating on social media show a car park billowing with smoke and fire. Belgorod has been the target of several retaliatory strikes from Kyiv. The Russian defence ministry confirmed that it had "inflicted losses" in the border areas of Ukraine and the Belgorod and Kursk regions.

Also, the governor of the Samara region - some 850km (530 miles) southeast of Moscow - said Ukrainian drones targeted two oil refineries. In a post on Telegram, Dmitry Azarov said one of the refineries, in Syzran, had been set alight but there were no casualties. A Ukrainian source told Reuters Kyiv's SBU intelligence agency struck three Samara region Rosneft refineries - in Syzran, Novokuibyshevsk and Kuibyshevsk. Kyiv has not commented about the attacks in Belgorod. The elections, which are described as neither free nor fair by critics, are set to see Mr Putin win six more years in office. The result is not in doubt as Mr Putin has no credible opponent.

Potential candidates who opposed Russia's invasion of Ukraine were barred from running. While Mr Putin's most vocal critic, Alexei Navalny, died suddenly in an Arctic prison last month. Mr Navalny's spokespeople have accused the Kremlin of killing the politician. These suggestions have been vehemently denied by the Russian government. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, called on Kremlin opponents to go to polling stations en masse at noon to protest against the election. Despite these elections being skewed in Mr Putin's favour, voting was filled with acts of vandalism at polling stations.

Incidents of vandalism involved green dye being poured into ballot boxes, the boxes being set alight and fireworks being set off inside polling stations, state media reported. "They try to scare us, but this is not a nation that can be intimidated," 68-year-old Elena Kirsanova told AFP. The ruling United Russia party said it had endured a large-scale hacking attack on its website, as reported by AFP. Voting is taking place in Russia over three days, spanning several time zones. Polling stations opened in the Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia's easternmost region and will finally close in the westernmost Kaliningrad exclave at 20:00.

Four officers among 16 troops killed in Nigeria

ABUJA (AP): At least 16 soldiers, including four officers, were killed in southern Nigeria while responding to a distress call during fighting between two communities, defense officials said. The attack in the oil-rich, riverine Delta state happened in the Bomadi council area when the soldiers, deployed to keep the peace, "were surrounded by some community youths and killed," Defense Headquarters spokesman Brig. Gen. Tukur Gusau said in a statement.

The attack led to the death of the commanding officer, two majors, one captain and 12 soldiers, Gusau said, adding that a few arrests had been made related to the attack, which is now being investigated by the military. Local media reported the conflict in Delta was related to a lingering land dispute between the Okuama and Okoloba communities, which resulted in the abduction of one man. The soldiers had unsuccessfully tried to negotiate his freedom. Though mostly deployed on special security operations across the West African country, Nigerian soldiers are sometimes sent to resolve conflict in communities, especially areas with an inadequate security presence or where deadly clashes are common.

Film studio engulfed by fire in Egypt

CAIRO (BBC): Egypt's Al-Ahram Studio, which is one of the oldest in the world, has been destroyed in a fire. It took hours for firefighters to get the blaze under control and several buildings near the studio in Cairo's Giza district had to be evacuated. Emergency services treated people at the scene for smoke inhalation. The cause of the fire is not yet known.

The studio was founded in 1944. Several films and TV series were produced there and broadcast across the world. The studio contains three production stages, a screening room and an editing suite. Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly visited the site alongside other officials to assess the damage. According to local media reports, the fire broke out 24 hours after the production company had finished filming its Ramadan TV series. AFP reports that residents in neighbouring buildings were still sleeping on the ground in nearby streets at dawn. The fire damaged the facades of seven buildings. In a statement reported by Arab News, the prime minister announced compensation for affected families.

South Sudan shuts all schools

JUBA (AP): South Sudan is closing all schools starting Monday in preparation for an extreme heat wave expected to last two weeks. The health and education ministries advised parents to keep all children indoors as temperatures are expected to soar to 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit).

They warned that any school found open during the warning period would have its registration withdrawn, but the statement issued didn't specify how long schools would remain shuttered. The ministries said they "will continue to monitor the situation and inform the public accordingly." Resident Peter Garang, who lives in the capital, Juba, welcomed the decision. He said "schools should be connected to the electricity grid" to enable the installation of air conditioners. South Sudan, one of the world's youngest nations, is particularly vulnerable to climate change with heat waves common but rarely exceeding 40 C (104 F). Civil conflict has plagued the east African country which also suffered from drought and flooding, making living conditions difficult for residents. The World Food Program in its latest country brief said South Sudan "continues to face a dire humanitarian crisis" due to violence, economic instability, climate change and an influx of people fleeing the conflict in neighboring Sudan.

EU announces \$8b package for Egypt

CAIRO: The European Union has announced a 7.4 billion-euro (\$8.06bn) aid package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt, part of a new deal to stem migrant flows to Europe that has been criticised by rights groups.

The deal is scheduled to be signed during a visit by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and leaders of Belgium, Italy, Austria, Cyprus and Greece, according to officials. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met separately with von der Leyen and other European leaders before the signing ceremony. The aid package includes both grants and loans over the next three years, with the EU saying it is upgrading its relationship with the Arab world's most populous country to a "strategic partnership". The proposed funding includes 5 billion euros (\$5.45bn) in concessional loans and 1.8 billion euros (\$1.96bn) of investments, according to a summary of the plan published by the EU. An additional 600 million euros (\$654m) would be provided in grants, including 200 million euros (\$218m) for managing migration issues. El-Sisi's office said in a statement that the deal with the EU aims to achieve "a significant leap in cooperation and coordination between the two sides and to achieve common interests". Egypt's economic uncertainty has pushed many to migrate from the Arab nation, with Europe interested in curbing migration

from Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa. But European governments are worried about the fall-out from growing instability in Egypt, which has been struggling to raise foreign currency and has inflation running close to record highs. Earlier this month, however, the country struck a record deal for Emirati investment, expanded its loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and sharply devalued its currency. The deal comes amid growing concerns that Israel's looming ground offensive on Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah could force hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to break into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli war on Gaza, now in its sixth month, has pushed more than a million people to Rafah. Egypt says there are nine million migrants, including about 480,000 who are registered refugees and asylum seekers with the United Nations' refugee agency. Many of those migrants have established their own businesses, while others work in the huge informal economy as street vendors and house cleaners.

But Egyptian officials say Cairo deserves recognition for largely shutting off irregular migration from its north coast since 2016 although there has been a surge in Egyptians trying to cross to Europe via Libya, and the EU is already providing support aimed at reducing those flows.

In recent months, the Greek islands of Crete and Gavdos have seen a

steep rise in migrant arrivals - mostly from Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan - raising concerns about a new Mediterranean smuggling route. Activists have criticised Western backing for el-Sisi, who came to power a decade ago after leading the overthrow of Egypt's first democratically elected leader. A crackdown has swept up dissidents from across the political spectrum, while the state and the army have extended their grip on the economy, which businessmen and analysts say has impeded structural reforms demanded by the IMF.

El-Sisi's backers say security measures were needed to stabilise Egypt and pave the way for providing social rights such as housing and jobs. The EU says its expanded partnership with Egypt is meant to promote democracy and freedoms, but its moves to offer financing in return for migration curbs have run up against obstacles and criticism. "The blueprint is the same as the flawed EU deals with Tunisia and Mauritania: stop migrants, ignore abuses," Human Rights Watch said of the plan to enhance ties with Egypt and provide new financing. Amnesty International also urged the European leaders not to be complicit with rights violations taking place in Egypt. "EU leaders must ensure that the Egyptian authorities adopt clear benchmarks for human rights," said Eve Geddie, the head of Amnesty International's European institutions office. — Aljazeera

Niger suspends military cooperation with US

ABUJA: Niger has suspended its military agreement with the United States "with immediate effect", according to the ruling military spokesman Colonel Amadou Abdramane, in a blow to US security interests in the region. The pact allowed US military personnel and civilian defence staff to operate from Niger, which plays a central role in the US military's operations in Africa's Sahel region and is home to a major airbase.

The decision, announced, came after senior US officials - led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee and US Africa Command head General Michael Langley - visited the West African country earlier this week to discuss democratic transition. Speaking on local television, Abdramane said the US delegation did not follow diplomatic protocol, and that Niger was not informed about the composition of the delegation, the date of its arrival or the agenda.

"Niger regrets the intention of the American delegation to deny the sovereign Nigerian people the right to choose their partners and types of partnerships capable of truly helping them fight against terrorism," Abdramane said. The US military had some 650 personnel working in

Niger in December, according to a White House report to Congress. The US military operates a major airbase in the Niger city of Agadez, some 920km (572 miles) from the capital of Niamey, using it for manned and unmanned surveillance flights and other operations. A drone base known as Air Base 201 near Agadez was built at a cost of more than \$100m. Since 2018 the base has been used to target ISIL (ISIS) fighters and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimene (JNIM), an al-Qaeda affiliate, in the Sahel region. Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera correspondent Shihab Rattansi said the move is "a huge blow to the US".

Niger is the centre of US operations in west and north Africa, notably at its Air Base 201, the most expensive construction project ever undertaken by the US government. It's there for war on terror operations but it's really there also for great power projection against countries like Russia and China." Last October, Washington officially designated the military takeover as a coup. But in December, the top US envoy for Africa, Phee, said the US was willing to restore aid and security ties if Niger met certain conditions.

The military said the del-

egation had accused Niger of partnering with Russia and Iran on "secret" deals, which the government denies. Officials also said the US had "threatened" action against Niger if the Niamey fails to cut ties with both countries. The military government "forcefully denounces the condescending attitude accompanied by the threat of retaliation from the head of the American delegation towards the Nigerian government and people", spokesman Abdramane added.

A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to the Reuters news agency, said the officials had "frank discussions" in Niamey earlier this week about the trajectory of Niger's ruling military council - known by its French initials CNSP. "We are in touch with the CNSP and will provide further updates as warranted," the official added. Niger has been under military rule since July 2023 when an elite guard force led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani detained President Mohamed Bazoum and declared Tchiani ruler. Like the military rulers in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger has also kicked out French and other European forces. Both Mali and Burkina Faso have turned to Russia for support. — Aljazeera

Battle over deep-sea mining heats up

NEW YORK (BBC): Greenpeace could be thrown out of the UN body overseeing controversial plans to begin deep-sea mining. One mining company claims the campaign group disrupted a research expedition in the remote Pacific. Member states of the UN's International Seabed Association could choose to strip Greenpeace of its observer status within the group.

Greenpeace says the incident in question was a peaceful protest aimed at protecting a pristine ecosystem. The mining company involved, The Metals Company, accuses Greenpeace of being "antisience". It is the latest salvo in a long-running battle over access to a trove of hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of metals lying on the surface of the seabed in some parts of the deep ocean. Green campaigners say it will cause terrible damage to one of the few remaining ecosystems on

Earth untouched by humanity. The metals the companies want to exploit have built up over tens of millions of years into potato-sized lumps, known as polymetallic nodules. Mining companies say the copper, cobalt, nickel and manganese they contain are crucial battery metals. The International Energy Agency forecasts demand for these metals will soar as the world continues the effort to transition towards a low-carbon economy. Green campaigners say there are sufficient supplies of the metals on land and no ocean mining should be allowed until the deep-sea environment, and the impact mining will have on it, are much better understood. Whether action will be taken against Greenpeace will be decided by the representatives of 167 countries at an International Seabed Authority (ISA) meeting this week. These latest

international talks continue an ongoing effort to decide what rules should apply to companies that want to collect minerals from the abyssal plain, one of the deepest parts of the ocean. The ISA has said it aims to have rules in place by 2025.

Both the mining companies and green activists claim to be acting in the best interests of the planet. The US has never ratified the international treaty that created the ISA, so plays no active role with the body. This week a group of influential US political and military leaders, including Hillary Clinton, called for the US to ratify it, arguing competition with China meant access to deep-sea metals was crucial for the country. The Metals Company says the research trip interrupted by Greenpeace in November was for science that aimed to help improve knowledge of the effect nodule collection will have.

Acute malnutrition spreading fast among children in Gaza: UN

NEW YORK: The main United Nations aid agency operating in Gaza has said that acute malnutrition was accelerating in the north of the Palestinian enclave as Israel prepared to send a delegation to Qatar for new truce talks on a hostage deal with Hamas.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said one in three children under the age of two in northern Gaza are now acutely malnourished, putting more pressure on Israel over the looming famine. "Children's malnutrition is spreading fast and reaching unprecedented levels in Gaza," UNRWA said in a social media post.

Israel said it would send a delegation to Qatar for more talks with mediators after Hamas presented a new proposal for a ceasefire with an exchange of hostages and prisoners. A

source familiar with the talks told the Reuters news agency that the delegation will be led by the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, David Barnea. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is seeking to convene the security cabinet to discuss the proposal before the talks start.

Netanyahu's office has said the Hamas offer was still based on "unrealistic demands". Repeated efforts failed to secure a ceasefire before the holy month of Ramadan, which started a week ago, with Israel saying it plans to launch a new offensive in Rafah in southern Gaza. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, starting a two-day visit to the region, voiced concerns about an assault on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million residents are sheltering, saying there was a danger it would result "in many terrible

civilian casualties". Netanyahu's office said he had approved an attack plan on Rafah and that the civilian population would be evacuated. It gave no timeframe, and there was no immediate evidence of extra preparations on the ground. Israeli attacks on Gaza have killed at least 31,553 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in the strip.

The assault has also devastated the enclave, forcing nearly all the inhabitants from their homes, leaving much of the territory in rubble and triggering a massive hunger crisis. "Children's malnutrition is spreading fast and reaching unprecedented levels in Gaza," UNRWA said in a social media post. Hospitals in Gaza have reported some children dying of malnutrition and

dehydration. Western countries have called on Israel to do more to allow in aid, with the UN saying it faced "overwhelming obstacles" including crossing closures, onerous vetting, restrictions on movement and unrest inside Gaza. A first delivery into Gaza by the World Central Kitchen, pioneering a new sea route via Cyprus, arrived and was off-loaded, the charity said. Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides said a second cargo of food aid was ready to depart by sea from Cyprus, while the United States and Jordan said they carried out an airdrop of humanitarian aid. In a CNN interview, Queen Rania of Jordan called the airdrops "literally just drops in the ocean of unmet needs" and accused Israel of "cutting off everything that is required to sustain a human life: food, fuel, medicine, water". — Aljazeera

Haiti: The harrowing journey out of gang territory

PORT-AU-PRINCE: As the passengers from Port-au-Prince disembark at the bus terminal in Cap-Haitien, the harrowing journey is evident on their faces. The trip out of the beleaguered Haitian capital city involves running the gauntlet along risky and dangerous roads, trying to avoid gunmen and sporadic violence along the way.

"It took us several hours longer than it should as we had to reroute from the gang checkpoints along the way and there was gunfire", says one passenger, who didn't give his name and was clearly shaken by the experience. Haiti's already precarious situation has quickly deteriorated over the past weeks as gangs launched co-ordinated attacks on key facilities, forcing the resignation of the country's prime minister. In total, more than 360,000 people have been internally displaced. To

seek refuge from the chaos, many have come to Cap-Haitien, a coastal city in the north of Haiti. In truth, Cap-Haitien suffers from almost all of Haiti's deepest problems: grinding poverty, chaos, disorder and corruption. But crucially, not gang violence.

As such, it's fast becoming the country's main safe haven for people forced to leave their homes. Panel Pierre made the same treacherous bus journey six months ago. It's almost impossible to pull yourself from poverty in Haiti. Somehow, through years of hard graft creating an import business for construction materials, Panel managed it. But becoming a middle-class businessman also made him a target for the gangs. They destroyed his business, ransacked his house and tried to kidnap him. In doing so, they plunged him and his family back into poverty. The 53-

year-old shows us the tiny breezeblock shack he shares with his wife, his two youngest children and his mother-in-law. It is a far cry from the seven-room home he built in Port-au-Prince. "This is just 2% of the life I used to live," he laments. "In fact, I'm not living, I'm just existing." He pulls up a photograph of a younger, healthier-looking version of himself from a few years ago on his phone. The stress has affected his health, he says, and his children haven't been able to enrol in school in their new city. After the gangs took so much from him, Panel is an advocate for an extreme solution to the country's security problem. "We need a long-term intervention. Not just one or two thousand police", he says, referring the planned deployment of a 1,000-strong Kenyan-led security force in Haiti. Rather, he thinks the solution will

involve tens of thousands of personnel over a period of years. He heralded the hard-line anti-gang strategy of El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele, as a blueprint for Haiti. Still, even if Panel got his wish, the task to restabilise Haiti is daunting. One of Haiti's most powerful gangs, Unite Village de Dieu, has released a slickly produced but terrifying video, currently circulating online. It shows a well-armed militia, dressed in black combat gear, prepared to take on the Haitian state and any international force which might be deployed here. Little wonder the number of internally displaced people is rising. While Haiti's security situation is that of a failed state, so are its politics. Youri Latortue was the head of the Senate and is currently under US sanctions for alleged links to drug trafficking and armed criminal gangs. — Aljazeera

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Illegal migration versus poor governance

THE Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has black-listed and banned 87 officers from being posted in the immigration and anti-human trafficking cells across Pakistan. After examining the inquiry reports of the Libya and Greece boat swamps last year which involved the deaths of scores of illegal Pakistani migrants, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi banned the FIA officers and lower staff involved in professional negligence or corruption relating to human trafficking from deputing on sensitive appointments in the future. Naqvi maintained that the real culprits behind the boat accidents must be dealt with iron hands, as perpetrators of human trafficking are jailed for their wrongdoings.

There have been multiple incidents of boat swamps in the Arcidict and Medditearanin seas in recent years involving scores of deaths of illegal Pakistani migrants who departed Pakistan for the Middle East and later faced unfortunate death during their attempts to illegally enter Europe through dangerous sea routes. There was not a single incident of boat wreckage involving no illegal Pakistani migrants on board wherein the volume of the illegal migration is so grave that more than 300 Pakistani nationals were killed in a single incident of ship swamp off the coast of Greece in April last year. Meanwhile, dozens of Pakistanis were killed in ship wreckage off the coast of Libya later last year.

Unfortunately, the number of people who flee the country due to fear of poverty, religious prosecution, destruction of war, terrorism, or other societal issues is nominal wherein a majority of the young Pakistanis from certain areas including Gujrat, Gujranwala, Azad Kashmir, and Sialkot intentionally seek illegal migration or managed voluntarily human smuggling with the help of recruiting agents or human smugglers with the price of \$8000 per head. The corrupt government officials particularly FIA immigration and anti-Human Trafficking cells play an important role in the accomplishment of this nefarious anti-state evil agenda instead of upholding their official responsibility. After the Greece boat incident, then Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered a high-level inquiry which revealed the involvement or negligence of 87 FIA officials in that incident who have now been black-listed and banned from deputing on sensitive duties.

Such devastating events highlight the desperate circumstances that drive people to risk their lives in search of hope and opportunity. Hundreds of Pakistanis have lost their lives and bereaved families are seeking justice and are unaware of the culprits who are responsible for the untimely death of their loved ones, whether the recruiting agents/ human smugglers, institutions like the FIA, the individuals who used illegal means to realize their rightful dreams or the system which does not provide a respectful living to its citizens and prompt them to use illegal means to meet their social needs and monetary goals in their lives. The volume of illegal migration is so gigantic that the Italian Coast Guard rescued 47 boats carrying around 1600 migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea in just two days.

Unfortunately, Pakistani leaders could not provide their public with the basics of life in their country whereas the monthslong political instability and economic frailty have turned the country into an unlivable place for the middle-class and low-income segments of the society. The youths are utterly disappointed about the system and see no future in the country, thus every other household intends to migrate from the country to live a dignified life no matter how it happens legally or illegally. Awfully, Pakistani leaders not only failed to bring any social or economic change in the country but also failed to strengthen the national institutions and clump down hard on human traffickers to halt illegal migration from the country. It is time that our leaders redefine their priorities and focus on the national economy, improve people's lives, and restore public trust in the country. So, our youth have sufficient opportunities to build their future in the country.

US diplomacy and Niger's Junta

NIGER'S ruling military junta has revoked with immediate effect a military accord that allows basing military personnel and civilian staff from the US Department of Defense on its soil. According to the Spokesman for Nigar military, the recently visited American delegation did not follow diplomatic protocol, and Niger was not informed about the composition of the delegation, the date of its arrival, or the agenda. The government of Niger forcefully denounces the condescending attitude accompanied by the threat of retaliation from the head of the American delegation toward the Nigerien government and people.

The ego and esteem of the Nigerian nation are undoubtedly adorable and surprising for the rest of the third world. Historically, American diplomats and Military generals are notorious for pressurizing foreign leaders to exercise the so-called carrot and stick policy to get their interests fulfilled by other nations. American also assert their influence including economic and military aid, and especially exploit the political weakness of the unelected military rulers in their interest. Interestingly, the Nigerian military generals did not give in to US intimidation and retaliated forcefully by severing diplomatic ties and halting military cooperation with the United States. This resolute and timely response of Nigerian leaders reminds us about the wicked policy of Pakistani leaders who uncontestedly subdued before a threat of Richard Holbrooke and pushed their nation into a foreign war. Today's young Pakistani officers and brave soldiers are laying their lives to fighting terrorism. In contrast, there is no terrorism in America and Afghanistan, both countries are currently fueling this monster on our soil.

There are about 1,100 US troops in Niger as of last year, where the US military operates out of two bases including a drone base known as Air Base 201. The ongoing power competition between major nations is in full swing across the globe, which significantly changed the geopolitical landscapes in Western Africa. Military generals threw out several pro-West political governments in Africa and kicked out Western Armies camped there in the garb of the fight against militancy. Whilst, Russian companies and Wagner Group are spreading their claws in the continent full with gold and other precious deposits. American diplomats used sticks to harass African generals, in turn Niger Military leaders not only smashed their sticks but vomited their carrots too. As, Americans' first attempt backfired, hopefully, Biden aides will come again in new guise to deal with the Niger junta in the future.

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Schrödinger's genocide

Adnan Mahmutovi

BOSNIANS have experience with genocide. Not just the signs of it coming. Not just the fact of it happening. But also this strange phenomenon we call "Schrödinger's genocide": the simultaneous glorification and denial of genocide. There is a cruel dance between the systematic relativisation of the legal qualification of genocide and the continuous pursuit of genocidal politics and its results.

Despite the verdicts issued by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), we have not healed. The ethnically cleansed Republika Srpska still stands as the triumph of the Serb genocidal project. Bosnian history has demonstrated the futility of the "never again" mantra and Gaza is now confirming it. The genocide of my people was accompanied by the same rhetoric that Israeli officials now espouse: a genocidal army is the only thing standing between Europe and "Muslim barbarians", they claim.

I have often lamented how the Jews, who struggled for years after World War II to globalise the knowledge about the Holocaust, started facing serious Holocaust denial as the number of living survivors started to dwindle. Swedish survivors Hédi Fried (98) and Emerich Roth (97) died recently - a major loss for the Jewish community and those working to uphold the "never again" vow. By contrast, Bosnians are experiencing genocide denial while most of us, survivors, are still alive. Genocide scholar Gregory Stanton argued there are 10 stages of genocide, the last one being denial, but we are effectively experiencing the 11th phase: glorification and triumphalism.

There are people who not only invest resources into historical revisionism of the genocide they committed in the 1990s, but are de facto threatening to repeat it. The Bosnian "final solution" was not properly finalised, they often say. In my home city, Banja Luka, the administrative capital of Republika Srpska, you can buy T-shirts with the faces of war criminals

Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, Biljana Plavšić, and Slobodan Milošević. And Russian President Vladimir Putin, too. In the case of

the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, which the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has already characterised as a plausible genocide, we see denial among Israeli politicians and propagandists while it is still going on. There is even more denial in Western countries with histories of horrific genocides, especially Germany.

Western governments and media are engaged in a systematic cover-up of Israeli war crimes and bullying of those who try to expose them. Laws are proposed on short notice that aim to criminalise free speech and criticism of Israel. At the same time, the glorification of this genocide is broadcast in real time on social media. Accounts with thousands of followers post footage of Israeli soldiers committing war crimes. People want credit even for discrediting content. The Palestinians have been dehumanised to such an extent that their executioners are deeply convinced that their violent acts are not just morally justified but also noble, and they must take pride in their "good work".

The Serb authorities did much to hide the concentration camps from foreign journalists. They tried to cover up massacres, moving mass graves multiple times. By contrast, the hubris of Israeli soldiers drives them to produce countless images and videos of their work: endearing messages to loved ones from sites of destruction, the mocking of everything Palestinian, proud repetitions of the genocidal discourse. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard was right: We postmodern humans want to broadcast ourselves to the world whatever we do. I am not surprised that the Israeli army is broadcasting its war crimes as I was not surprised that Hamas had cameras on October 7.

We have seen attempts to whitewash Hamas's crimes, but we have also seen propaganda campaigns aimed at making them look even more horrible as a way of justifying the crimes of the Israeli army.

Meanwhile, Palestinians have felt compelled to report in detail the atrocities they face. It is perverse that people suffering so much are forced to record and broadcast

unimaginable slaughter to be believed, to be pitied enough so their cry for help is heard. We think we live in a different time, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has shown the world that the old rules still apply. Though Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari is correct that since World War II fewer people have died in wars, Israel keeps confirming the fact that nations are built through violence.

In Gaza, the old world order came back with a vengeance. Western powers are doing the exact opposite of acting in the spirit of the civilisation they have bragged about building. They have armed the aggressor and aided his indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, their starvation, and culturicide. They encouraged the media to dehumanise the victims and cover up the crimes. And finally, despite the explicit ruling by the ICJ, they cut aid. Let us note here that even the Israeli judge in the ICJ hearing on Gaza voted in favour of the provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians. As a Holocaust survivor, of course, he did at least that.

Despite the staggering effort by Western media to suppress information, there has been a significant shift in public opinion in the West. This means that the timing is bad for Israel. Netanyahu and his predecessors should have finished their genocidal project decades ago. Back then, there were fewer avenues for the truth to surface. Places were ethnically cleansed and mass graves were buried under parking lots. As the Israeli interviewees in a 2022 documentary about a massacre in the Palestinian village of Tantura made clear, they got away with it because no one was watching.

But people across the whole world are watching now and there is no excuse not to act to stop it. Once a genocide happens, history shows, there is no going back. Six million Jews and millions of their unborn descendants are missing in Germany and other nations. Many are missing from countries across Asia and Africa. They will never return.

Germans may have apologised, built memorial centres, financed historical studies, and instituted

prizes for science and literature, but the fact remains. The state of Israel is a continuous reminder that the Jews will never get back what they lost. The laws of nation-building are like entropy. It is a one-way road. We Bosnians know this too well. Despite all the convictions of war criminals, the authorities of Republika Srpska still enjoy the gift they were given: half of Bosnia, nice and clean. Threats of secession and annexation to Serbia continue. The dream of Greater Serbia is on the horizon. Greater Serbia in the European Union. Maybe even in NATO.

No peace process will ever retrieve the territories and recreate Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multiethnic state with equal rights for all citizens. Bosnia remains an ethnostate where three ethnicities rule and others, such as Jews and the Roma, do not have equal political rights. We see Israelis dream big of Greater Israel. If the world - whatever that means - allows Israel to take Gaza, it will never go back to the Palestinians even if the ICJ convicts all war criminals. There might be symbolic justice for some, but in practice, it will be an irreversible loss, endlessly debated in history books.

Netanyahu knows, as do all the others in his government, that even if they are sentenced as war criminals, the posterity will absorb that. Films will be made about them as complex human beings with good and bad sides. Many will glorify and whitewash them. The Bibi T-shirt industry will do well. Some Israelis are already thinking of Gaza in terms of real estate. The future intrudes on the present. We are watching Schrödinger's genocide live, analysing what is happening as if it is already history, as if we are already in the future, observing it from a distance. It is almost like a quantum (entangled) genocide.

I understand some Israelis who are against the war but are in denial about the genocide just as I understand some Serbs who cannot imagine atrocities have been done in their name. And yet, a new zeitgeist is emerging and the interest in international law is rising. Times are changing, but where are we going? And, more importantly, what will we be when we get there?

Aljazeera

Experts' take on democracy

Muhammad Asif Noor

SEOUL will host the third Summit for Democracy, themed "Democracy for Future Generations", from Monday to Wednesday where political leaders, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and civil society and youth organizations from across the world are expected to participate.

This Summit for Democracy which was launched by Biden in 2021 is considered a strategic maneuver within a larger geopolitical game being played out in the Asia-Pacific region where the US' primary focus has been to expand its influence and engage with China on the sub-regional level. The summit is being held to consolidate the historical premise that major powers will continue to export democracy to less-powerful nations, often under the banner of freedom and human rights protection, in order to exert their influence on the latter.

In contrast, China advocates that developing countries have the right to choose a development path and follow a political system that best suit their national interests. "Whole-process people's democracy" is a form of democracy which, despite being different from Western-style democracy, suits China's national conditions. And even in the existing world order, a country has the right to have a governance structure that is good for its people and conducive to its socioeconomic development. The Summit for Democracy, while apparently aimed at strengthening democratic norms across the world, in reality serves as a platform for the United States to expand its influence, and rally its allies against perceived rivals. The summit therefore is not an advocacy for democracy but a strategic tool in the broader geopolitical contestation which allows the US to maintain its global hegemony. The global narrative of democracy has been weaponized by the US and its Western allies to further their geopolitical interests instead of fostering genuine democracy around the world and improving the world order in which at present chaos reigns supreme.

China's governance model is different from that of the West's in that it approaches democracy holistically and, hence, is called whole-process people's democracy. This governance model is marked by extensive public participation in all facets of governance, and therein lies its difference with the Western model, which lays emphasis on electoral democracy. Whole-process people's democracy reflects China's commitment to socialism with Chinese characteristics and challenges the universality claim of Western-style democracy. Whole-process people's democracy embodies China's endeavor to chart its unique development path, different from the prescriptive norms of Western liberalism.

China's governance model, predicated on whole-process people's democracy, emphasizes people's comprehensive engagement in governance, transcending mere electoral participation. It is an approach to governance that responds to the needs and aspirations of China's population, which comprises 56 ethnic groups, through mechanisms that ensure broad public participation in the decision-making process. The Chinese governance model challenges the notion that Western-style democracy is the sole legitimate form of governance, and advocates for a pluralistic understanding of democracy that respects the sovereignty and different development paths of different countries.

The hosting of the Summit for Democracy by Seoul will have profound implications on regional dynamics, particularly in the context of the competition between the US and China. It places the Republic of Korea at the intersection of competing global powers, and gives it the opportunity to assert its democratic identity while navigating the complexities of its ties with both the US and China. This delicate diplomatic balancing act, which the ROK is expected to perform, shows how less-powerful countries are caught in the crossfire of major power competition while trying to safeguard their sovereignty and strategic autonomy in a rapidly changing global landscape. Seoul's engagement with NATO and the likelihood of its joining QUAD (a diplomatic, strategic partnership among the US, India, Japan and Australia), which Chinese people view as a clique formed to contain China.

The Summit for Democracy has raised Beijing's concerns also because the Taiwan island has been "strengthening cooperation" with the US under this framework. By ignoring the fact that the Taiwan island cannot be invited to attend any regional or international meeting as a separate entity, as it is an integral part of China, the US and the ROK have in fact interfered in China's internal affairs and violated the one-China principle. Therefore, the summit not only reflects the global competition among different governance models but also demonstrates the intricate and delicate ways in which the US and its allies trigger rivalries with other countries and heighten geopolitical tensions. With the world grappling with many serious challenges, including ongoing military conflicts that have claimed tens of thousands of lives and left many more homeless, the US and its allies are not helping matters by adopting such a confrontational approach toward countries like China.

This is the time to work together and resolve bilateral differences and regional and global disputes, and overcome common challenges. The Summit for Democracy glorifies the democratic ideals and governance models but the essence of true democracy is in respecting each other's points of view and working together for the betterment of the world. If the US and its allies are serious about restoring lasting peace and promoting development across the world, they should prioritize constructive engagement with other countries and build a future where diversity would be the norm and development the rule.

The Guardian

How will the Ukraine war end?

Simon Tisdall

es and escalation scenarios, the New York Times reported. All this was based on the calculation that a nuclear strike was more likely than at any time since the end of the cold war. Though the risk has diminished since 2022, it's still high.

The "Russia loses" scenario is especially hazardous in that Putin characterises Ukraine as a war against the US and Nato - and polling suggests that most Russians believe him. For him, defeat is unacceptable, since it would imply Russia's wider defeat by America and could result in his overthrow. If cornered, this cowardly skunk would blame the west and take everyone down with him. The prospect of Ukraine losing the war is similarly alarming, for different reasons. The human consequences would be terrifying, with millions more refugees fleeing westwards. If Bucha

and Mariupol are any guide, atrocities, war crimes and abductions would proliferate. A victorious Putin might try to seize the entire country - or impose a settlement and a puppet regime. In any event, Ukraine's independent existence as a free nation would cease. Its democracy and EU aspirations would be extinguished.

The impact on Europe would be dire. A Russian success would certainly be viewed in Poland and the three Baltic states as a prelude to new expansionist wars of aggression. Pro-western Moldova, on Ukraine's southern border, is a likely target. Huge economic disruption and an arms race would ensue as Nato and the EU scrambled to boost Europe's defences. Far-right and pro-Russia populist parties would be emboldened.

Unless the western democracies can unite

around the aim of ensuring a comprehensive Russian defeat, regardless of the inherent risks, negotiations - though not as framed by Pope Francis - appear the only way through. Yet, typically, Turkey's latest proposal for a two-way peace summit has been rejected by Kyiv. Other would-be mediators have got nowhere. And Ukraine's 10-point plan is scorned by Moscow. No peace process, no peace. There is a middle way, say the American foreign policy gurus Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan. Ukraine should negotiate a ceasefire with Russia, they argue. "Kyiv would not give up on restoring territorial integrity or holding Russia economically and legally accountable for its aggression, but it would acknowledge its near-term priorities need to shift from attempting to liberate more territory to defending and repairing the more than

80% of the country that is still under its control." A western-backed ceasefire might stop the death and destruction and create breathing space for diplomacy without sacrificing Ukraine's broader objectives. The trouble is, Putin, who thinks he's winning, must agree. And one or both sides could simply use a pause to rearm and regroup, ready to go at it again if and when talks break down.

A ceasefire is tempting but, at best, would be a temporary stop-gap. And as Macron said, in a rebuke to the pope, peace in Ukraine cannot mean "capitulation". The only sure way to permanently end this war on just terms is to remove from power, by whatever legitimate means available, the messianic mass murderer who started it: Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. There will be no peace until the tyrant falls.

Is the US on the brink of another civil war?

Bruce Hoffman & Jacob Ware

THREE months into 2024, it seems dire predictions of political violence are now commonly issued both by the country's extreme fringes as well as from the mainstream. Former President Donald Trump has been perhaps the most vociferous prognosticator, warning that there would be "bedlam in the country" should the criminal charges against him lead to a 2024 election loss. Nowadays, even seemingly mundane political procedures can also result in promises of violence.

When the US Supreme Court sided with the Biden administration in January, allowing federal border agents to remove concertina wire put in place by the state of Texas, some in elected office said it was a sign of civil war. In its threat assessment for 2024, the Department of Homeland Security forecast that, among other threats, the 2024 election cycle would be a "key event for possible violence..."

In her 2022 book, "How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them," renowned political scientist Barbara F. Walter argues that "we are closer to civil war than any of us would like to believe" because of a toxic mix of political extremism and polarization, social and cultural tribalism, the popular embrace of conspiracy theories, proliferation of guns and well-armed militias and the erosion of faith in government and the liberal, Western democratic state. Among the key factors she cites is accelerationism - which Walter describes as "the apocalyptic belief that modern society is irredeemable and that its end must be hastened, so that a new order can be brought into being."

Accelerationism is embraced by a spectrum of white supremacists, white nationalists, racists, anti-semites, xenophobes and anti-government militants as a clarion call to revolution. They fervently believe that the modern Western, liberal state is so corrupt and inept that it is beyond redemption and must be destroyed in order to create a new society and way of governance.

With the West supposedly on the precipice of collapse, accelerationism's adherents maintain that violent insurrection is required to push democracy over the edge and into oblivion. Only by hastening its destruction can a White-dominated society and new order emerge, the thinking goes. Fomenting divisiveness and polarization through violent attacks on racial minorities, Jews, liberals, foreign interlopers and power elites, and thus produc-

ing a cataclysmic collapse of the existing order and provoking a second civil war, accordingly, is accelerationism's stock-in-trade.

But this terrorist strategy is in fact part of a long tradition of extreme, destabilizing far-right violence. To understand why, and to put those events in broader context, one has to view January 6, 2021, as another milestone in a trajectory that commenced in the late 1970s and gathered momentum throughout the 1980s. Its evolution slowed following the nationwide law enforcement crackdown after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, but was infused with new purpose after Barack Obama was elected president in 2008 and the Great Recession stunned the country that same year. And, it was subsequently weaponized in the 2010s by social media and further empowered by the febrile rhetoric and polarization of politics that continued to divide America.

Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, two former National Security Council staffers with deep knowledge of sectarian conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, have similarly described a situation where the United States could easily tip into civil war. The country, they write, "now appears to be in a state of 'unstable equilibrium' - a term originating in physics to describe a body whose slight displacement will cause other forces to move it even further away from its original position," heightening the risk that violent action could plunge the United States into the chaos and disorder that accelerationists so desperately want. The most dismal assessment, though, is that of Canadian journalist Stephen Marche who, in his 2022 book, The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future, contends that a new American civil war is inevitable. "The United States is coming to an end. The question is how." To his mind, "The United States is descending into the kind of sectarian conflict usually found in poor countries with histories of violence, not the world's most enduring democracy and largest economy."

As febrile and alarmist as such assertions may be, there is more than a grain of truth behind these fears. A 2021 survey conducted by the University of Maryland's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement and the Washington Post had found that almost a quarter of Democrats and 40% of Republicans believe the use of vio-

lence against the government is "somewhat justified." This was the highest percentage of respondents to this question dating back more than two decades. These concerns have hardly diminished, according to a new survey recently conducted by both the Post and the same University of Maryland center in 2024. "Republicans are more sympathetic to those who stormed the US Capitol and more likely to absolve Donald Trump of responsibility for the attack," the Washington Post reported, "than they were in 2021."

But neither polls nor predictions are prophecy. While we think the likelihood of a civil war is relatively low - in large part because America's political divides no longer fall into clear-cut geographic categories like North versus South, nor do they center around one contentious issue like slavery - the country now faces a different kind of threat. Defying simple red state-blue state differences or urban versus rural divides, a different form of violence, manifesting more as sustained and nationwide terrorism than organized separatism, is potentially more likely. Remember that the United States leads the world - by far - in the number of firearms in private hands. Although the United States comprises only 4% of the world's population, it accounts for roughly 40% of the globe's firearms, according to Small Arms Survey, an independent research project based in Switzerland. There are an estimated 393 million privately held firearms in the United States - more than one gun per person. In fact, there are more civilian-held guns in the United States than the other top 25 countries in the world combined. Indeed, more guns were purchased in the United States in 2020 - nearly 23 million - than any other year on record. This proliferation of privately-held weapons in the United States, Simon and Stevenson observe, "make the leadership resistance advocated by the late-twentieth-century militia theoreticians and now epitomized by the far right, anti-authoritarian Boogaloo Bois - they of the Hawaiian shirts - all the more practicable."

Indeed, among the most fervent defenders of Second Amendment rights are people who express their desire for a new civil war. Gun rights also electrified the militia movement in the early 1990s and played a major role in motivating Timothy McVeigh to carry out the

1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil until September 11, 2001. If the United States avoids an actual civil war, it is not difficult to imagine a variety of dark scenarios spanning a range of politically violent potentialities that would destabilize the country, further entrench existing divisions and severely challenge our government's ability to protect its citizens. In his 2023 book on the erosion of democratic norms in America, then-Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haass raised the possibility of the US facing a version of Northern Ireland's longstanding "Troubles". "If there is a model for what we should fear," Haass warns, "it comes from Northern Ireland and the Troubles, the three-decade struggle starting in the late 1960s that involved multiple paramilitary groups, police, and soldiers and resulted in some 3,600 deaths and a sharp reduction in local economic output." Leading American white supremacists, who have long been among the foremost advocates of civil war and sedition, have cited the Northern Irish exemplar and the province's preeminent terrorist organization, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), as worthy of emulation. "Soon, our own version of the 'Troubles' will be widespread," Robert Miles, one of the early leaders of America's violent far-right underground, wrote under his Norse code name "Fafnir" on a 1980s online forum. "The patterns of operations of the IRA will be seen across this land. [...] Soon, America becomes Ireland recreated."

Despite the ultimately successful certification of the 2020 presidential election; the arrests of over 1,000 rioters who participated in the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol; the guilty pleas or convictions of at least half of those cases; and the mostly peaceful events surrounding the 2022 midterm elections, the threat of far-right terrorism in America continues. Given the long historical trajectory that culminated in the events of January 6, the continued proliferation and pervasiveness of conspiracy theories and the growing racism, antisemitism and xenophobia that has entered the mainstream of political and social discourse in the United States, along with readily accessible weapons, the potential for new acts of domestic, politically-motivated violence - including mass shootings, attacks on critical infrastructure, bombings and other attacks - cannot be dismissed or ignored.

Trump gives Biden one big lift

IN the Oscar-winning movie "Poor Things," Rami Youssef plays a student who hungers for the merest sign of approval from his professor. His character, Max McCandles, feels a surge of hope when teacher and surgeon Dr. Godwin Baxter brings up the student's recent paper.

"You liked it, sir?" The doctor, a mashup of Dr. Frankenstein and his monster played hilariously by Willem Dafoe, fires back, "It showed signs of a conventional mind straining hard to almost touch mediocrity."

McCandles mutters, "Thank you." It is the first of many humiliations at the hands of Baxter, who's fond of his nickname, "God." The two candidates who clinched their parties' nomination for president last week are also straining for approval, and barely touching mediocre levels of it. Fifty-nine percent of Americans disapprove of President Joe Biden's performance, according to CNN's Poll of Polls, with recent surveys showing that the president got no bump from his energetic State of the Union address. Former President Donald Trump's favorability ratings are only slightly better.

If the polls are correct, Biden may need everything to go right for him to beat Trump in November, but with less than eight months left to go, almost everything is going wrong. Gas prices are rising and progress in stamping out high inflation more generally seems to have stalled, possibly jeopardizing interest rate cuts that could fuel the economy. A deal to free hostages in Gaza and pause the fighting between Israel and Hamas has so far failed to materialize, intensifying criticism of Biden's backing of Israel among some voters on the left.

The bipartisan legislation to control the flow of migrants across the southern border was blown up by opposition from Trump. And the former president is winning delay after delay in the four criminal trials he faces. One thing that is going right for Biden is Trump himself. The former president's incendiary rhetoric continued at an Ohio rally Saturday as he warned of a "bloodbath for the country" if he is defeated by Biden.

The extreme tone is helping Biden build a fundraising advantage over Trump. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat wrote, "Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Viktor Orban, Adolf Hitler, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong-un, Saddam Hussein: What do they have in common? All of these authoritarians have reportedly drawn praise from former US president - and now GOP presidential nominee - Donald Trump, who has promised Americans that he, too, will be a dictator 'on Day One' of his time in office..."

"Wherever they fall on the political spectrum, autocrats are united in their disregard for human rights and human dignity and their attempt to persuade people that it is in their interests to support governments that take their rights away. This seems to be Trump's project as well. The former president may be telling us that he will only be a dictator for one day, but no authoritarian has ever relinquished power once he gains it and the strongmen he exalts have all been in power for many years," Ben-Ghiat wrote. "I want to vote for Donald Trump in November, wrote Marc A. Thiessen in the Washington Post. "The question is: Will he let me? ... After meeting with Trump at Mar-a-Lago on Friday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that Trump assured him he 'will not give a penny' to help Ukraine defend itself from Russian aggression. If true, that's not the Trump I want to vote for."

"I can't do that if I believe that Trump's second term won't be a continuation of the best elements of his first, but a radical departure focused on revenge and retreat from the world." Voters give Trump higher marks on handling the economy than they do Biden. One reason for that may be the reality that while the inflation rate is going down (from roughly 9% a year in 2022 to a little more than 3% now), prices remain at elevated levels.

Dana M. Peterson and Erik Lundh of the Conference Board crunched the numbers to come up with these eyebrow-raising stats: "Used car prices are 26% higher, food prices are 34% higher and rent prices are 22% higher than in January 2020, according to our calculations using PCE data," they wrote. "While these are some of the more extreme

Richard Galant

examples of recent price increases, the average basket of goods and services that most Americans buy in any given month is 17% more expensive than four years ago. Prior to the pandemic, it took more than 10 years for general price levels to rise that much, according to Conference Board calculations."

The US Constitution requires candidates to be at least 35 years old to run for the presidency, but there's no maximum age. With the two oldest candidates in American history running in 2024, many are asking if there should be a limit. In a new CNN Opinion feature, Matter of Debate, moderated by Hilary Krieger, two experts debated the issue. Gary Schmidt, a former White House official and senior fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, argued, "The key point is that being an elected official, be it a member of Congress or the president, carries with it great responsibilities and, as such, we want those elected officials as healthy in mind and body as possible. And we know that generally, as we get older, our mental and physical capacities diminish."

The presidency is "a 24/7 job and has great stress. And, as someone who just turned 72, I can say that I and most of my friends my age would not be up to the job." Bradley Schurman, an expert on aging who's 46, responded, "Removing someone's ability to serve, simply because of an arbitrary measure like their birthdate is problematic." People are free to factor in concerns about age when they vote. "Any office holder should be in good physical and mental health. ... Just like office holders have released their tax returns (up until former President Donald Trump), I would like to see more candidates release their physical and mental health assessments," Schurman observed. An assessment of a sort came last month when Special Counsel Robert Hur reported that while he had decided not to charge Biden with any crimes related to his handling of classified documents, he called the president "an elderly man with a poor memory."

As Patrick T. Brown noted, a House hearing Tuesday featuring Hur "coincided with the release of the transcript of Biden's interview, highlighting a man who twice couldn't recall the word for fax machine, needed help remembering what years he served as vice president, told rambling stories and had 'no idea' how his aides stored or handled sensitive documents." But coming after Biden's forceful State of the Union, Brown added, Republicans "will need to find ways of pointing out Biden's advanced years that underscore a deeper critique of his competency." The inflationary impact of Biden's desire to "spend \$2.2 trillion on social programs" and "his apparent willingness to ignore top military advisers during the tumultuous Afghanistan withdrawal, should be front and center of any campaign ad."

The GOP can paint a picture of a president who sought to follow in the footsteps of Franklin D. Roosevelt but misread the moment, and who let events across the world overtake his ability to lead America."

A Georgia judge ruled in favor of Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, allowing her to continue overseeing the prosecution of Donald Trump and others over the 2020 election, as long as Willis' former romantic partner, Nathan Wade resigned as a special prosecutor on her staff. Wade did so soon after the ruling on Friday. Norman Eisen, E. Danya Perry and Joshua Kolb praised Judge Scott McAffee for a "Solomonic decision" in the case. "Now that this sideshow has begun to pass with Wade's resignation, the most important next step is for the trial to be scheduled quickly."

The case needn't be delayed by Wade leaving the team - the very large group of assistant district attorneys and the other prosecutors who have long handled this case can continue their work." "The Fulton County prosecution is critical to adjudicate the charges pertaining to the 2020 election - allegations that strike at the heart of our democracy and abuse of power."

Therefore, the trial must begin as soon as possible so voters know Trump's role before they once again cast votes in a presidential election in which he's on the ballot." Biden took some heat from progressives for calling

an undocumented alien accused of murder in Georgia an "illegal." Jose Antonio Vargas, who declared in 2011 that he was undocumented, wrote, "It's not a big thing that a sitting US president referred to a group of people as 'illegal.' Obsessing over this single word loses sight of the more sobering reality that, in action and in copious, insidious words, Trump will be worse on immigration than Biden if reelected."

"Come election season, we are always on the menu, but we never get to order. We are pawns in a political game, a boogeyman rolled out regularly by both sides to scare up votes." Journalist Gary Pierre-Pierre was born in Haiti and, with his family, became part of the 1.2 million-member Haitian diaspora in the US. As editor and publisher of The Haitian Times, he is watching the chaos in his home country with great concern. "Public order has disintegrated and there is little to no police protection," he wrote for CNN Opinion.

"A look at TikTok's feeds strongly suggests it already is far from a neutral player, aggravating divisions in the US and apparently trying to conceal posts on topics about which the Chinese government prefers silence. (A practice TikTok has denied)." "Congress is right in wanting to curtail China's ability to use TikTok to scoop up Americans' private information and, more importantly, to influence views and opinions in a country that it views as its primary geopolitical rival," Ghitis observed.

"In one fell swoop, it seemed the conspiracy theorists had been silenced. Kate appeared healthy and glowing." "Reassurance lasted only a few hours, however, as picture editors at photo agencies including AP and Reuters spotted something amiss. Didn't Charlotte's sleeve look rather odd? Was something wrong with the pattern on Louis' sweater? Perhaps the biggest clue: How on earth had William managed to capture all three children smiling at the same time?" "More than 12 hours later, Kate finally responded: 'Like many amateur photographers, I do occasionally experiment with editing,' she said on social media. 'I wanted to express my apologies for any confusion the family photograph we shared yesterday caused.'"

"The problem for royals: when confusion combines with conspiracy, the narrative is hard to control." Prince concluded. The Oscars ended early. That earth-shattering departure from tradition (including the hour earlier start for the show) wasn't enough of a surprise to impress Jeff Yang, who yearned for something akin to earlier show-stopping moments: like "Jack Palance doing one-armed pushups after winning the best supporting actor trophy in 1992" or "Presenter Warren Beatty taking the wrong envelope before he and Faye Dunaway announced the wrong winner for best picture in 2017, leading the producers of 'La La Land' to momentarily think they'd won over 'Moonlight.'" "This year's show felt calculated to be as locked-down, conventional and vaguely throwback as possible," Yang noted.

"All of this made the handful of unscripted, human moments stand out. Like Cord Jefferson pleading with Hollywood to make more small, creative movies instead of a small number of blockbusters in his best adapted screenplay acceptance speech for 'American Fiction.' The wild glee of the 'Godzilla Minus One' crew upon winning their visual effects award - and the reveal upon taking the stage that each of them was carrying a miniature golden Godzilla and wearing matching 'monster claw' shoes. Noah Berlatsky lamented that one of the Best Actress nominees, Lily Gladstone, could have been the first Native American to win an Oscar for acting if "Killers of the Flower Moon" had been imagined differently."

"Gladstone expresses love, grief and betrayal powerfully, but she's sidelined for long stretches in a film that was clearly designed as a vehicle for (Leonardo) DiCaprio and costar Robert DeNiro (who was nominated for best supporting actor)."

"In contrast, Yorgos Lanthimos's 'Poor Things' is a spectacular showpiece for Emma Stone's character Bella. She's onscreen practically every moment in a role that has her grow from infant-like innocent to horny adolescent to self-actualized woman in a tour de force performance." Stone took home the best actress Oscar.

Going further and farther to move China-US relations forward and up

Erik Nilsson

IT was an honor. But in that moment, it was distressing. And it ended with a renewed sense of mission - and hope. Former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger told me during the video interview I was hosting for China Daily's Edgar Snow Newsroom in early 2022: "It is important for humanity that China and the US have the greatest capacity to undermine order in the world. We will have many disagreements but work together on the basic principle that we will work for peace and order. And in the conduct of our relations with each other, we will work out the solutions on the basis of mutual respect and equality."

What he said later jolted my soul yet also revitalized my sense of purpose. "The basic question between China and the United States seems to me to be this: Through the evolution of our societies, the two nations in the world have the capacity, economically, and by the magnitude of our efforts, to affect the whole world."

We also have the technological capacity to produce a maximum degree of good that has never been imagined before but also a degree of devastation that has never been imagined before," he said. "So, we have a special obligation to do something for which there is no precedent in history, which is the two nations of this magnitude, which usually would wind up in military conflict. Historically, it has led to military conflict. "But our leaders on both sides, in both China and in the United States, have to be wise enough to understand that a military conflict between our two nations would bring about a degree of dislocation of the world, which would push what we have considered civilization to go back to an earlier beginning," Kissinger said.

The precise phrasing of that last sentence still makes me shudder. Of course, I'd had this thought. And I knew he'd long had it, too. For years, this very concern has animated much of my work, career and hopes to tell the real story of China in ways that resonate with international sensibilities. This apprehension is exactly why, Kissinger explained, he was talking with us that day and advocating for this message rather than resting at age 99.

He worked toward this goal until he passed away at age 100 in November last year. To actually hear these warnings fall from his lips, as a statesperson so luminary that he's a household name throughout much of the world and as the individual who played a

most crucial role in establishing China-US relations - to look into each other's eyes as he said these words made this existential warning real, and all the more chilling the destruction we could unleash with a miscalculation, misstep or mistake, perhaps created by a misunderstanding. In fact, we were doing this interview - Kissinger speaking by video call as I hosted the conversation with him and his friend, China's former ambassador to the US, Cui Tiankai - largely because of how relations were unfolding.

They were, indeed, at a low point. To me, helping the world better understand China's realities - and especially to better enable relations between my birth land and adoptive country - is not just a job but rather a life mission.

I was especially honored when Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned my mission at the ministry's news conference during the recent two sessions. This calling is in service of a vision, shared by many - but, unfortunately, not all - for a world in which we, hopefully, at least avoid devastating conflict and, at best, cooperate to maximize human flourishing. Or, plausibly, we optimize "co-evolution" - the term Kissinger had minted to describe his conception of a lower-case-i ideal for capital-R Realism in terms of China-US relations across time.

Cui said, directing his words particularly to Kissinger but, more generally to me, and ultimately to all Americans and the whole world: "As there, honestly, have been some issues between China and the US, and, more recently, there are very dangerous things coming up, I think we do have a common goal that we are working together to enhance and facilitate mutual understanding between our two countries. If there are problems, we are trying to help to solve these problems." Indeed, things were at an ebb then, as we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué, which Kissinger helped write with Chinese counterparts.

This is the foundational document that paved the way for the establishment of China-US relations years later. Days later, in 2022, I attended a ceremony where Kissinger and leading Chinese officials spoke by video call as well as in-person participants in Shanghai to commemorate the communiqué's signing in the exact room where it took place. Some of us then enjoyed the exact same lunch as the individual who played a

countries' leaders and officials did during Nixon's 1972 visit. Over this meal, I joined other selected Americans to speak with Chinese officials about how to improve mutual understanding and relations.

Also present in the main meeting hall that day was Tang Wensheng, a charismatic woman of electric charm, who'd interpreted for Mao Zedong and late premier Zhou Enlai during the visits by Kissinger, Nixon and the US table-tennis team. She also worked with celebrated American journalist Edgar Snow and late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, before joining China Daily's editorial board and later working in diplomatic positions, including in the US. I was reminded of her stories she'd shared in a video interview I hosted in 2022 again this year, when I was invited to meet the University of Virginia table-tennis team when they visited China. I was disappointed my schedule didn't permit me to attend the reception, given what their trip represents as a reflection of history but also as a symbolic prospect for our shared future. However, I worry recent progress will encounter more exacting trials as the US revs up for an election year, and both Democrats and Republicans consider making overgeneralized declarations against China to be low-hanging fruit.

I've noticed a tendency of Chinese friends to perhaps focus too much on US presidential elections. I hope they could more clearly realize most policies, including nearly all related to China, are actually devised, and passed or struck down, by our congresses on the national and state levels. To slightly oversimplify, it's the US legislature much more than the executive branch and its top leader - the US president, who does wield real power but perhaps even more so serves as a figurehead - who will draft and decide policies that advance or oppose such approaches as "decoupling", "de-risking", "containment" or even, in the worst scenario, military conflict. The potential TikTok ban perfectly reflects this actuality.

The US congress is elected by regular folks, by people like my relatives who I met during my last visit stateside. As such, China needs to not only better tell its story to US business elites, academics and politicians but also to ordinary voters. That includes salt-of-the-earth Americans like my aunts, uncles, cousins and in-laws, who farm corn, fix cars, hang dry-

wall, drive semis, supervise forges and teach kids. They talk about China around bonfires, water coolers and cafe tables. And they will ultimately elect the officeholders, who at least should, generally, reflect their wills, including in terms of China-US relations.

As Kissinger put it to me on that day in 2022: "I don't blame either side for the difficulties that appear. In my country, the United States, I argue for understanding and cooperation with the others who have other views. I suspect in China, too, there are people who I have met who have similar overall views," Kissinger said. "We have to see that the momentary disputes do not overwhelm us. I have not been happy that in recent years the momentary disputes might have taken precedence over the overall objective, and each side should look into itself to see what could be done."

These risks will inevitably intensify with this year's election campaigns. The questions then become exactly how and what transpires after. Kissinger continued: "I hope that we will find a way to conduct our conversations. Of course, there'll be some differences, but we should try to resolve them with the understanding that no two countries in history have ever had this opportunity and this capacity. "I think a contest between us and China will benefit nobody. There will be no winners ... This is a great opportunity and a great danger." Kissinger has passed away. But I hope his spirit of advocating for China-US relations lives on. May future generations learn from the wisdom of these past generations of diplomats like him, Cui and Tang.

Tang's words during our interview also particularly resonated with me and, I hope, a growing number of Americans. "History will have its ups and downs. But eventually, it always goes forward. We just have to work for the better because that is in the interest of us all," she said. "And the Chinese people want to be friends with other people in the world. They also have to know people who do this work, like yourself, how to explain China to others in a way that can touch their hearts and be truly understood."

Not only can we not turn our backs to each other, but I have seen during my 18 years in China that we as people can stand face to face and hand in hand, to see eye to eye and even heart to heart. I don't know what will happen. But I do know what could - and should. Most of all, I know what I will do - that is, in every sense, all I can do.

The China Daily

Pakistan Stock Exchange gains 74 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bullish trend on Monday, gaining 74.04 points, a positive change of 0.11 percent, closing at 64,890.51 points against 64,816.47 points the previous trading day.

A total of 211,758,341 shares valuing Rs.7.785 billion were traded during the day as compared to 259,373,019 shares valuing Rs.10.120 billion the last day.

Some 313 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 149 of them recorded gains and 160 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 4 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 16,605,737 shares at Rs.1.36 per share, Hascol Petrol with

16,267,000 shares with 8.28 per share and Telecard Limited with 14,676,033 shares at Rs9.00 per share.

Pakistan Hotels Developers Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.19.98 per share price, closing at Rs.499.98, whereas the runner-up was Pakistan Tobacco Company Limited with a Rs.11.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.992.00.

Ismail Industries Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.60.00 per share closing at Rs.1,050.00, followed by Sapphire Fibres Limited with Rs.35.83 decline to close at Rs.1,506.67.

Rupee gains 11 paise against dollar

Pakistani Rupee on Monday strengthened by 11 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.63 against

the previous day's closing of Rs278.74.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 278.7 and Rs 281.3, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 19 paise to close at Rs 303.51 against the last day's closing of Rs 303.32, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.86, whereas a decrease of 17 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs355.00 compared to the last closing of Rs355.17.

The Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal also decreased by 02 paise and 03 paise to closed at Rs

75.87 and Rs74.29.

Gold rates decline by Rs.600 to Rs.226,900 per tola

The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.600 and was sold at Rs.226,900 on Monday compared to its sale at Rs. 227,500 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.515 to Rs.194,430 from Rs195,045 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.178,319 from Rs. 178,791, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver decreased by Rs.20 to Rs.2,580 whereas that of ten gram silver declined by Rs.17.15 to 2,211.93. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$5 to \$2,170 from \$2,175, the Association reported.

Update on resumption of flights likely in May: Additional DG



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority held its 43rd E-Kachehri chaired by the Additional Director General CAA (AVM) Taimoor Iqbal. Director Airport Services, A/Director Security, Director Operations, Director Commercial & Estate, Director Engineering Services, Director Air Transport & Additional Director HR assisted Additional DGCAA during E-Kachehri.

The E-Kacheri commenced with a review of the previous session, which included nine follow-up complaints. Commenting on follow ups, Additional Director General (AdiDG) emphasized the importance

of passengers knowing their rights and filing claims for grievances like flight cancellations. The AdiDG also mentioned that airlines need to provide more information than just saying 'technical' for cancellations or delays leading to cancellations. The Director of Air Transport (AT) stated that a document is being prepared to ensure airlines are more thorough in such cases.

Regarding PIA flights to the UK, the AdiDG hoped for an update in May now that the inspections have concluded. Complaints against Serene Air and PIA were addressed, with assurance that the matter will be followed up with the airlines.

In response to a com-

plaint about FIA staffing at immigration counters, the AdiDG explained that the agency is responsible for assigning personnel to the immigration counters, especially during peak hours.

The issue has been raised multiple times and will be pursued further, he added. Replying to a question about drones, the AdiDG informed a document on drone policy is being prepared, covering various aspects, and will be available on the PCAA website once finalized.

The Chair, in response to a question regarding the investigation report on the PK 8303 crash, clarified that there are specific procedures and requirements that must be adhered to in order to

ensure accountability.

Also, the AdiDG, when addressing a complaint about the lack of proper signage at Quetta International Airport's parking lot, instructed to designate spaces for special persons and to install clear and visible markings to assist passengers and other visitors.

In a conversation with another complainant regarding the shortage of trolleys, the Director General mentioned that an adequate number of luggage trolleys have been recently provided at airports, but still requested the complainant's contact information, flight number, date, and time to investigate the specific incident.

AdiDG CAA, responding to an inquiry about commencing flights from Dera Ghazi Khan (D.G Khan) to Dubai, stated that currently no airline operates to D.G Khan due to airlines finding it economically non-viable, despite the airport being fully prepared for flight operations.

The AdiDG concluded the session by expressing gratitude to all participants for their time and suggestions, emphasizing that the purpose of these sessions is to address passenger complaints and improve their overall experience.

PHHSA welcomes PM's measures for agriculture, seed sectors

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Hi-tec Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) has hailed the multiple measures announced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to boost the ailing agriculture economy of the country and underdeveloped seed sector in his inaugural speech on the floor of National Assembly after assuming charge of his office on March 3.

Speaking at a joint press conference along with LCCI President Kashif Anwar here at LCCI on Monday, PHHSA Chairman Shahzad Ali Malik

said the pronouncements made by the premier underscored his government's deep commitment with the agriculture and seed sector.

"Agriculture is the main pillar of Pakistan's economy, and the seed sector is the backbone of the agriculture economy. We, therefore, strongly appreciate the premier's plans to import the world's best quality, high-yield seed to enhance the farm output, as well as his commitment to take action against seed mafia responsible for wheat hoarding, cotton ginners selling banola as seed, and others who violate rules, regulations and code of ethics."

LCCI President Kashif Anwar also appreciated the government's resolve the economic challenges through sectoral reforms and support. He said that increase in yield was dire need of the hour. He said that focus on agriculture would not only help end poverty from the country but also help to earn much needed foreign exchange.

The PHHSA welcomed the government initiative to set up a dedicated, autonomous body -- National Seed Development & Regulatory Authority (NSDRA) -- and the appointment of a professional like Dr Asif Ali Khan (Tamgha-e-Imtiaz), who has a successful record in research and management as its chairman.

Applauding the vision of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and its Green Pakistan Initiative for bringing barren land of Cholistan under cultivation, the chairman stressed the need for bringing the area under cultivation as well as increasing per acre crop output through the use of high-yielding quality seed.

Shahzad Ali Malik, who has pioneered hybrid seed technology in Pakistan with the support of top Chinese scientists, pointed out that transfer of hybrid technology, development of seed varieties through extensive local R&D had helped

boost the country's rice exports by 600 percent from just \$462 million to \$3 billion in 20 years. "We are optimistic to cross US \$5 billion by 2027 due to surplus production of rice," he added.

He also drew the attention of the authorities towards the fact that out of five major field crops cotton, wheat, rice, maize and sugarcane, only two crops -- rice and maize -- are producing surplus for exports due to adoption and localization of hybrid technology. "By replicating the hybrid rice success story, we can achieve import substitution of approximately \$10bn in cotton, wheat, edible oil, pulses etc. as well as have surplus production for export.

He however regretted that in spite of its enormous contributions towards agriculture, exports and poverty alleviation in many areas of Sindh and South Punjab through hybrid technology transfer, the PHHSA has been denied representation on NSDRA.

China's employment situation generally stable in Jan-Feb

BEIJING (APP): The surveyed urban unemployment rate on average in China stood at 5.3 percent in the first two months of 2024, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Monday.

China's employment situation was generally stable during the period, according to the NBS.

In January, the country's surveyed urban unemployment rate reached 5.2 percent.

In February, the rate

came in at 5.3 percent, 0.1 percentage points higher from January due to the impact of the Chinese New Year holiday, which is in line with the seasonal trajectory of the job market, NBS spokesperson Liu Aihua told a press conference.

China's surveyed urban unemployment rate decreased by 0.3 percentage points respectively in January and February compared with the same period in 2023, Liu added.

She emphasized the

improvement in the employment situation in big cities and the stability of the job market for rural migrant workers.

Last month, the surveyed urban unemployment rate for 31 major Chinese cities stood at 5.1 percent, down 0.6 percentage points year on year. The figure for rural migrant workers hit 4.8 percent, dropping 1.2 percentage points on a yearly basis, according to the NBS spokesperson.



RAWALPINDI: People busy purchasing fruits and vegetables on subsidized rates at Ramadan Bazaar.

KATI for prioritizing industrial zones

KARACHI (APP): President Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI), Johar Qandhari, Monday, felicitated newly elected Sindh cabinet and emphasized need of prioritizing industrial zones while making allocation of development budget.

The KATI President, in a statement issued here, expressed hope that incumbent cabinet will address challenges faced by the industrial sector and take decisive action for ensuring a safe and secure environment for both local and international investors and restore investor confidence.

Underlining KATI's history of collaborative efforts with the government, Qandhari reaffirmed the association's commitment to support development of industrial zones across the country.

He cited noticeable improvements in the infrastructure of the Korangi industrial area, attributing these advancements to the effective utilization of funds allocated to business organizations.

With Karachi serving as the economic linchpin of Pakistan, he expressed hope that the government will swiftly address issues of Karachi and steer the city towards a path of sustained development and prosperity.

Chinese shares close higher

BEIJING (APP): Chinese stocks closed higher on Monday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index up 0.99 percent to 3,084.93 points. The Shenzhen Component Index closed 1.46 percent higher at 9,752.83 points.

The combined turnover of stocks covered by the two indices totaled 1.14 trillion yuan (about 160.4 billion US dollars), up from 944.6 billion yuan on the previous trading day.

Most stocks rose during Monday's trading, with more than 4,500 stocks reporting gains. Shares in sectors such as the low-altitude economy, AI PC and carbon fiber led the gains, while shares of the coal, precious metals and steel sectors led the losses.

PHA to decide tax issue in consultation with FCCI

FAISALABAD (APP): Parks & Horticulture Authority (PHA) will decide the issue of publicity board tax in consultation with the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), said PHA DG Zameer Hussain.

Addressing the business representative from 8 bazaars and other important commercial centres of the city in a meeting at FCCI, he said the government intended to make PHA, FWMC and other utilities self-reliant.

He said the government had trimmed the grant for PHA from Rs 400 million to Rs 250 million. He said that PHA also earned Rs 240 million from outdoor publicity while on the other hand PHA had a workforce of 1200 individuals and it had to look after 354 parks in addition to greenbelts, Millat Road, Sheikhupura road, Canal Road, Bilal Road, Jail Road, Kutchery Road and Daewoo Road.

He said the PHA had also developed 19 Miyawaki forests to control urban pollution while FCCI President Dr Khurram Tariq had also promised to

develop a Miyawaki forest.

About the publicity board, he said that earlier 50 sqft boards were exempted from tax but now their size has been reduced to 30 sqft.

"PHA has also organized independence and winter festivals while soon after Ramadan spring festival would also be celebrated in a befitting manner", he said and added that all the activities need funds and the Punjab government decided to generate these funds from publicity boards.

He identified shop specific and publicity boards and said that the apprehensions and reservations of small shopkeepers would be discussed in the next BOD meeting of PHA regarding publicity board tax.

He said the PHA had already submitted the business plan proposing austerity measures to cut down expenditures and enhancing income to undertake new projects.

Earlier, Acting President FCCI Dr Sajjad Arshad said that he had represented these small shopkeeper's issues in an effective manner.

"However, there is a difference between the

approach of government departments and the business community", he said and added that the government departments and business community both are equally facing financial crunch.

He said the government should add burden on the small shopkeepers according to their bearing capacity so that the system could be run smoothly.

He said that the membership of Dubai chamber had increased 71 percent only due to the shifting of Pakistani businessmen to that country.

He said that major businessmen could easily absorb the major shops but it was difficult for the small shopkeepers who had limited financial resources.

FCCI Vice President Hajji Muhammad Aslam Bhalli explained that he participated in the PHA meeting to present the case of small shopkeepers without any invitation.

He thanked the Director General PHA for visiting FCCI to resolve the issue of publicity board tax. He was optimistic that we must sit together and resolve issues amicably.

Food exports grew by 54.05% in 08 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Food group exports from the country during the first 08 months of the current financial year grew by 54.05 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year.

During the period from July-February, 2023-24, different food commodities worth \$4,969 billion were exported as compared to the exports of 3.225 billion in the same period of the previous year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

The exports of rice grew by 85.83 per cent as over 5,932 million metric tons of rice valued at \$2.517 billion were exported as compared to the exports of 2.546 million tons worth \$1.354 billion in the same period of last year, it added.

During the period under review, the exports of fruits and vegetables grew by 13.89 per cent and 39.27 per cent respectively as 688,950 metric tons of fruits valued at \$246.463 million and 724.252 metric tons of vegetables worth \$277.064 million were exported.

The other commodities that witnessed positive growth in their respective exports included pulses 268.68 per cent as pulses valued at \$173,000, tobacco 32.09 per cent worth of \$60.581 million and the exports of spices grew by 21.10 per cent and recorded at \$78.107 million.

Meanwhile, the imports of food commodities into the country during the first 08 months of the current financial year decreased by 18.33 per cent as against

the imports of the corresponding period of last year. The imports of food commodities during the period under review came down from \$6.687 billion to \$5.461 billion.

On month on month basis, the food group imports grew by 5.12 per cent in February 2024 growth as food goods valued at \$739.819 million were imported as compared to the imports of 703.722 million of the same month of last year.

However, the exports of food goods during the month of February 2024 grew by 35.38 per cent as different food commodities worth \$702.469 million were exported as compared to the exports of \$518.871 million in the same month of the last year.

Asian stocks rise after strong China production data

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks gained on Monday after China posted stronger-than-expected industrial production data in an uneven recovery for the world's second-largest economy.

Investors also have their eyes on a Bank of Japan decision on Tuesday, with policymakers expected to finally ditch the bank's negative interest rate. Shanghai closed up 1.0 percent and Hong Kong added 0.1% after Beijing released industrial production and fixed-asset investment figures that were "surprisingly spritely", said Harry Murphy Cruise of Moody's Analytics.

"China's economy had a stronger start to the year than expected," he told AFP, but warned that "we should take the latest data with a grain of salt".

"Today's prints are

inflated by this year's bigger Lunar New Year celebrations compared to those last year marred by rapidly rising Covid-19 cases," Cruise said.

China's industrial production was up 7.0 percent year-on-year in January and February, beating the 6.8 percent rise in December and the 5.2 percent predicted for the period by Bloomberg. Household consumption was sluggish, reflecting a fragile recovery for the Chinese economy.

"Headwinds still remain: real estate investment continues to be a drag, deflation's reversal is likely only fleeting and export's outlook is clouded by geopolitical tensions and still-high global interest rates," Cruise said.

Taipei rose 1.0 percent, Seoul gained 0.7 percent and Manila added 0.4 per-

cent. Bangkok and Sydney were up but Wellington fell 0.3 percent and Singapore slid 0.1 percent.

Europe's major stock markets also opened higher ahead of key eurozone inflation data and a slew of central bank decisions this week.

The US Federal Reserve, the Reserve Bank of Australia, the Bank of England and the Swiss National Bank are among the institutions holding policy meetings.

But only one is expected to make a major move -- the Bank of Japan, which wraps up its two-day policy meeting on Tuesday.

Tokyo closed 2.7 percent higher on Monday after the influential Nikkei business daily reported that the BoJ plans to raise interest rates for the first time since 2007. Strong wins for

workers in annual pay negotiations have also pointed to the bank ending its outlier negative rate policy designed to boost the flagging economy.

Tom Kenny, senior international economist at ANZ, said that even if it does raise rates, guidance from the BoJ's governor Kazuo Ueda "is likely to be dovish". "He has previously said that policy will remain accommodative after the removal of the (negative interest rate policy) and has ruled out the possibility of successive rate hikes," Kenny said.

Dampened hopes for Federal Reserve rate cuts led Wall Street to close lower on Friday, and now "all eyes are on whether the Fed will adjust its rate hike outlook for 2024", said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management.

Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Case No. 194/1 Institution. 17/6/2023. Date of hearing 16/4/2024. Mohamad Hasan VS Ghulam Husain. Notice to No. 5/2. Dilawar Khan. 5/3. Muladad Khan sons. 5/10. Zubania d/o Alladad Khan 6/1. Zebunisa d/o Afsar Khan. 7. Sarfaraz Khan s/o Aslam Khan. 8/1. Bahadur Said. 8/4. Abdul Hakem ss/o Mst Zaron. 9/1. Firhad. 9/2. Merhad. 9/3. Abdul Waris sons. 9/4. Sahibzara d/o Zarsaid. 10. Mian Nor Shah s/o Qadar Shah. 19. Ahmed s/o Faqer Husain resident of Kalakshela 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 a.m. dated 16/4/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



In brief

FIFA's new friendly series

CAIRO (Agencies): Egypt became the fifth country to be selected as host of a new series of friendly games introduced by FIFA to allow teams from different confederations to play each other, the world soccer governing body said on Monday. The pilot phase was expanded to feature 24 national teams from three continents, FIFA said in a statement. The Egypt edition – which will take place from March 22-26 – will also include Croatia, Tunisia and New Zealand. Egypt will host New Zealand in the opening game on Friday, which will also mark the inauguration of a new 92,000-capacity stadium that the country has built in a new administrative capital, 45 km (28 miles) east of Cairo. Named Egypt Stadium, the venue is the second biggest in Africa, behind South Africa's 94,000-seater Soccer City. Tunisia will face Croatia in the other game, with the winners playing each other in the second match. Although there are no trophies or prize money, the series is designed to benefit national teams that do not have the opportunity to play teams from other confederations, with FIFA set to cover travel costs. Algeria, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka will simultaneously host other editions this month, although formats will differ.

Littion back as BD name squad

DHAKA (Agencies): Bangladesh have named a strong 15-member squad for the first Test against Sri Lanka in Sylhet, which begins on 22 March. Wicketkeeper batter and former captain Litton Das returns to the Bangladesh Test side after he missed the previous series against New Zealand due to paternity leave. Litton, who was the captain of the Test side at that point, was replaced by Najmul Hossain Shanto at the helm for the series and the latter was subsequently named captain of all three formats last month. This ICC World Test Championship series against Sri Lanka will be Najmul's first assignment with the Test team since taking over as full-time captain. Litton, who was recently dropped from the ODI squad after an ordinary run of form, has played 39 Tests, making 2394 runs at an average of 36.27. He was also the designated wicketkeeper in 28 of these Test matches. Nurul Hasan, who kept wickets in place of Litton in the home Test series against New Zealand, misses out from the squad. The 15-member squad also sees a call-up for new-bie pacers Nahid Rana and Mushfik Hasan. Senior pacer Ebadot Hossain hasn't returned since the knee injury last year which saw him miss the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in India. "Rana is a very exciting prospect. He is probably the quickest bowler in Bangladesh at the moment and can also extract steep bounce," former Bangladesh player and a member of the current selection panel, Abdur Razzak, said. "Although these are early days for him, his first-class record is quite impressive. There is another young pacer Mushfik Hasan in the squad. This is the right time for these pacers to get the experience as Ebadot (Hossain) is out injured and Taskin (Ahmed) is also not playing Tests at the moment." The first Test begins in Sylhet on 22 March with the following match in Chattogram from 30 March.

Islamabad United beat Multan Sultans to win PSL 9 title

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Islamabad United won their third HBL PSL title after they edged over Multan Sultans in the HBL PSL 9 final following a last ball thriller, at National Bank Stadium, Karachi on Monday night. The HBL PSL 9 champions bagged PKR 140,000,000 as prize money, whereas, Multan Sultans, the runners-up, received PKR 56,000,000.

Imad Wasim, who registered a historic five-wicket haul in the first innings, was adjudged player of the match as Islamabad United lifted the HBL PSL trophy after winning the first final they made since 2018.

Multan Sultans won the toss and elected to bat first. The first over, bowled by Naseem Shah, saw drama unfold as Salman Ali Agha caught Mohammad Rizwan on the fourth ball, only for the umpire to signal a no-ball as Naseem overstepped.

Imad Wasim struck on the third ball of the next over to remove Yasir Khan, who was caught by Tymal Mills. David Willey, batting at three, hit Imad for a six on the fifth delivery. On the very next ball, Willey's stumps were shattered as the second wicket fell for Multan.

The fifth over, bowled by Hunain Shah, was capitalized by Rizwan and Usman Khan as both hit two boundaries each to snatch 17 from the over. At the end of the powerplay, Multan stood at 48-2.

The 53-run third-wicket stand between Rizwan and Usman was broken in the 10th over as Shadab Khan removed his counterpart for run-a-ball 26.

In the next over, Usman smashed a four and a six to keep the score flowing. Imad, returning to the attack, got his third wicket when Johnson Charles (4, 6b) was caught by Naseem at short fine.

In the 15th over, Usman brought up his second HBL PSL 9 half-century. In the same over, Usman and Khushdil Shah hit a boundary each as Multan got to 114-4 with five overs left.

Shadab removed Usman (57, 40b, 7x4s, 1x6) on the first ball of the next over. Usama Mir, the next batter in, smashed a maximum on his first ball. The Islamabad skipper avenged himself on



the subsequent delivery, as Hunain pounced an important catch to dismiss Usama (6, 2b, 1x6).

The 17th over, bowled by Imad, saw three wickets at the expense of just three runs, paralyzing Multan's innings. Khushdil (11, 13b, 1x4) and Chris Jordan (0, 1b) were removed on consecutive deliveries as Imad completed a five-wicket haul, becoming the first bowler to do so across nine HBL PSL finals.

Abbas Afridi was run out on the final ball of the same over, as Multan were reduced to 127-9 after losing five wickets for just 13 runs over the course of two overs. With only two overs remaining, Iftikhar stepped on the gas pedal. He smashed two sixes against Mills in the penultimate over. Then, facing Naseem in the final over, he produced two boundaries and one six to help Multan finish at a competitive total of 159-9.

Imad was the pick of the bowlers, getting a five-fer. Shadab bagged three wickets.

In pursuit of 160-run target, Islamabad United started on a 26-run opening partnership between

Colin Munro and Martin Guptill, until Khushdil removed the former for 17 on 13, with four boundaries, in the fourth over. In the final over of the powerplay, Khushdil completed a successful return catch to send Salman (10, 11b, 2x4s) back to the pavilion as Islamabad finished six overs at 46-2.

Shortly after, Shadab (4, 8b) failed to execute a sweep shot as Iftikhar disturbed the stumps to bring Islamabad three down, with 58 on the board, after nine overs. Usama, brought to the attack to bowl the 11th over, was on the receiving end of Guptill's onslaught as he conceded 18 on the back of two sixes and a four. The next over saw 15 runs scored on the back of three boundaries, with Azam Khan hitting two of them.

The stabilizing 47-run fourth-wicket stand between Guptill and Azam was unceremoniously ended when the former was run out in the 13th over. Guptill walked back after contributing 50 from 32, showcasing four boundaries and three maximums. Imad joined Azam on the crease, with 58 needed off

43 deliveries. The two could only add 19 runs collectively before Azam (30, 22b, 4x4s, 1x6) edged one to the keeper to award Usama a wicket.

Haider Ali (5, 3b, 1x4) and Faheem Ashraf (1, 4b) were removed cheaply as trouble deepened for the chasing side, who required 31 off 17 to get over the line.

The 18th and 19th overs yielded 12 and 11 runs respectively, to bring the equation to eight needed from the final over with Naseem (17, 9b, 2x4s, 1x6) and Imad (19 not out, 17b, 2x4s) on the crease. Naseem hit a four on the second ball but was dismissed on the penultimate ball of the game, with scores leveled. Hunain, needing one off the final delivery, hit the winning runs as Islamabad secured the title for the first time since 2018. Khushdil and Iftikhar returned with two wickets each while Willey, Ali and Usama had one each.

Scores in brief:

Islamabad United beat Multan Sultans by two wickets Multan Sultans 159-9, 20 overs (Usman Khan 57, Iftikhar Ahmed 32 not out; Imad Wasim 5-23, Shadab Khan 3-32)

Islamabad United 163-8, 20 overs (Martin Guptill 50, Azam Khan 30, Imad Wasim 19 not out; Iftikhar Ahmed 2-19, Khushdil Shah 2-21)

Player of the match – Imad Wasim (Islamabad United)

Emerging Player of the Tournament – Muhammad Irfan Khan (171 runs, Karachi Kings) All-Rounder of the Tournament – Saim Ayub (345 runs, Eight wickets, Peshawar Zalmi)

Fielder of the Tournament – Muhammad Irfan Khan (Eight catches, Karachi Kings)

Wicketkeeper of the Tournament – Azam Khan (10 dismissals, 226 runs, Islamabad United)

Bowler of the Tournament – Usama Mir (24 wickets, Multan Sultans)

Batter of the Tournament – Usman Khan (430 runs, Multan Sultans)

HBL – Player of the Tournament – Shadab Khan (305 runs, 14 wickets, Islamabad United)

Spirit of Cricket Award – Peshawar Zalmi Umpire of the Tournament – Asif Yaqoob.

PCB empowers selection committee in a bid to improve WC performance

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Mohsin Raza Naqvi, has decided to empower the selection committee with full authority.

This decision includes the selection of the national team and the captain, marking a shift in the PCB's approach towards team selection.

This move is part of a broader strategy to enhance the performance of the Pakistani cricket team in the upcoming World Cup.

The decision is based on the belief that those with a deep understanding of the game and its players should have a significant say in team selection.

According to sources, the Chairman is keen on empowering the selection committee and will not interfere in its matters. This hands-off approach is expected to allow the committee to make unbiased decisions in the best interest of the team and the sport.

The decision regarding

the other selectors, including Chief Selector Wahab Riaz, will be made within a week.

This is part of an overall plan to empower other departments within the PCB, ensuring a more democratic and efficient functioning of the board.

In recent news, the PCB faced a setback as Shane Watson and Darren Sammy declined the offer for the head coach position. Despite this, the PCB remains committed to its quest for a foreign coach.

National Women Powerlifting C'ship in May

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Powerlifting Federation would be holding the National Women Powerlifting Championship here at the Jahangir Khan Squash Complex in the last week of May.

Secretary General Pakistan Powerlifting Federation Rashid Malik said all preparations for the championship have begun and ten teams from across the country were participating in the championship.

Teams include Pakistan Army, Police, Wapda, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Islamabad,

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, as well as foreign players, he told APP.

Malik said that the Junior and senior competitions would be held in ten weight categories each. The final date of the championship will be announced in the coming days and prizes will be distributed among the winning players at the end of the championship, he said.

Balbirnie fined for breaching ICC Code of Conduct

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ireland player Andrew Balbirnie has been fined 25 per cent of his match fee for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the second T20I against Afghanistan in Sharjah on Sunday.

Balbirnie was found to have breached Article 2.8 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to "showing dissent at an Umpire's decision during an International Match."

In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to Balbirnie's disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period, said a press release.

The incident occurred in the 16th over of Ireland's innings, when Balbirnie showed dissent on being adjudged leg before wicket by pointing to his gloves and telling the umpire that the ball had touched the gloves before hitting his pads.

Balbirnie admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by David Boon of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Bismillah Jan Shinwari and Izatullah Safi, third umpire Ahmed Shah Pakteen and fourth umpire Ahmed Shah Durrani levelled the charges.

Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points.

Tanzid Hasan, Rishad Hossain power Bangladesh to series win against Sri Lanka



CHATTOTGRAM (Agencies): Rishad Hossain played an attacking innings of 48 after substitute Tanzid Hasan Tamim hit 84 off 81 balls Monday, steering Bangladesh to a four-wicket win and a 2-1 ODI series victory over Sri Lanka.

Set a modest target after Janith Liyanage's unbeaten 101 guided Sri Lanka to 235 all out in 50 overs, Bangladesh raced to 237-6 in 40.2 overs. Rishad remained unbeaten on 48 off just 18 balls.

The hosts were in danger when Wanindu Hasaranga forced Mehdi Hasan Miraz, the last recognised batsman, to give a catch to Pramod Madushan for 25, with Bangladesh still 58 runs away from victory.

But Rishad dispatched the first ball he faced over midwicket for six and did not look back.

He hit four sixes and five fours in his whirlwind innings before Mushfiqur

Rahim, 37 not out, finished the game with a boundary off Maheesh Theekshana.

Tanzid led the initial charge, replacing Soumya Sarkar in the second innings as a concussion sub, despite Lahiru Kumara wreaking havoc with 4-48.

Liyanage earlier staged a lone battle en route to his maiden century after Bangladesh made regular strikes, with Taskin Ahmed leading the way for the home side with 3-42.

Skipper Kusal Mendis (29) and Charith Asalanka (37) made a good start but lost their wickets before they could build bigger innings.

Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat first, only to lose both openers inside four overs. Taskin struck early, trapping in-form opener Pathum Nissanka leg-before for one, then dismissing the other opener Avishka Fernando for four in his next over.

Mustafizur Rahman,

playing his first match in the series, removed Sadeera Samarawickrama off his first ball for 14 to leave Sri Lanka reeling at 41-3.

Leg-spinner Rishad made Mendis his first ODI wicket, also off his first ball of the game.

Mustafizur ended Asalanka's counter-attacking innings before Mehidy claimed two back-to-back wickets to expose the tail.

But Liyanage held one end firm to ensure Sri Lanka batted out 50 overs, hitting Taskin over the cover for a four in the final over to reach his century off 101 balls.

Mustafizur and Mehidy claimed 2-39 and 2-38, respectively.

Bangladesh won the opener by six wickets, with Sri Lanka taking the second by three wickets on Friday.

The two teams will now play a two-match Test series, beginning on Friday in Sylhet.

Violence erupts between players and fans



ANKARA (Agencies): Violence broke out between supporters of Trabzonspor and players from Fenerbahce after a match on Sunday in the Turkish top flight, which has been plagued by trouble this season.

A crowd of home supporters invaded the pitch at Trabzonspor's stadium after the final whistle of an encounter that Fenerbahce won 3-2. Images show a Trabzonspor fan enter the pitch and begin running towards the celebrating Fenerbahce players, some of whom reacted by running towards him to try and strike him. Other fans then invaded the pitch as stewards tried to restore order.

Videos showed Belgian international Michy Batshuayi kicking a fan

who had entered the pitch and Nigerian international Bright Osayi-Samuel punching another supporter.

In other images on social media, a fan can be seen to threaten a visiting player with a corner flag and Fenerbahce's goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic receives a punch to the face.

Following the violent scenes, Turkey's interior minister Ali Yerlikaya announced the opening of an investigation into the incident. "After the Trabzonspor-Fenerbahce football match played this evening, an investigation has been initiated immediately to identify the spectators who entered the pitch and to investigate the incidents that took place at the end of the match," he wrote on X. "Incidents of vio-

lence on football pitches are never acceptable."

The Turkish Football Federation (TFF) called the events "unacceptable" and said in a statement that "the necessary criminal sanctions will be imposed on those responsible for these incidents". It is not the first time violence has been seen in the Turkish Super Lig this season. The league was suspended for a week in December after a referee was attacked during a match between Ankaragucu and Rizespor.

Ankaragucu president Faruk Koca, alongside other men, attacked referee Halil Umut Meler on the pitch after the match, injuring the official. A number of Fenerbahce trips to Trabzon in recent times have also been marred by violence. A 2016 game against Trabzonspor was abandoned in the closing minutes after an assistant referee was attacked by a home supporter. The year before that the Fenerbahce team bus came under attack from a gunman en route to the airport on the way back from the neighbouring Black Sea city of Rize, leaving the driver seriously injured.

Indian Wells Carlos Alcaraz beats Daniil Medvedev to defend title



INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): World number two Carlos Alcaraz defended his Indian Wells title with a straight-set win over Daniil Medvedev in a repeat of last year's final.

Alcaraz, 20, beat the Russian world number four 7-6 (7-5) 6-1 to claim his first title since Wimbledon in July. The Spaniard was returning from an ankle injury which forced him to retire from his opening match at the Rio Open last month.

"I love playing here - it's so special for me," Alcaraz told Sky Sports. "This year is a bit more special because before the tournament I was thinking about whether I was going to play my best or not. I wasn't

feeling my best with my ankle injury. "There were a lot of doubts but I'm really happy to overcome the problems. We did really good work off the court to try to recover as best I can."

Alcaraz, who was stung on his forehead as a swarm of bees forced a delay in his quarter-final win over Alexander Zverev, recovered from 3-0 down against Medvedev to force a tie-break and clinch the first set.

He breezed through the second, breaking serve twice to secure his 13th career title and become the first repeat winner at Indian Wells since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014 to 2016. "I had a lot of nerves. It was difficult to start, but I started

to play better," Alcaraz said. "I calmed myself and controlled my emotions."

Swiatek beats Sakkari for second Indian Wells title: Poland's Iga Swiatek claimed another dominant win over Maria Sakkari to clinch her second Indian Wells title. In a repeat of the 2022 final, the world number one produced an almost identical score, beating Greece's Sakkari 6-4 6-0 in 69 minutes.

That secured a 19th career title for Swiatek, 22, and a second of the year having also won in Qatar last month. "It's an amazing thing to be standing here again," she said. "Thank you for really making this feel like home."

Sakkari, 28, was playing in her 10th WTA final and hoped for her third title, but Swiatek charged into a 3-0 lead in California. The world number nine broke back, but had to save two break points at 5-4, before Swiatek hit a forehand winner to clinch the first set.

The four-time Grand Slam champion then breezed through the second set in just 25 minutes, with Sakkari winning just five points.

Irving buzzer-beater seals Mavericks win over Nuggets

NEW YORK (Agencies): Kyrie Irving hit a buzzer-beater to secure a 107-105 victory for the Dallas Mavericks over the Denver Nuggets.

The defending champion Nuggets rallied from 13 points down in the fourth quarter to lead the hosts 105-102. Mavericks star Luka Donic hit a three-pointer with 25 seconds left to tie the game, before Irving floated in a left-handed shot from 20ft to seal the win.

Defeat means the Nuggets fall to second in the Western Conference, behind leaders the Oklahoma City Thunder. Donic hit a game-high 37 points, while Irving added 24 to help the Mavericks end the Nuggets' five-game winning streak.

Denver's Jamal Murray

scored 12 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter to spark his side's comeback but it proved in vain. The Mavericks are seventh in the Western Conference, with the top-six sides in each conference guaranteed a play-off spot and teams in seventh to 10th entering the play-in tournament.

Elsewhere, Bam Adebayo hit a three-pointer from 30ft at the final buzzer to land the Miami Heat a 104-101 win over the Detroit Pistons. Adebayo scored 20 points overall and claimed 17 rebounds, while Duncan Robinson top-scored with 30 points for the Heat, who are seventh in the Eastern Conference. Robinson also became the fastest player in NBA history to make 1,000

three-pointers, reaching the mark in his 343rd game, seven faster than previous record holder Buddy Hield.

The Milwaukee Bucks claimed an impressive 140-129 victory over the Phoenix Suns despite star player Giannis Antetokounmpo missing because of a hamstring injury. Damian Lillard and Bobby Portis both made 31 points for the Bucks, who are second in the Eastern Conference. Sam Hauser scored a career-high 30 points, all from three-pointers, but sustained a left ankle sprain in the Boston Celtics' 130-104 victory over Washington Wizards. Jayson Tatum also had 30 points as the Celtics cruised to a fifth straight win to improve to an NBA-best 53-14.



In brief

Death anniversary of Mehboob Alam

ISLAMABAD (APP): Death anniversary of renowned television and film actor Mehboob Alam was observed on Monday. Born on March 14, 1948, Mehboob Alam was a versatile actor with a unique acting style. He was best known for his remarkable role in the Pakistan Television classic drama serial "Waris" in which he played the role of Chaudhry Hashmat Ali. He also appeared in famous PTV drama Andhera Ujala, Apnay Log, and Neelay Hath. Mehboob Alam also acted in 38 movies which included 12 Urdu, 15 Punjabi, and 11 Sindhi movies. He died on March 18, 1994, in Karachi at age 46.

Police arrest five suspects

RAWALPINDI (APP): District police arrested five suspects of two gangs involved in theft and robbery in several areas of the city. According to a police spokesman, the stolen amount of Rs.10,000.00 rupees, the motorcycle and weapons used in the incidents were recovered from the accused Kamran, Abbas and Shahab in the Pirwadhai area. In another police raid, a two member gang of robbers was arrested in Dhamial area during which motorcycle and ammunition were recovered from the accused, identified as Taif and Irfan. Spokesman said that the accused would be shifted to the jail for the identification parade, after which more recovery would be done.

Maqbool assumes charge

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has assumed charge as Minister of Science and Technology here on Monday. The high officials extended a warm welcome to the minister on his arrival at the ministry. An introductory meeting was conducted with senior officials while the minister was briefed about the role and functions of the ministry and its executive departments including major ongoing activities. The federal minister has called for a meeting of all wings of the ministry on March 19, 2024 to receive briefings from the respective officials and discuss the future goals.

Operations against price surge

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Assistant Commissioner (City) Farhan Ahmed on Monday conducted an operation against the surge in prices at the Sector G-6 Sasta Bazaar following the directives of the deputy commissioner Islamabad. As per the spokesperson of Islamabad Capital Territory Dr. Abdullah Tabassum, he visited the Sector G-6 Sasta Bazaar to enforce the price list and other regulations. Six individuals were apprehended by the assistant commissioner for failing to disclose the price list and were subsequently handed over to the police station. Others were fined and issued warnings on the occasion. Likewise, the Assistant Commissioner (Rural) Kamran Saghir launched an operation against price hikes and professional beggars across various areas. He inspected Imtiaz Mall, Gulberg Green, and adjacent areas to enforce price controls. He imposed fines and issued warnings for violations of government-fixed rates. Moreover, the assistant commissioner apprehended seven beggars from the precinct of Police Station Sihala and the Humak area. He also arrested professional beggars and sent them to the police station, while minors were handed over to the Edhi Center.

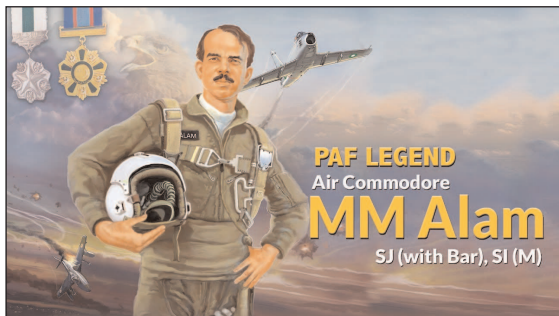


ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, chairs significant meetings with representatives from the Sugar Mills Association and Ethanol Manufacturer Association to address pressing concerns affecting their industries.

1965 War Hero MM Alam remembered on death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 11th death anniversary of 1965 War Hero Muhammad Mahmood Alam, popularly known as M M Alam was observed on Monday.

Pakistan Air Force legendary war hero M M Alam, nicknamed while piloting an F-86 Sabre, shot down five Indian war planes in less than a minute during 1965 Pak-India war and altogether, downed nine war planes in the aerial fight. MM Alam was the first ever fighter pilot for PAF, listed on top in the hall of



famers' list at the PAF Museum in Karachi.

Alam is considered as a national hero for Pakistan, most significantly, for his remarkable show of brilliance in the

war of 1965.

He was awarded the 'Sitara-e-Jurat' and also the BAR medal. He died in Karachi on this day in 2013 at the age of 77 after a protracted illness.

DC issues directives for anti-dengue operation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad has chaired a high-level meeting to address the looming threat of dengue fever in the federal capital and directed the concerned to initiate a drive without any delay to combat the potential outbreak.

According to the spokesman of ICT, Dr Abdullah Tabassum, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad emphasized the unwavering commitment to deploy all available resources in the fight against the dengue virus.

Notably, special attention would be given to rural areas to safeguard all citizens from potential harm.

On the occasion, he issued instructions to the department concerned to start the surveillance drive against dengue to control the hazard in the area.

Meanwhile, he said that the safety of citizens was the top-most priority of the district administration and the department would leave no stone unturned to maintain a healthy atmosphere in Islamabad.

The meeting was attended by the officials of Local Government, CDA Sanitation, CDA Environment, Endowments Department, Union Council Sectors, MCI Health Services, Surveillance teams, District Health Officers, Assistant Commissioners, Magistrates and other stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema here on Monday directed the authorities concerned to take strict action against profiteers. The Price Magistrates should make all-out efforts to implement the official rate lists and ensure the rate lists of the essential items must be displayed on the shops, he instructed.

Strict action in accordance with the law would be taken against the profiteers, Hassan Waqar Cheema said adding, the violation of the official rates would not be allowed. Fines amounting to over Rs 4.7 million were imposed on the wholesalers found indulged in profiteering in Rawalpindi during March, the DC said and added that more than 300 wholesalers were also sent behind the bars. Hassan Waqar informed that the district administration had increased the number of the price magistrates which helped ensuring the implementation of the fixed prices of essential commodities.

Entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with army: Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, and Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, on Monday, extended appreciation to the courageous personnel of the Pakistan Army for their successful operation against terrorists in North Waziristan.

He said that the whole nation, along with the Pakistan Armed Forces, would continue to fight against terrorism together, said a news release.

He also expressed resolve that the Pakistani nation would continue to support the Pakistan Armed Forces to eradicate terrorism from the soil of Pakistan.

While reminding of the sacrifices rendered by brave personnel of the Pakistan Armed Forces, he said that every Pakistani stood shoulder to shoulder with its armed forces. He paid rich tribute to the Pakistan Armed Forces who laid down their lives to protect Pakistan from the scourge of terrorism.

Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, lauded the Pakistan Security Agencies for the successful operation against terrorists in North Waziristan.

He said that the Pakistani nation, along with the Pakistan Armed Forces, is united to eradicate terrorism from its roots.

Education Ministry partners with Muslim Hands to improve basic health, education facilities

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has partnered with Muslim Hands Pakistan to improve the health and well-being of school children and staff by enhancing access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and basic education facilities.

In this connection, the Directorate General of Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) and the Project Planning and Development Unit (PPDU) under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and Muslim Hands Pakistan, signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) on Monday.

Director General of BECS, Hameed Khan Niazi, and Executive Director of Muslim Hands, Syed Javed Gillani, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organizations, said a news release issued here.

According to the agreement, both parties will collaborate on initiatives and projects related to the School WASH Programme in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). This partnership will commence on

March 20, 2024, and will remain in force for the next one year, unless terminated earlier by mutual agreement or due to specific circumstances as outlined herein. The Directorate General of BECS and PPDU will identify and provide a list of 25 schools in the federal capital in need of WASH interventions (out-of-school children). Furthermore, they will facilitate coordination with school administrations for the smooth execution of WASH projects.

BECS and PPDU will support monitoring and evaluation activities to assess the impact of the interventions, besides assisting in organizing hygiene education sessions by providing access to students and staff.

Muslim Hands will fund the WASH interventions in the identified 25 schools, including the procurement of materials and hiring of contractors as needed. Additionally, they will design and implement the WASH projects in close coordination with BECS and PPDU and provide technical expertise and training for the maintenance and sustainability of WASH facilities.

Muslim Hands will also conduct hygiene education sessions for students and staff in collaboration with BECS and PPDU and facilitate the capacity building of school staff and management.

On the occasion, Director General of BECS, Hameed Khan Niazi, said that BECS is a unique model of one teacher, one school, and integrated teaching. He said that it costs the government Rs 18,000 per student in the formal education system compared to Rs 4,000 per student in the non-formal system run by BECS, adding that these community schools would emerge as the best model by providing basic facilities. He further said that there are around 12,000 children out of school in ICT, and BECS has the capacity to absorb around 7-8 thousand children. He said that child's right to education and water and sanitation are human rights that cannot be taken away or compromised.

Hameed Khan Niazi, DG BECS said that the government is committed to ensuring basic necessities for all, especially students and staff in non-formal education institutions.

Commissioner visits wholesale Bazaar set up

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak here on Monday made a surprise visit to the wholesale Bazaar set up near Nawaz Sharif Park on Murree Road and inspected the arrangements. Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi Hassan Waqar Cheema, Assistant Commissioner, Zoneera Aftab and other officers concerned were present on the occasion.

The Commissioner reviewed the sale of the subsidized food items and inquired about the supply of the food items from the buyers. He directed the officers that the rate lists should be displayed at a prominent place at the stalls. The officials concerned performing duty in the bazaar should ensure that all possible relief could be provided to the citizens, he said. The Commissioner directed the officers concerned to make surprise visits to the bazaars regularly and address the

problems if any immediately. The wholesale bazaar is a good initiative by the government to provide relief to the public particularly in Ramadan, he added. He informed that keeping in view the convenience of the public, another wholesale market had been established at Rawal Road.

The sale of the subsidized food items was being ensured in the wholesale bazaars, he said adding, no negligence would be tolerated in providing relief to the people. In the wholesale bazaar, the administration was not only ensuring availability of the food items but their rates were also 20 to 25 percent cheaper than the open market, Aamir Khattak said. Solid steps were being taken in the light of the government orders to solve public problems, he added. The Commissioner directed that more steps should be taken by the Agriculture Department to ensure provision of essential commodities to the citizens at affordable rates.

Khurram condemns terrorist attack

ISLAMABAD (APP): Secretary General of Pakistan Awami Tehreek Khuram Nawaz Gandapur on Monday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on North Waziristan Mir Ali check post expressing deep sorrow and grief over the martyrdom of the brave officers of Pakistan armed forces. According to Islamabad Media Cell, he said that the martyrdom of the officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army is intolerable.

He said that the officers and youths who sacrificed their lives for the defense and security of the country are the heroes of the nation. He also extended heartfelt condolences and solidarity with the families of the martyrs. Meanwhile, President Awami Tehreek North Punjab Qazi Shafiq, President Awami Tehreek Rawalpindi Ghulam Ali Khan also strongly condemned the terrorist attack on Mir Ali check post in North Waziristan and expressed grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of the military officers.

KSA to establish a state-of-the-art skill university in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development recently has planned to propose the dedication of a special quota for Pakistani skilled and semi-skilled workers for NEOM and other upcoming projects.

Additionally, a proposal for Saudi Arabia to establish a state-of-the-art Skill University in Pakistan further aligns the two nations in their pursuit of economic transformation, an official source told APP. He said that collaboration in the training of Pakistani workers to meet the rising needs of the Saudi labor market and enhance their skills and capabilities were also key points of discussion.

The Ministry has proposed collaborative efforts between the Embassy of KSA

in Islamabad, the Consulate General (CG) Karachi, and Pakistani authorities to facilitate the entry of new Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs) into the Saudi sector.

The high-level delegation visit aims to align Pakistan's workforce with Saudi Arabia's economic transformation program under Vision 2030, fostering a strong partnership for mutual benefit.

The visit aims to enhance crucial remittances, contributing to the stability of Pakistan's economy and supporting the economic well-being of families that rely solely on these financial inflows. Which was aimed at fostering collaboration and exploring employment opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in the Kingdom.

CDA to construct 374 km long cycling track in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) is taking measures to provide a healthy environment to the citizens. In this regard, it has been decided to construct bicycle lanes along the highways in different sectors and areas of Islamabad in order to promote the bicycle culture in the city by implementing the instructions of the Chairman CDA.

According to the details,

under the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Bicycle Lab Project (BLP), 374 km long cycling track would be constructed in different areas and sectors of Islamabad in a period of 18 months at a cost of 2.4 billion rupees.

This cycling track will be constructed on highways connected to Purple Line Metro Bus project including Khayaban Iqbal, Sector G-6, G-7, G-8, Green Double Lane,

Jinnah Avenue, Red Double Line, so that the passengers leaving the metro bus could also use the cycling track. Similarly, under this project, every sector of Islamabad would be connected with a cycling track. Moreover, 150 parking stands will also be constructed under the Bicycle Lab Project (BLP) so that the citizens can benefit from the facilities like bikes on cheap rent.



ISLAMABAD: Labourer busy installing underground main Gas pipe line with the help of crane at G-9 Peshawar More.

Health sector to be enhanced

KABUL (BNA) Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister, convened a meeting with doctors and specialists. Healthcare professionals expressed their satisfaction with IE's sincere focus on advancing the health sector and providing better healthcare services to citizens. The doctors and specialists emphasized the need for enhancing the quality of healthcare and expanding care provisions to ensure the delivery of exceptional services to the population.

Charge d'affaires summoned

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has summoned Pakistan's charge d'affaires over Islamabad's airstrike inside Afghanistan in the early hours of Monday morning. The ministry presented the charge d'affaires with a letter of protest and advised the new civilian government to curb anti-Afghanistan actions and to not 'complicate' relations between the two Muslim countries.

Girls’ despair over schools reopening in coming academic year

KABUL (TOLONews): As the new academic year 1403 (solar year) approaches, girls deprived of education in Herat are demanding the reopening of schools for students above grade six.

They said that due to the closure of schools, they have faced psychological problems and have lost hope.

Sharifa Ghiasi told TOLONews that she was in grade seven when she was deprived of going to school and had to turn to tailoring out of necessity.

She added that she has been counting the days for the reopening of schools, but so far, her wish has not been fulfilled.

“It has been two years since the schools were closed, and we turned to tailoring. We request the Islamic Emirate to open the schools so that we can study and build a good future,” Sharifa told TOLONews.

A number of girls deprived of education, who are engaged in tailoring alongside Sharifa, said that due to being deprived of education, they have turned to tailoring and vocational training out of necessity.

“We came here out of necessity because we were always at home, and now we have become busy with tailoring, and we want from the Islamic Emirate to reopen the schools,” said Hasanat Osmani, a deprived student.

“We were not allowed to go to school and had to turn to tailoring; we want to continue our studies,” said Nazanin Habibi, another student. About 20 girls deprived of education are engaged to learn tailoring daily at different times in a tailoring workshop, and some of these girls have become tailors during the past two years.

“They come to us for work and training; these are girls deprived of education, they work here with their broken heart of their hopes because they are not interested in tailoring; they want to go to school, study, and to have a good future,” said Rana Ishaqzai, the head of the tailoring workshop.

More than 900 days have passed since the closure of schools for girls above grade six. The Ministry of Education has always announced that the closure of girls’ schools is not permanent but temporary until further notice, but it is still unclear when the schools for girls above grade six will reopen.

Spokesman highlights role of journalists



KABUL (BNA) In a message released on the occasion of National Journalists’ Day, Mawlawi Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, highlighted the role of journalists as the connecting bridge between the nation and the system.

Congratulating journalists across the country, Mawlawi Zabihullah Mujahid expressed his well wishes via his official page on X platform (formerly known as Twitter).

He urged journalists to continue serving the nation by upholding Islamic values and protecting national interests.

Furthermore, he called upon them to remain motivated and committed to media principles.

National Journalists’ Day is celebrated annually in Afghanistan on the 27th solar date, recognizing the invaluable contributions of journalists in the country.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is focused on fostering an environment where journalists can work freely and without fear, ensuring that their role in shaping public opinion and providing objective news is protected and valued.

Ministry expresses efforts of journalists

KABUL (BNA): On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day and Journalists, the Ministry of Information and Culture expresses its appreciation for the valuable efforts of our dear journalists in the country. Journalism is the foundation of informed societies and plays an indispensable role in ensuring transparency and raising public awareness.

Today, we honor the commitment, courage, and honesty of journalists who strive continuously to report the truth and raise the level of awareness among the beloved people of Afghanistan, within the framework of Islamic and national values.

The Ministry of Information and Culture considers itself committed to supporting press freedom while considering Islamic and national values, and endeavors to provide a safe and conducive working environment for our dear journalists. Considering the various challenges in the media field, simultaneous with technological advancements, including the spread of misinformation and the need for digital literacy, this ministry declares its commitment to continue supporting initiatives aimed at improving media literacy, enhancing a healthy critical understanding of media content, and promoting ethical standards within the media.

To commemorate this day, we invite all esteemed government institutions, media organizations, and the Afghan journalists’ community to participate in fostering a beneficial and powerful media vision.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Information and Culture appreciates the spirit of journalism and its indispensable role in society, and expresses gratitude to the beloved journalists of our country for their valuable services.

Six of a family killed in Badghis roof collapse



QALA-I-NAW (Pajhwok): Six members of a family have been killed as a result of a roof collapse in the Dara Buam district of northwestern Badghis province, a statement said.

The incident happened in the Ghulghalai locality, a statement from Police Headquarters said.

The source added that as a result of recent rainfall the house was damaged and the roof collapse was also because of late precipitations.

Six members of a family, including four children, were killed in the incident.

It is pertinent to mention that tens of Afghans had been killed in similar incidents lately.

2nd phase of work on Qosh Tepa Canal begins

JAWZJAN (TOLONews): The second phase of the Qosh Tepa canal project began in six locations in the Aqcha district of Jowzjan province of Afghanistan.

Officials from the Jawzjan River Basin said that upon completion, the canal would irrigate about 300,000 hectares of agricultural land in this province.

“300,000 acres of land in Jawzjan province will be covered,” said Saaduddin Salimi, head of the Jawzjan River Basin.

“This canal has the capacity to transport approximately six and a half million cubic meters of water per second,” said Ahmad Masoud, a representative of the contracting company.

The Qosh Tepa canal, which is 280 kilometers long, starts in the Kaldar district of Balkh province and passes through Jawzjan province to reach the Andkhoy district in Faryab province.

Furthermore, economic experts say that the completion of this canal will lead to Afghanistan achieving self-sufficiency in agriculture.

“It is clear that it will not only suffice for the people of Jawzjan province and neighboring provinces but there is also the possibility that wheat could be exported abroad,” said Abdul Qahar, an economist.

Residents of Jawzjan say that the completion of this project will irrigate thousands of acres of agricultural land and significantly increase the volume of domestic produce in the country.

“Our lands yield so much that we don’t have enough consumption for it; we want other countries to buy wheat from us,” said Wazir Mohammad, a resident of Jawzjan.

“Once this canal is operational, all this land will be irrigated, and agriculture in this region will continue,” said Mohammad Hashem, another resident of Jawzjan.

The Qosh Tepa canal is the largest irrigation canal in Afghanistan, with its costs estimated at around sixty billion afghani, funded by the budget of the caretaker government.

Father of quintuplets appeals for assistance

J A L A L A B A D (TOLONews): Mohammad Ashraf, a father of quintuplets in Nangarhar province, said he is currently living in poor economic conditions and has requested assistance from the caretaker government.

Mohammad Ashraf added that before this, 13 of his children, most of whom were twins, died due to economic challenges.

Ashraf said, “Before this, God gave me 13 children, and due to the disease, that afflicted them, I could not vaccinate them, and it lasted for 7 to 8 months, and God took them back again, most of them were twins and triplets.”

The quintuplets were born on Saturday, March 16, in Nangarhar’s provincial hospital.

Doctors at the Nangarhar provincial hospital said that the health condition of four of the five newborns is satisfactory.

Wahidullah Habibi, head of the children’s ward at Nangarhar’s provincial hospital, said, “They were born in a very normal condition, only one child weighs 1,400 grams, and according to new medical standards, if the weight of the children is below 1,700 grams, they must be hospitalized.”

According to information from the Nangarhar Public Health Department, nearly 24,000 children have been born in this province’s provincial hospital over the past year.

Kazai repeats calls for schools and universities to be reopened to girls

KABUL (TOLONews): On the eve of the start of the new academic year, Afghanistan’s former president Hamid Karzai has once again called on the Islamic Emirate to reopen high schools and universities to girls.

“On the eve of the beginning of the new academic year, I once again ask the caretaker government to open the doors of schools and universities to Afghan girls and provide better education and advancement opportunities; so that our country is free from needing others, self-sufficient and an opponent for its competitors,” Afghanistan’s former president Hamid Karzai said in a post on X.

He said the days leading up to the start of the new academic year had been a



time of celebration for girls and boys, knowing they would resume their education but now, for “nearly three years, the girls of the country have been deprived of education and cannot go to school and university, learn science, and as a result, serve their family and country.”

Karzai said that learning and gathering knowledge is the way of survival, growth, honor and liberation of any human society.

The former president of Afghanistan has repeatedly called for the reopening of schools and universities to girls.

200 schools in Balkh province lack suitable buildings: Officials

BALKH (TOLONews): The lack of suitable buildings for two hundred schools in Balkh and the shortage of professional teachers are among the serious challenges facing the education department of this province.

Abdul Jalil Shahidkhail, head of the education department in Balkh, said that in order to reduce educational challenges, they have distributed more than 2 million textbooks in two stages to students in public schools of this province.

Abdul Jalil Shahidkhail added that among 700 schools in this province, 200 schools need reconstruction.

Shahidkhail said: “A few

days ago, I was told by the Ministry of Education to provide information on how many schools in Balkh need repair and reconstruction. With the approaching academic year 1403 (solar year) and the process of distributing textbooks in Balkh, nearly 200 schools in Balkh need repair and reconstruction.”

Meanwhile, students and teachers in Balkh emphasized the continuation of the textbook distribution process in the coming years.

Bahram Hamrah, representative of the Ministry of Education in the printing and distribution of textbooks, said: “According to our plan, we have allocated

2.2 million textbooks for all the schools of Balkh province. In the first stage, which was last year, 1.4 million books were distributed, and now we are witnessing the second stage of textbook distribution. About 840,000 books are being distributed to public schools in Balkh province from grade one to grade twelve.”

“When we do not have books, we cannot study properly, and the Afghan society suffers from the lack of books. Now that the books have arrived, we are very happy and study our lessons well,” said Ahmad Sohaib, a student.

“Last year, when we entered the classrooms,

approximately 70-80%, or 50% did not have books. We faced a significant shortage of books,” said Padshah Khan, a teacher.

According to information from the Balkh Education Department, after the return of the Islamic Emirate, 52 schools have been reconstructed, and 13 other schools have been built by national and international institutions.

According to this institution, currently, more than 600,000 students are engaged in education in public schools in Balkh, and there is a need for 1,400 professional teachers and other staff.

3-year-old kidnapped girl rescued in Nangarhar



JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Security forces have rescued a three-year-old girl from kidnappers in eastern Nangarhar, an official said.

Police Spokesperson Hafiz Mawlawi Abdul Basir Zabuli told Pajhwok Afghan News six days ago a three-years-old girl was kidnapped.

She was rescued from kidnappers by the security personnel of the fourth Police District, he added.

Qari Ziaulhaq, deputy head of fourth Police District, said with the cooperation of detective and intelligence personnel they were able to rescue the kidnapped girl and hand her

over to her family.

The father of the rescued girl said that the kidnappers warned him against the killing of her daughter if their demand was not fulfilled.

He said he was happy and satisfied with the security forces effort to recover her daughter.

Bayat Foundation steps in to help needy families over Ramazan

HERAT (Ariana News): Dozens of needy families in Herat province received much needed Ramadan aid packages on Monday from Bayat Foundation.

According to Bayat Foundation officials, a transparent assessment was carried out on people in need before the aid was distributed.

The packages included flour, rice and cooking oil. The foundation will carry this initiative through to other provinces during the holy month of Ramadan.

Officials said poverty and unemployment in the country has resulted in more people needing assistance.

Recipients of this aid welcomed the initiative and



called on other organizations to also help the needy.

Over the past 20 years, the Bayat Foundation has

carried out countless campaigns to help the needy across the country. The foundation is also actively

involved in education and health – with the aim of helping the needy in Afghanistan.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of United States of America to Pakistan, Donald Blome called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

President for boosting bilateral ties with UAE

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has emphasised the need for further boosting the bilateral ties between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the areas of trade, economy, aviation, renewable energy, climate change and human resource development for the mutual benefit of the two brotherly countries.

The President expressed these views while talking to the Ambassador of UAE to Pakistan, Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi, who called on him, here at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Monday.

Talking to the Ambassador, the President urged the need to increase collaboration in the aviation industry to facilitate the Pakistani diaspora in the UAE, including the initiation of commercial flights of Airbus A380s.

He said the Emirati businesses should be encouraged to invest in the Pakistan Stock Exchange to infuse innovative ideas and more capital in the Pakistani economy. Talking about Sindh, the President apprised that Pakistan had

started investing in mangrove forests and was trading carbon credits in the international market. He suggested that Pakistan and the UAE should mutually benefit from this opportunity.

He said projects had been undertaken for the lining of canals to overcome seepage and boost agricultural production. He maintained that Pakistan and the UAE needed to collaborate in the agricultural sector by sharing new technologies as food security was a growing concern for the region due to climate change.

During the meeting, the Ambassador highlighted that the UAE was committed to Pakistan's development and would continue to stand with Pakistan. He urged the need to transform the existing bilateral relationship into a strategic partnership between Pakistan and the UAE.

He called for focusing on economic diplomacy, adding that big companies from the UAE were keen to invest in aviation, agriculture, renewable energy (solar), education and healthcare in Pakistan. He

informed that the UAE had recently hosted COP-28 and pledged \$100 million for the "loss and damage" fund to help vulnerable countries deal with the adverse effects of climate change. He said Pakistan could benefit from this fund to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The Ambassador congratulated President Asif Ali Zardari on becoming the President for the second term. He extended best wishes on behalf of the leadership and people of the UAE and reaffirmed their strong commitment to further reinforce the bond of friendship between the two countries. He also extended an invitation to the President to visit the UAE, which the President accepted.

The President thanked the UAE's leadership for warm greetings and messages of felicitation and said that the UAE was very close to his heart. He appreciated the warmth and affection of UAE's leadership towards Pakistan and highlighted the need to further strengthen the fraternal ties between the two countries.

Terrorist leader killed in military action: ISPR

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces have gunned down at least eight terrorists, including a terrorist commander who orchestrated the Mir Ali attack, during an intelligence-based operation in North Waziristan District on the night of March 17 and 18, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement on Monday.

According to the military's media wing, the operation was carried out on the reported presence of terrorists. During the conduct of the operation, the ISPR stated, at least eight terrorists were "sent to hell" after an intense fire exchange, including a high-value target terrorist commander Sehra alias Janan.

The commander, the army's media wing added, was involved in orchestrating the terrorist attack on a security forces' post in Mir Ali on 16 March and was "highly wanted by the law enforcement agencies". "Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the Security Forces of Pakistan remain determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," the ISPR mentioned in its statement.

The military's media wing stated that a group of six terrorists attacked the post in the early hours of Saturday with the Pakistani troops foiling their initial attempt of intrusion before they rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the post, followed by multiple suicide bombing attacks, which led to the collapse of a portion of a building, resulting into the martyrdom of the brave sons of the soil. "During the conduct of ensuing clearance operation, own troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Kashif, effectively engaged and sent to hell all six terrorists," the statement read.

SC orders re-election in PB-50

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Supreme Court (SC) on Monday ordered to hold re-election in PB-50 Qalaabduallah, Balochistan. The top court heard the plea filed by Zamrik Khan, challenging the ECP order.

At the outset of the hearing, Supreme Court annulled the Election Commission of Pakistan's recount order in PB-50 Balochistan. The top court also directed the ECP to ensure transparent election as per the Constitution of Pakistan. Earlier, the Election Commission suspended the victory notification ANP candidate from Balochistan Assembly Constituency PB-50 Qila Abdullah and directed re-polling at 6 polling stations.

The ECP has directed that the victory notification of Zamrik Khan, candidate from PB-50, will remain suspended until the result of re-polling. On February 20, a plea was filed with the Supreme Court (SC) against the alleged rigging during the 2024 general elections. As per details, the plea was moved by citizen Mian Shabbir Ahmed through his lawyer Azhar Siddique with the Supreme Court's Lahore registry, seeking a judicial commission to probe the rigging allegations.

It contends that widespread 'rigging' occurred throughout the country during the recent general elections. The petition emphasizes that an inquiry into the alleged fraud be conducted in light of upholding the fundamental rights of citizens.

Putin wins Russia election in landslide with no serious competition

MOSCOW (Reuters): President Vladimir Putin won a record post-Soviet landslide in Russia's election, cementing his already tight grip on power in a victory he said showed Moscow had been right to stand up to the West and send its troops into Ukraine.

Putin, a former KGB lieutenant colonel who first rose to power in 1999, made it clear that the result should send a message to the West that its leaders will have to reckon with an emboldened Russia, whether in war or peace, for many more years to come. The outcome means Putin, 71, is set to embark on a new six-year term that will see him overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years if he completes it.

Putin won 87.8 per cent of the vote, the highest-ever result in Russia's post-Soviet history, according to an exit poll by pollster the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM). The Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VCIOM) put Putin on 87pc. The first official results indicated the polls were accurate.

Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif congratulated Putin on the win and said he looked forward to working together to strengthen Pakistan-Russian relations. The United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and other nations have said the vote was neither free nor fair due to the imprisonment of political opponents and censorship.

Communist candidate Nikolai Kharitonov finished second with just under 4pc, newcomer Vladislav Davankov third, and ultra-nationalist Leonid Slutsky fourth, partial results suggested. Putin told supporters in a victory speech in Moscow that he would prioritise resolving tasks associated with what he called Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine and would strengthen the Russian military. "We have many tasks ahead. But when we are consolidated — no matter who wants to intimidate us, suppress us — nobody has ever succeeded in history, they

have not succeeded now, and they will not succeed ever in the future," said Putin. Supporters chanted "Putin, Putin, Putin" when he appeared on stage and "Russia, Russia, Russia" after he had delivered his acceptance speech. Inspired by opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last month, thousands of opponents protested at noon against Putin at polling stations inside Russia and abroad.

Putin told reporters he regarded Russia's election as democratic and said the Navalny-inspired protest against him had had no effect on the election's outcome. In his first comments on his death, he also said that Navalny's passing had been a "sad event" and confirmed that he had been ready to do a prisoner swap involving the opposition politician.

When asked by NBC, a US TV network, whether his re-election was democratic, Putin criticised the US political and judicial systems. "The whole world is laughing at what is happening (in the United States)," he said. "This is just a disaster, not a democracy." "...Is it democratic to use administrative resources to attack one of the candidates for the presidency of the United States, using the judiciary among other things?" he asked, making an apparent reference to four criminal cases against Republican candidate Donald Trump.

The Russian election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. War has hung over the three-day election: Ukraine has repeatedly attacked oil refineries in Russia, shelled Russian regions and sought to pierce Russian borders with proxy forces — a move Putin said would not be left unpunished. Putin said Russia might need to create a buffer zone inside Ukraine to prevent such attacks in future.

While Putin's re-election was not in doubt given his control over Russia and the absence of any real challengers, the former KGB spy had

wanted to show he had the overwhelming support of Russians. Nationwide turnout was 74.22pc at 1800 GMT when polls closed, election officials said, surpassing 2018 levels of 67.5pc. There was no independent tally of how many of Russia's 114 million voters took part in the opposition demonstrations, amid tight security involving tens of thousands of police and security officials.

Reuters journalists saw an increase in the flow of voters, especially younger people, at noon at polling stations in Moscow, St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, with queues of several hundred people and even thousands. Some said they were protesting, though there were few outward signs to distinguish them from ordinary voters. At least 74 people were arrested on Sunday across Russia, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors crackdowns on dissent. Over the previous two days, there were scattered incidents of protest as some Russians set fire to voting booths or poured green dye into ballot boxes.

Opponents posted some pictures of ballots spoiled with slogans insulting Putin. But Navalny's death has left the opposition deprived of its most formidable leader, and other major opposition figures are abroad, in jail or dead. The West casts Putin as an autocrat and a killer. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday that Putin wanted to rule forever and that the vote had been illegitimate.

Putin portrays the war as part of a centuries-old battle with a declining West that he says humiliated Russia after the Cold War by encroaching on Moscow's sphere of influence. Russia's election comes at what Western spy chiefs say is a crossroads for the Ukraine war and the wider West. Support for Ukraine is tangled in US domestic politics ahead of the November presidential election. Though Kyiv recaptured territory after the invasion in 2022, Russian forces have made gains after a failed Ukrainian counter-offensive last year.

Ukraine debates mobilising more men to fight Russia

KYIV: In a fight taking place far from the front lines, Ukrainian lawmakers are debating a bill that could make or break their country's fortunes in this war. The bill would raise up to half a million new soldiers, increasing Ukraine's standing army by half.

The increase is 10 times as many new men as the 12 brigades Ukraine raised for its 2023 counteroffensive, and it could enable the country to finally break Russia's stranglehold on its southern regions, cutting the front in half and forcing the Kremlin into a negotiation on Kyiv's terms.

Ukraine may have little choice because it is currently fighting a war of attrition experts say favours the side with greater manpower resources — Russia. It also seems likely that Russian President Vladimir Putin would raise more troops after his re-election. "Putin is... planning to mobilise more men, once the election is over," Tim Less, a lecturer at Cambridge University's Centre for Geopolitics, told Al Jazeera.

"Among other things, he has banned the exit of fighting-age men from the country and banned the antiwar candidate, Boris Nadezhdin, from standing in the election, for fear he may generate opposition to the war effort," said Less. "Putin appears to have concluded that further mobilisation is essential to press home Russia's advantage on the battlefield and that this is what he will do." With US aid stalled — perhaps permanently — by congressional Republicans, Putin may have concluded that 2024 was his year to win the war and that forces the moment to its crisis for Ukraine.

"It's been two years of hell for us," said Inna Sovsun, who sits on the Security, Defence and Intelligence Committee of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, where the bill is being discussed. Her partner has been fighting on the front lines since Russia's invasion and she supports raising more troops, but only if there's an end in sight for those who've already served.

"There are people who are leading normal lives. We would like to know there is a point in the future when he will be demobilised and someone else will take his place. This is being hotly debated and there is no answer right now," she told Al Jazeera. Ukraine mobilised men over the age of 27 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of the country on February 24, 2022. But only a third of its million men and women in uniform are on active

combat duty, facing what Kyiv estimates are 462,000 Russian soldiers, and Russia's Putin claims are 617,000. The rest of Ukraine's personnel are in supporting roles, including tens of thousands posted to the currently quiet northern border with Belarus, from where Moscow's original main thrust towards Kyiv came, lest it should be repeated.

A more efficient rotation of those in uniform might fill some combat roles, but not enough, says the military. There are also some tens of thousands to be gleaned from closing loopholes to the draft. After Russia's invasion, young men rushed to enrol in PhD programmes at private colleges and there was an uptick in marriages to women with minor disabilities. The committee is closing these and other exemptions.

But that is where the low-hanging fruit ends and the difficult decisions begin. Last December, after the counteroffensive failed to execute his strategy, then-Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi put the matter on the table, demanding half a million more soldiers. "This is a significant number," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after meeting his top generals, apparently unconvinced that the economy could spare them, or allies could train and equip them.

"I told them I need more arguments to support this direction, because this is a matter of people first and foremost," Zelenskyy said. The Verkhovna Rada had already passed a bill in the spring of 2023, lowering the conscription age from 27 to 25. Zelenskyy didn't sign it, and last month he dismissed Zaluzhnyi — it is believed, partly due to this disagreement.

"What Zelenskyy is actually doing is trying to leverage more arms from the West, which he sees either as an alternative to mobilisation or a precondition for this, while allowing his new commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskii, to assess the situation on the ground," said Less. Sovsun believed the lowering of the draft age is a foregone conclusion and parliament "will get it done by the end of March". The committee has discarded punitive measures included in a January 4 draft seen as human rights violations, such as freezing draft dodgers' bank accounts or preventing them from selling property — though a travel ban outside Ukraine will likely remain. The debate now focuses on creating incentives for enlisting, said Sovsun, such as guaranteeing six-monthly rotations and a term limit of 36 months. — Al Jazeera



LAHORE: Members of Punjab Assembly leaving after attending budget session.

Aafia case: IHC appoints two amici curiae

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court (IHC) has appointed two amici curiae in the case of Dr Aafia Siddiqui to assist the court besides coordinating with the ministry of foreign affairs and the American lawyer of Dr Aafia, Clive Stafford Smith.

According to a statement sent by Aafia Movement on Monday, a single bench of Islamabad High Court IHC comprising Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaque Khan here heard the constitutional petition of Dr Fowzia Siddiqui. Imran Shafique, advocate appeared for the petitioner. Mr Clive Stafford Smith and Dr Fowzia Siddiqui appeared through video link.

Hafiz Ahmad Rashid AAG, Ms Zainab Janjua advocate/ amici, Additional Secretary MoFA US through video link, Mr Assad Burki legal advisor MoFA, and Muhammad Hamza, AD US-II appeared on behaviour of the respondents.

The court order said that the ministry has further filed that as always remains unnumbered and undated despite a clear order to this effect passed on the last date. Learned counsel of the petitioner also filed today a declaration by Mr Smith, which apart from raising several points that necessitate MoFA's attention also brings to the fore the fact that MoFA does not have any visibility on the diaspora of Pakistani lawyers in top-ranked law firms who can be contacted to support Mr Smith's efforts. Further several other points raised in Mr Smith's declaration necessitate that this Court appoints amici to move things forward.

Accordingly, the Court appoints Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif and Ms Zainab Janjua as amici to assist in this matter. The office is directed to prepare a copy set of the order sheets from January 2021, all the declarations filed by Mr Smith and all the updates filed by MoFA, and to dispatch those both sets to the amici at the earliest. Mr Imran Shafique would ensure that the telephone numbers and email addresses of Mr Smith and the two amici appointed today are exchanged among them so that communication can commence, read the court order.

SC to form larger bench in sugar price fixation case

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Monday sent the matter of fixation of sugar price to the judges committee for formation of a larger bench to hear the case.

A three member bench, headed by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah heard the case. Sugar Mills Association's Counsel Shehzad Ata Elahi argued that a larger bench should be constituted under the Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Act. The federal government issued directives for fixation of sugar price across the country in July and September 2021, which was challenged before the court.

The lawyer said that the concern court gave judgment in favor of his client. He said that the Parliament was not authorized to fix the price of edibles as per the federal legislative list. The court decided to form the larger bench in the case and adjourned hearing for indefinite time.

Apex court serves notices to respondents: The Supreme Court of

Pakistan on Monday served notices to respondents including the federal government in a case against imposition of alleged extra taxes in electricity bills. A three member bench headed by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah heard the aforesaid case.

The petitioners' lawyer adopted the stance that further and extra taxes could only be imposed on unregistered institutions, adding that his clients have already been paying GST taxes. The law of registration couldn't be applied on petitioner institutions, he contended.

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah said that the court was serving notices to respondents to hear them on next hearing. Further hearing of the case was then adjourned till April 25.

Court adjourns federation's appeal: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Monday granted time to Sindh's Advocate General to take instructions from provincial government in an appeal pertaining to tax collection by cantonment board across the country. The court, however,

maintained it stay order against the order of Sindh High Court (SHC) for returning of the tax amount. The court said that the cantonment board could collect tax till next date under act of 1958 and adjourned the case till April 22. A five member bench headed by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah heard the appeal of Attorney General of Pakistan against the verdict of SHC into the matter.

The AGP argued that a presidential ordinance was promulgated in 1979 on property tax law of 1958. The ordinance was given constitutional protection in 1985 through the 8th amendment. He said that the tax collection by the cantonment board was a federal subject. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah remarked that why the Sindh government doesn't make this a provincial matter with an amendment. The court asked the Advocate General Sindh to take instructions from the provincial government and inform the bench on next hearing. Further hearing of the case was then adjourned till April 22.

Israeli military tells Gazans to evacuate Al-Shifa hospital

GAZA STRIP (AFP): Israel's military on Monday called on Gazans to evacuate the area in and around the territory's largest hospital as battles raged at the complex crowded with patients and displaced people.

"In order to maintain your security, you must immediately evacuate the area," army spokesman Avichay Adraee said on social media platform X, instructing "all those present" to head west and then south to a "humanitarian area." The Israeli army launched Monday an operation around Al-Shifa, with witnesses reporting air strikes on the devastated neighborhood where it is located.

Israeli soldiers "are currently conducting a precise operation in the area of the Shifa hospital," a statement from the military said. "The operation is based on intelligence information indicating the use of the hospital by senior Hamas terror-

ists." Witnesses in Gaza City said they saw tanks surround the hospital site. The Israeli army also carried out a November operation in Al-Shifa, sparking an international outcry.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians displaced by the war have sought shelter in the complex, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza. Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of running military operations from hospitals and other medical centers, claims the militant group denies. The Hamas government media office in Gaza condemned the operation, saying that "the storming of the Al-Shifa medical complex with tanks, drones, and weapons, and shooting inside it, is a war crime." The Israeli army has carried out several operations on medical facilities around the Gaza Strip since the start of the war.

The war began when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack from

Gaza on October 7 that resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures. Palestinian militants seized about 250 Israeli and foreign hostages during the October 7 attack, but dozens were released during a week-long truce in November. Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza including 33 — eight soldiers and 25 civilians — who are presumed dead.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel has carried out a relentless bombardment and ground offensive that the health ministry in the Palestinian territory says has killed at least 31,645 people, most of them women and children. According to the Israeli military, troops "were instructed on the importance of operating cautiously, as well as on the measures to be taken to avoid harm to the patients, civilians, medical staff, and medical equipment."