

Torkham border reopened

TORKHAM (INP): Pak-Afghan Torkham border has been restored for crossing after three hours. According to border security sources, passengers' crossing from both sides of the border has been continued. The border was suspended due to dispute between Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and security forces, sources said. The channel report said the traffic on the border was suspended for three hours today morning.



@thefrontierpost

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

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI

No. 64

Regd. No. 241

RAMAZAN 14 1445 -- MONDAY, MARCH 25 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

PM directs for foolproof security of Reko Diq project personnel, logistics

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday directed that security should be ensured for those working on the Reko Diq mining project and for the logistics and transport from Reko Diq to the Gwadar seaport.

He was chairing an important meeting regarding the Reko Diq mining project. A delegation of Barrick Gold company led by its Chief Executive Officer Mark Bristow took part in the meeting through video link.

The PM said consultations should be held with all stakeholders regarding the project at the official level and all the obstacles should be removed.

He said planning should be initiated for improvement in the communication infrastructure especially railway lines for utilising the minerals of Balochistan, adding work for the upgradation of the road network to link Reko Diq project with Gwadar port by road, should be completed at the earliest.

Wherever new roads were being constructed, the pace of construction should be increased, he remarked.

The PM said a strategy should be formed for the feasibility of a rail and road network from Reko Diq to Gwadar port. He said the railway line project from Reko Diq to Gwadar would make access to the port short and easy and as compared to Bin Qasim port the distance would also be less.

The new railway line would be beneficial for the mineral-rich district of Chaghi and the mining industry would expand, he added.

PM expresses delight in hosting Saudi Defense Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that he was delighted to meet and exchange views with his dear brother Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia who was Guest of Honour at Pakistan Day Parade.

"Congratulated him on receiving the country's highest civil award "Nishan-i-Pakistan" for his invaluable contribution to further strengthening Pak-SA fraternal ties," the prime minister posted on his X account.

He further said that he had conveyed warm wishes and greetings for Custodian of Two Holy Mosques King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"Pakistan and Saudi Arabia stand together proudly at all times and on all occasions," he added.

He sought a detailed briefing next week on the Reko Diq road and rail connectivity project. He also instructed that all hurdles should be removed at the official level for early completion of the environment and social impact assessment regarding the Reko Diq project. During the meeting, it was told that the feasibility of the Reko Diq project would be completed by December 2024.

Every month, 6000 containers would be transported from the Reko Diq project to the port. The concentrate pipeline of the project would be the second-longest slurry pipeline in the world. The mining company would construct the link road from Reko Diq to the national highway 40.

It was further told that the 103-kilometer Nokandi to Mashkhal road, which would connect Reko Diq to the Gwadar port, was 58 percent complete. Minister for Finance and Revenue

Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Petroleum Musadiq Malik, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Muhammad Jehanzeb and high-level officials attended the meeting.

PM wishes speedy recovery of King Charles, Princess Catherine: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday wished for the full and speedy recovery of British King Charles III and Princess Catherine. "The Royal Family is widely respected & revered in Pakistan. We stand with them in these difficult times," the prime minister posted on X.

Govt cognizant of addressing TB as public health priority: PM: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that provision of universal access to quality essential health services was the constitutional responsibility of the Government that recog-

nized the importance of addressing Tuberculosis (TB) as a public health priority. The government has implemented various programmes and policies to combat this disease, the prime minister said in a message on World TB Day.

"On this World TB Day 2024, I applaud the services of everyone committed to the fight against tuberculosis and reiterate our Government's resolve towards supporting the initiatives aimed at eradicating TB and improving the health and well-being of our citizens," PM Office Media Wing, in a press release, quoted the prime minister as saying. The prime minister said Tuberculosis remained a significant global health challenge, causing immense suffering and claiming far too many lives every year.

"It is crucial that we prioritize TB elimination in our global health agenda and allocate resources accordingly. Together, we can harness innovation, research, and technology to accelerate progress towards a TB-free world," he added.

The prime minister said that while they strived to provide equitable health services to their citizens, they deeply appreciated the role of the private sector and our global partners. "I call upon all partners, organisations, healthcare professionals, and individuals to unite in our efforts to end TB. We must work collaboratively to strengthen healthcare systems, increase access to quality diagnosis and treatment, and raise awareness about the importance of TB prevention and control measures," he stressed.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday conferred insignias of military awards upon 42 officers of armed forces of Pakistan.

'KSA, Pakistan discuss ways to further strength bilateral ties'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Defence Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud on Sunday said that he met with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and reviewed robust relations between the two countries and ways to bolster them.

On his X account, he said "We also discussed recent regional and international developments and efforts to promote peace." He also conveyed the greetings of Saudi leadership.

'Govt. facilitated masses with Rs 12.5 billion Ramazan subsidy'

NAROWAL (APP): Federal Minister for Planning Prof. Ahsan Iqbal on Sunday said the government had given Rs 12.5 billion subsidy to general public during the month of Ramazan, with ample stock of edibles items available at Utility Stores.

Talking to media during his visit to a Utility Store in Narowal, he said flour, ghee, sugar and other items were available at cheaper prices to facilitate the consumers. Iqbal said Pakistan was facing economic challenges and bearing the brunt of heavy loans. This is a vicious cycle of loans which consumes a big chunk of revenue collected from taxes, he added.

He regretted that the government of Imran Khan during his four-year tenure incurred immense damage to the country.

The heavy price for his incompetence is now being paid by the entire nation in form of financial constraints and inflation, he added.

President confers military awards upon 42 officers of Pakistan Armed Forces

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday conferred insignias of military awards upon 42 officers of armed forces of Pakistan.

Held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr in connection with Pakistan Day, the Presidential Investiture ceremony was attended by senior officers of Pakistan armed forces, government officials and families of the recipients of the awards.

The recipients of Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) included Lt. Gen. Mohsin Muhammad Qureshi, Air Marshal Abdul Moeed Khan, Air Marshal Tariq Zia, Air Marshal Ghulam Abbas Ghuman, Major Gen. Shoaib Ahmed, Major Gen. Naseer Ahmed Samore, Rear Admiral Habibur Rehman, Major Gen. Shazia Nisar, Major Gen. Ejaz Ghani, Major Gen. Nadeem Ahmed Rana, Major Gen. Waseem Ahmad Khan, Major Gen. Arshad Naseem, Rear Admiral Syed Ahmed Salman, Major Gen. Arshad Mehmood, Major Gen. Muhammad Atif Mansha, Major Gen. Javed Dost Chandio, Major Gen. Muhammad Irfan

Khan, Major General Syed Asif Hussain, Major Gen. Shehryar Parvez Butt, Air Vice Marshal Zaffar Aslam, Major Gen. Imranullah, Rear Admiral Jawad Ahmed, Rear Admiral Abdul Munib, Rear Admiral Faisal Amin, Major Gen. Muhammad Raza Aizad, Major General Muhammad Ishaq Khattak, Major Gen. Ch. Amin Ajmal, Major Gen. Jawwad Ahmed Qazi, Major Gen. Ahmad Bilal, Major Gen. Iftikhar Hassan Chaudhry, Major Gen. Ehsan Ali, Major Gen. Kamran Nazir Malik, Major Gen. Wajid Aziz, Major Gen. Muhammad Umer Bashir, Major Gen. Asad ur Rehman Afzal Cheema, Major Gen. Mushtaq Ali, Major Gen. Muhammad Imtihan Babar, Major Gen. Muhammad Farhan Yousaf, Rear Admiral Syed Faisal Ali Shah, Major Gen. Ahsan Altaf and Major Gen. Abeena Choudry. President Zardari also conferred Sitara-i-Basalat (posthumous) upon Captain Abdul Wali Shaheed, who embraced martyrdom during a terrorist operation in North Waziristan.

Peshawar based leadership of PTI calls on CM Gandapur

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar based leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur here at Chief Minister House the other day and discussed with him issues related to solving public problems of the provincial capital Peshawar. These problems included traffic problems, improvement of infrastructure, provision of clean drinking water, sewerage, security issues etc.

The leadership included Arbab Sher Ali, Shandana Gulzar, Meena Khan Afridi, Mohammad Asif, Fazal Elahi, Arbab Asim, Kamran Bangash, Mehmood Jan and others. Speaking on this occasion, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur declared Peshawar as the city of all the people of the province and said that Peshawar is the city of all of us and added that its development was one of the top priorities of the current provincial government, and result oriented steps would be taken to this effect under a well devised strategy. The Chief Minister vowed to make Peshawar a city of flowers again, and said that street lights in the provincial capital would be switched to solar energy adding that the provincial government plans on a plan to run local train to ease traffic congestion in the city. He said that discussions are underway with a private company to run the train on BOT (Built Operate and Transfer) model. The Chief Minister termed sewerage issue of the city as a serious one, and said that the entire sewerage system will be made underground to solve this problem on a permanent basis. Ali Amin Gandapur said that in order to improve public services delivery, hardworking and professional people will be appointed on the basis of merit in all autonomous institutions of the provincial government, while local government system will further be improved so that public issues are resolved at local level.



LAHORE: Former Governor of the Punjab Mr. Shahid Hamid calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Pakistan mulling over resuming trade with India, says Ishaq Dar

LONDON (INP): Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar hinted at Pakistan mulling over trade relations with India. He was talking to media in London after his participation in the Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels. Ishaq Dar, a former finance minister of Pakistan, remarked that the trade with India via Dubai and Singapore has been much expensive.

Trade relations with India were suspended since India's controversial move to revoke the special autonomous status of Occupied

Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. He said Pakistan's business class was eager for restoration of direct trade with India.

"We will take a decision after consultations with all stakeholders," he added.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the government would implement a five-year road map to put Pakistan on the road of economic progress and bring down inflation to lessen economic difficulties of the common man.

He said the 16-month govern-

ment of Shehbaz Sharif saved Pakistan from economic collapse after the bad policies of the previous government which devastated economy of the country.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said Pakistan had vision for nuclear energy since 1960s and despite the scrutiny of the world it continued to harness the benefits of nuclear energy. "Now the world is saying that nuclear and hydro energy are the safest and best for taking on the challenge of climate change."

Pakistan, Afghanistan to hold trade talks in Kabul as part of normalisation efforts

KBAUL (Monitoring Desk): A Pakistani commerce ministry delegation is scheduled to arrive in the Afghan capital Kabul on Monday to explore ways to remove obstacles in transit and bilateral trade, said an Afghan official.

Abdul Salam Jawad, spokesman for the Afghan Commerce Ministry, confirmed to Dawn.com today that Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi will lead the Afghan delegation. Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch confirmed that the Pakistani delegation, headed by Secretary of Commerce Khurram Agha, will undertake the two-day visit.

"Pakistan remains committed to promoting trade and people-to-people ties with Afghanistan," Baloch added.

Other delegates from Pakistan include Joint Secretary (Ministry of Commerce), Maria Qazi, Additional Secretary Commerce Dr Wajid Ali Khan, Director General Transit Trade and Additional Secretary of Interior Khushal Khan.

Discussions will be held on overall bilateral and transit trade, said the Afghan Commerce Ministry's spokesman. "We will take up the issue of a ban on several transit items. Pakistan has banned the import of certain items under the transit agreement. Around 50 per cent of transit trade has been decreased due to this ban and shifted to Iran," Jawad said.

The talks will be held amid efforts by both sides to normalise relations following Pakistani airstrikes in two Afghan provinces on March 18.

Afghan charge d'affaires Sardar Shokaib Ahmad rushed to Kabul to brief officials about his meetings in Islamabad. Shokaib met acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan

Muttaqi and briefed him regarding recent developments in the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, deputy foreign ministry spokesman Hafiz Zia Ahmad Takkal said.

"During the meeting, Mawlawi Sardar Ahmed Shakib, acting head of the Afghan embassy in Pakistan, shared the report of his recent meetings with the Pakistani officials with FM Muttaqi, and held in-depth discussion thereof," Takkal wrote on X.

"Following briefing, FM Muttaqi gave necessary instructions to the Acting Head of the Afghan embassy in Islamabad with regards to the existing situation and relations of the two countries," he said.

The Afghan embassy earlier said that Shakib met Pakistan's Special envoy for Afghanistan Asif Durrani on March 22 and "addressed recent challenges between the two countries, the revitalisation of political, commercial, people-to-people and other aspects of bilateral relations."

On March 11, Afghan Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi held an online meeting with Secretary Pakistan Commerce Ministry Khurram Agha and explored ways to establish closer relations, solve challenges and prevent the occurrence of bottlenecks in trade and transit between the two countries, the ministry wrote on X.

The Afghan Commerce Ministry said the two sides spoke about the progress made over the last two years. They discussed options for increasing the volume of bilateral trade, solving problems and removing trade and transit barriers, providing more facilities, establishing close relations between the public and private sectors of the two countries, and increasing regional cooperation.

The Afghan minister also invited Khurram Agha to visit Kabul with a delegation to hold further discussions on bilateral trade issues. Pakistani and Afghan business leaders expect the talks in Kabul will be useful.

Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) Khan Jan Alkozai said that the new government in Pakistan will address the concerns of Afghan importers. Alkozai mentioned a 10 per cent hike in import duty on Afghan transit trade introduced in October last year. He also complained about adding more transit items to the negative list.

"More problems for Afghan importers were created during the caretaker government in Pakistan. Pakistan and the Islamic Emirate should pave the way to normalise bilateral and transit trade," Alkozai told Dawn.com from Kabul today.

He said transit via Pakistan has substantially decreased and Afghan importers moved their business to ports in Iran.

Pakistani traders also urge officials to facilitate transit and bilateral trade with Afghanistan as it is a win-win situation for both.

Coordinator PAJCCI Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi recalled that in October the Ministry of Commerce, through issuing SRO 1380, imposed a ban on 14 items of Afghan Transit Trade which in a larger context constitute around 212 items, besides the enforcement of 100 per cent bank guarantee.

"The cargo goods were already covered under insurance guarantee and all the goods were going safely to Afghanistan for the last 13 years," Sarhadi told Dawn.com today. He demanded revoking the 100 per cent bank guarantee and the revival of the old insurance guarantee system.

CM Punjab orders crackdown on chemical string

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has ordered a crackdown on the making, selling and buying of chemical string.

The CM presided over a meeting in which law and order of the province was reviewed. The IG Police gave a briefing about the law and order.

The CM sought a report on the crime situation on a daily basis and directed to submit a report after evaluating performance of police officers. Maryam Nawaz ordered a zero tolerance policy about chemical string.

The CM ordered immediate action to ensure implementation of the law to stop open display of arms. It was agreed to formulate a foolproof mechanism against drug peddling during the meeting.

Maryam Nawaz directed to frame cases with an irrefutable evidence

against big drug peddlers, adding that the need to formulate a legal mechanism in order to check the online supply of drugs in educational institutions should be reviewed.

The CM stated that permission to establish no-go areas anywhere in Punjab will not be granted. She expressed her concern over the frequent occurrence of kite flying incidents and stated that she felt heartily grieved over witnessing the video of a child due to chemical kite string, adding that the lives of parents of the innocent child were ruined as well.

She maintained that a law exists for the eradication of kite flying but even then people were losing their lives. There is a need to undertake steps on a war footing to ensure implementation of the prohibition of the kite flying law. Mere a case is inadequate, the accused must

also be punished, she added.

The CM directed to take stern action for reduction in molestation cases. The accused should be awarded strict punishment in molestation cases. The unending torture incidents of children, servants and domestic violence are highly deplorable, she added.

Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Former Senator Pervez Rasheed, Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari, Special Assistant Zeeshan Malik, MPA Sania Ashiq, Chief Secretary, IG Police, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, CCPO and Advocate General attended the meeting. Secretary Home, Divisional Commissioners, RPOs, Deputy Commissioners, DPOs participated in the meeting via video link.

Freedom is a blessing and it is the need of the hour to apprise the youth: Saleem

F.P. Report

KARACHI : Director General Public Relations Information Department, Government of Sindh Muhammad Saleem Khan has said that freedom is a blessing and it is the need of the hour to apprise the youth about the importance of freedom and patriotism.

He expressed these views while addressing on Pakistan Day event organized by NCR-CET College. Director NCR Ghulam Mahmood and Editor-in-Chief of National Courier Aneel Ahmed Usmani were also present on the occasion.

The Director General Public Relations further said that the nations who do not have their own independent homeland are

being subjected to oppression. "We should thank that our ancestors dreamt of an independent homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent and made it a reality", he added.

He said that the day of March 23, 1940 is also important in our history because Pakistan was formed within a short span of just seven years of the adoption of the Resolution of Pakistan, which was the result of the dynamic leadership of the father of the nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

He further said that today the students have expressed their commitment through their speeches and songs with great enthusiasm that they will work for the development and prosperity of

their motherland, which is a very welcome thing.

Director General Public Relations further said that 20 years ago, competitions for speeches and songs were held regularly in colleges and universities, but now they have clearly decreased. "We should pay attention to this as such extracurricular activities are just as important as curricular activities and help in the physical development of Children", he opined.

Director General Public Relations distributed prizes amongst successful students in the quiz competition. NCR.CET Director Ghulam Mehmood presented him the shield of his institution. The national flag was also hoisted on the occasion.

Prof Dr Nadeem honoured with TI for his services in healthcare sector

KARACHI (APP): Former Executive Director of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), Professor Dr Nadeem Qamar has been bestowed with the prestigious Pakistan Civil Award Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (TI) in recognition of his exemplary leadership and remarkable contributions to healthcare in Pakistan.

Having assumed the role of Executive Director in 2015 until October 2023, Professor Qamar spearheaded a transformative journey at NICVD, elevating it to one of the foremost cardiac hospitals globally. Under his visionary guidance and with the steadfast support of the

Sindh government, NICVD became a beacon of hope for cardiac patients across the country.

Among his notable achievements, Professor Qamar initiated the pivotal step of offering free-of-cost treatment at NICVD since 2017, ensuring accessibility to cardiac care for all, regardless of financial constraints. His unwavering commitment to innovation led to the establishment of NICVD Karachi as the world's largest center for primary angioplasty and the introduction of stroke intervention program, previously unprecedented in public sector hospitals.

ٹینڈر نوٹس

1- ہیڈ کوارٹر خیبر پختونخواہ کے منظور شدہ ٹھیکیداروں سے جنہوں نے سال رواں 2023-24 کے لئے تجویزی فیس جمع کروائی ہو، ٹرانسفا رمز کی مرقی کام کیلئے میٹرل کی سپلائی جسکی مالیت چوبیس لاکھ نوے ہزار (2,490,000) روپے ہے سے ٹینڈر مطلب ہیں۔ ٹینڈر پریڈمپٹی کے دفتر میں مورخہ 15 اپریل 2024 بوقت صبح 10 بجے تک پہنچ جائیں۔ ٹینڈر مورخہ 15 اپریل 2024 بوقت 12 بجے تمام ٹھیکیداروں کی موجودگی میں کھولے جائیں گے۔

2- ٹرانسفا رمز کی تفصیل مندرجہ ذیل ہیں۔

ٹیوب ویل کی تفصیل	متعینہ لاگت
۱ ایف سی کیلیکس حیات آباد میں 2 عدد (200 KVA) اور 2 عدد (400 KVA) ٹرانسفا رمز کی مرمت کا کام	1,500,000 روپے
۲ قلعہ بالا لاہر میں 2 عدد (200 KVA) ٹرانسفا رمز کی مرمت کا کام	990,000 روپے
ٹوٹل	2,490,000 روپے

میجر برائے انٹیکورپز جنرل فیئر کور (ناٹھ) اسامہ یازدلی



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Industries and Production's Rana Tanveer Hussain visit of USC Store at Shadman. —APP Photo

Federal minister sees decline in inflation next year

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain expressed optimism about a decrease in inflation within the next year.

Speaking to the media following his visit to a Utility Stores Corporation outlet here on Sunday, he emphasized that despite the current challenges, inflation would be effectively managed within a year and a half. He projected that by the end of 2025, inflation would ideally be reduced to a single digit. Highlighting government initiatives, he mentioned the increase in the Ramadan relief package to Rs12 billion by the Prime Minister, aimed at providing assistance to the public.

He also noted the efforts of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in initiating the Ramadan Nigebhan package. Rana Tanveer emphasized the availability of quality goods at affordable prices in Utility Stores, mentioning discounts on flour and the reduction in sugar prices. Additionally, he pledged to discuss with the Prime Minister the possibility of further increasing subsidies post-Ramazan to alleviate the burden on the masses.

Punjab govt to set up 'School Councils'

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has decided to recruit visiting teachers through 'School Councils' for schools under the first phase to meet the shortage of teaching staff.

The government would release additional funds around Rs4m to each school councils for salaries of the visiting teachers and the councils would also generate funds for meeting the needs of schools expenditure.

The school councils would comprise parents/guardians of students enrolled in these schools, as well as school teachers and members of civil society are supposed to make important decisions, of the recruitment of teachers collectively.

This is indeed something to appreciate as parents/guardians of students being important stakeholders have long been neglected by private schools despite charging hefty fees.

It is worth mentioning here that the incumbent Punjab government, through new schools' reforms, is trying to overcome the shortage of school teachers by hiring over 30,000 school teachers on a visiting basis and they would be given salaries per lecture, School Education Department (SED) sources told APP.

Habib Jalib's anniversary observed

LAHORE (APP): The 96th birth anniversary of revolutionary poet Habib Jalib was observed on Sunday.

He was born on 24th March, 1928 in Hoshiarpur district of Indian Punjab. Habib Jalib migrated to Pakistan in 1947 and started working for the Daily Imroz in Karachi. He touched the hearts of people through his simple yet attractive style.

Punjab govt announces a 90-day reduction in prison sentences

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government on Sunday announced to reduce the punishment of prisoners across the province by 90 days during Ramadan.

The Punjab Home Department has issued a notification to reduce the sentences of prisoners.

According to the notification issued here Sunday, it has been said that the punishment of prisoners, across the province has been reduced by 90 days during the month of Ramadan. There will be no relaxation of punishment in serious criminal cases.

Likewise, the notification further states that the prisoners involved in the cases of drugs and adultery will also not get concession in sentence. The prisoners involved in robbery and kidnapping, rebellion and espionage will also not get this concession.

CM felicitates Hindu community on Holi Festival

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday conveyed his warm greetings to the Hindu community on the auspicious occasion of the Holi festival.

In his message, the CM expressed his heartfelt wishes for the happiness and well-being of the Hindu community residing in the country, particularly in Sindh. Holi is widely celebrated as the festival of colors, which signifies love and affection, and provides a wonderful opportunity to bring people together, he added.

The CM Pakistan People's Party always raise voice for protection of the rights of minorities. He said the non Muslims were enjoying complete freedom for observance of their religious rituals in Sindh and the country. Syed Murad Shah said Hindu community was performing it's major role for the development and prosperity of the country.

The provincial government was providing all required facilities to the minorities, Shah said and added that all Hindu employees were paid full salary and pension in advance due their religious festival by Sindh Government.

He said the celebration of this day (Holi) here is recognition of the fact that Hindu community was living here in peace and prosperity and plays role for the development of the country.

CM Sindh takes action on tragic killing of six persons near Nawabshah: The Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has taken notice of the killing of six persons near Nawabshah.

He said, 'I am very sorry

that this has happened in the month of Ramadan.' According to a CM Spokesman, the CM had ordered IGP Sindh that a report should be submitted to him after conducting a detailed inquiry into the incident. Murad said that steps should be taken immediately to establish peace in the area.

The incident took place due to a conflict over agricultural land in the village of Haji Wahid Bakhsh Dahri near Nawabshah.

The IGP had informed the CM that the bodies of the dead and the injured had been shifted to the hospital. Due to the tense situation in the area, the district police were alerted and a heavy contingent had been deployed. It is to be noted that 6 people were killed and eight others were injured due to the land dispute in the Dahri community.

PFA adopted zero tolerance over sale of unhealthy chicken: DG

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has tightened the noose around the suppliers of dead and emaciated chickens in Lahore by placing screening pickets at the entry points of the provincial metropolis.

To monitor the ongoing crackdown against vendors selling unhealthy chicken, PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javaid conducted a visit to meat shops in Tollinton Market here on Sunday.

He said that PFA imposed hefty fines on two meat shops, served warning notices on 12 food business operators (FBOs) and issued improvement notices to two others. Moreover, the authority discarded 61kg of stale meat and 400kg of dead chickens during the operation. The meat safety teams will thoroughly inspect the vehicles transporting chicken flocks to local poultry shops in Lahore to meet the daily consumption. He said that the decision was taken to control the sale and purchase of sick, emaciated and dead chickens' meat by following the directions of Punjab Chief Minister.

The DG said that the authority took action against FBOs after recovering hundreds of kilograms dead chickens from chicken-carrying vehicles. Furthermore, the butchers had stored expired and malodorous meat in the freezers at meat shops, but the PFA took action by discarding all unhygienic meat in accordance with the Punjab Pure Food Regulations. Apart from that, FBOs also failed to present the meat supply record to the raiding teams on the spot, he added.

'We all have to strive for Pakistan's economic growth'

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Hon'ble Qaiser Ahmed Shaikh visited Port Qasim Authority on 24th March 2024.

Federal Minister was received by Chairman Port Qasim Authority and other members. Hon'ble Minister was briefed about the mandate and day to day affairs of the Authority.

Addressing the meeting of PQA officers, The Minister said, Asia is progressing fast than any of the region in the world, however, Pakistan is deprived of that progress and has been unable to reap the fruit of progress, hence, we all have to play our part in the revival of the economy.

Speaking at the occasion, the Minister cited China's example of how they took out 60 crore of it's population from poverty level. He deplored that still 95 million people of Pakistan are below the poverty level, therefore, he stressed the need for efforts to revive the economy. The minister highlighted the importance of PQA and it's role in the country's economy. He informed the audience about the industrial zones

being charted out in PQA where multinational companies can establish world class Industries.

Moreover, to boost trade, he told that dredging of the channels is being completed and berths are also being updated to facilitate the large ships at the port.

In addition to this, other projects such as terminals, industrial zones, berths, additional channel are also under consideration for the revival of economy through this port.

During his visit, the Minister also planted a tree at Port Qasim Authority Karachi.

Azma rubbishes Barrister Saif's allegations

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Information Azma Bokhari, responding to a statement of PTI leader Barrister Saif, stated that according to officials of Adiyala Jail, Pervaiz Elahi had fallen in the washroom and got injured. In a statement, she said, "Barrister Saif, before levelling an allegation on Maryam Nawaz, you should have read the report of Adiyala Jail officials." Azma Bokhari stated that Pervaiz Elahi's son had no worry about his father. "The tonga party has made a habit to level allegations of their every crime on Maryam Nawaz. She is much busy and has no time to monitor the activities of every worker of the tonga party. Maryam Nawaz is focusing her attention to serve the people of her province and does not care for her opponents. May it be Ali Amin Gandapur or Barrister Saif, everyone in the PTI follows into the footsteps of their leader. They play the politics of levelling baseless allegations like their leader," she added.

Faryal wishes Happy Holi to Hindu community

KARACHI (APP): Central President of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Women's Wing and MPA Faryal Talpur has extended Holi greetings to the Hindu community in Pakistan and all those celebrating this festival of colours, lights and the spring worldwide.

In a message on this occasion of the Holi, Faryal Talpur said that the message of Holi was love, brotherhood and peace.

She said that the services of Pakistan's Hindus community to the country and nation are unforgettable and prayed that may this Holi bring peace and prosperity to our Hindu brothers and sisters, leading to the interfaith harmony in Pakistan.

Four special trains on Eid

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Railways will run four special trains to facilitate passengers on Eid-ul-Fitr. According to official sources Pakistan Railways runs special Eid trains every year to facilitate passengers heading to or coming from Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Quetta.

A majority of those working in other cities, travel to hometowns before Eid and return to workplaces after holidays on these special trains. Railways high-ups have directed making necessary arrangements to give maximum benefits to passengers on Eid special trains. As per the official sources, the Railways will pass on the benefits to the passengers if petroleum prices are decreased before Eid.

World TB day observed

LAHORE (APP): World Tuberculosis (TB) Day was observed here and across the country like many other countries around the globe on Sunday with a renewed pledge to raise awareness about the disease to make Pakistan a healthy society.

In Pakistan too, tuberculosis (TB) takes thousands of lives every year. TB is considered to be the second deadliest infectious disease in the world after corona, however, TB is curable.

To mark the day, different seminars, walks, awareness camps and other activities were organised by various governmental and non-governmental organisations in According to the data of National TB programme, around 6 lakh cases are reported in Pakistan every year, of which at least 27,000 are reported to be multi-drug resistant types while around 40,000 patients die from the infection. The data further reveals that about 400,000 TB patients in Pakistan benefit from free diagnosis and treatment facilities every year and there are more than 1603 modern laboratories equipped with health facilities in all provinces to deal with the menace of TB.

Woman killing case:

AD&SJ acquits five alleged murderers

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Session Judge (AD&SJ) Peshawar Muhammad Sher Ali Khan acquitted five alleged murderers involved in killing of woman over lack of evidences and witnesses as well as contradictions in the facts of offense.

The counsel Syed Naeem Bukhari advocate argued the case before worthy Session Judge Peshawar. 5he case centered around a tragic incident, detailed in the First Information Report (FIR), where the complainant and her daughter-in-law, Mst. Amreena, were attacked in their home during the night.

The lawyer argued that allegedly, armed individuals, including Laiq, Haji Akbar, Miraj, Ahmed, and two unidentified assailants, forcibly entered the premises. They awakened Mst. Amreena, dragged her outside, and fired upon her, leading to her fatal injuries and subsequent demise on the way to the hospital. Following the crime, the perpetrators fled the scene.

The motive behind the attack appeared to stem from a longstanding blood feud. However, upon closer examination of the evidence, discrepancies emerged. Despite the recovery of empty cartridges and bullets from the crime scene, the prosecution's case lacked consistency.

The bullets retrieved were all of the same caliber, suggesting a single weapon was used. Nevertheless, the positioning of the accused in relation to the victim cast doubt on their involvement.

Additionally, the absence of any injury to the complainant, who was present during the attack, further muddled the prosecution's narrative.

Furthermore, the defense highlighted the implausibility of the alleged scenario, wherein the victim was taken outside before being killed. This raised questions about the credibility of the prosecution's version of events.

The defense's scrutiny and postmortem of the prosecution case revealed significant gaps and inconsistencies, undermining the prosecution's arguments. Syed Naeem Bukhari Advocate strategic defense not only dismantled the prosecution's case but also exposed the weakness of the evidence against the accused.

In a landmark ruling, the session court, acknowledging the lack of conclusive evidence and the doubts raised by the defense, acquitted Ahmad Khan, Haji Akbar, and Laiq Akbar. The decision, delivered under Section 265-K of the Criminal Procedure Code, highlighted the importance of a fair trial and the presumption of innocence.

The outcome of this trial not only vindicated the accused but also underscored the indispensable role of a competent legal defense in upholding Rule of law, constitution, justice and fair and expeditious trial, Syed Naeem Bukhari's exceptional advocacy served as a beacon of hope for his clients in their darkest hour, reaffirming the principles of due process and the rule of law.

Armed forces celebrated Pak Day with patriotic fervor across KP



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The spirit of Pakistan Day resonated across various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as special events organized by the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North unfolded with grandeur and patriotism.

In commemoration of this significant day, a series of special events were orchestrated by the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North in Peshawar, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Swat, Dir, and Chitral. The festivities commenced with the illumination of lamps adorning iconic landmarks, including the historic Balahisar Fort, evoking a sense of pride and unity.

The day commenced with the recitation of the Quran and heartfelt prayers for the prosperity and well-being of the nation. At the revered Balahisar Fort in Peshawar, a stirring flag-hoisting ceremony took place, symbolizing the unwavering commitment to the country's sovereignty.

The gallant troops of Frontier Corps North saluted the national flag with utmost reverence. In a poignant tribute to the martyrs, Inspector General Frontier Corps North, Major General Noor Wali Khan, paid homage at Balahisar Fort, honoring their sacrifice and valor. Major General Noor Wali Khan also extended his heartfelt appreciation to the families of the martyrs, acknowledging their unwavering resilience and patriotism.

Throughout the region, from Khyber to Chitral, the national flag soared high, embodying the spirit of unity and allegiance. Rousing rallies echoed through the districts, as citizens fervently expressed their love for Pakistan. Schools reverberated with the vibrant performances of students, who presented captivating tableaux encapsulating the essence of Pakistan Day.

In a testament to the indomitable spirit of the nation, banners adorned the streets, paying tribute to the founding fathers and heroes of Pakistan's freedom movement.

The events witnessed an overwhelming participation from diverse segments of society, including Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps North, district administration officials, local elders and students reaffirming the collective resolve towards a prosperous and harmonious future.

Partly cloudy weather predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): There is a possibility of partly cloudy weather in most districts of the province, said an official of the Meteorological Department here on Sunday. There is a possibility of light rain with thunder in the districts of Chitral, Upper Dir, Swat, Khyber and Kurram and during the last 24 hours, the highest rainfall was recorded in Balakot, 6 mm, Tirah 2 mm and Kakul 1 mm, the official of the Meteorological Department said. During the last 24 hours, the lowest temperature in Kalam was recorded as minus 4 degrees Celsius and Malam Jabba recorded 4 degrees Celsius, Dir 5 degrees Celsius and Chitral 6 degrees Celsius, the official said. He said, Peshawar recorded a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 29 degrees Celsius.

Chamkani police arrest kidnapper gang

PESHAWAR (APP): Timely action by Chamkani Police Station, a five member gang of kidnappers were arrested by failing an attempt to kidnap a citizen, official of the Chamkani Police Station said here on Sunday.

All the arrested accused are residents of Matni and Sadar, a suburban village, Police official said. The accused were trying to kidnap the citizen over a transaction dispute, Police said. During the initial investigation, the accused confessed to involvement in the kidnapping of a citizen over a transaction dispute, Police said.

Police have safely recovered the citizen Shoaib. A Kalashnikov, a pistol and a vehicle have also been recovered from the accused and a case has been registered against the abductor and investigation has been started, Police said.

7,77419 poor family registered in Ehsaas Program

PESHAWAR (APP): Food Minister Zahir Shah Toro said that more than 7, 77, 419 deserving families of the province were registered in the Ehsaas program under the Ramadan package here on Sunday.

He said this while talking to media men during the distribution of checks under the Ramadan package to deserving families. He disclosed that so far, checks worth Rs. 10,000 per family have been distributed to 100,000 families.

Zahir Shah Toro believes in real public service and not just claims and photo sessions. District administration and food inspection teams are checking and closely monitoring on a daily basis to prevent artificial inflation and substandard food. Ramadan package checks are being provided by Bank Al Falah, he said.

Organic food: A booming trend in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): The benefits of organic food and its positive effects on human life have drawn peoples' attention towards safe food that is also rich in nutrients and grown by traditional methods using natural ingredients beneficial for health.

With the new innovation and developments in medical science that unveiled the hazards of inorganic foods to humans is seen.

The scientists are still unaware about the real harmful effects of foods grown from unnatural ways but people are preferring food that is simple, pure and less contaminated by chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides.

"Agricultural products that are grown and processed without use of chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified organisms are referred to inorganic food," said Darya Khan, Provincial Coordinator at Nutrition International Peshawar while talking to APP.

He said such food was healthy, full of antioxidants and without allergens besides have lasting effects on immunity and life span.

Individuals who use inorganic food are more prone to various kinds of diseases and ailments and the best option was adaptation of home-based agricultural practices to get organic food, he maintained.

The survival rate and life expectancy of people living in remote areas is far better as compared to people living in developed cities, adding the average life span of population residing in remote areas of Pakistan like Hunza, Swat and Chitral are significantly longer and healthier due to their reliance on organic food items.

The food grown in natural ways was full of nutrients and devoid of harmful effects that increased immunity of human beings and protect them from falling prey to most common diseases such as cholera, diarrhea and other stomach disorders.

Besides Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and SAARC countries, he said that culture of organic food cultivation made inroads in Pakistan, adding the kitchen gardens culture at Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar was growing for organic food.

"In Ramadan, my first priority is to purchase organic food including banana, citrus and vegetables due to high nutrient value and free of adulteration," said Bakhtair Khan, former General Manager SMEDA at Faqirabad fruit and vegetable market at Peshawar.

"I have established kitchen garden at backyard of my house at Hayatabad from where my family collect fresh organic food," he said.

Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) report has revealed that organic farming in Pakistan has been growing at an average rate of 15 percent per year over the past decade and this is due to a number of factors such as increasing awareness about health benefits of organic foods and hazardous being caused by synthetic chemicals in conventional farming.

"The key principle of organic food production is soil health in which farmers maintain soil fertility through practices such as crop rotation and use of natural fertilizers i.e manure," said Sundas Manzoor, a diet consultant.

She said the approach enriches soil, ensure healthier plant growth besides making plants resistant to pests and diseases and increase immunity of consumers.

Organic farming relies on natural methods of production instead of using practices that are dependent on artificial methods of plant growth, she added.

The production and use of organic food is also a habit that helps promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity, said former conservator for Forests KP Niaz Ali Khan.

Farmers that use organic methods cultivate a variety of crops and utilize natural habitats into their agricultural and forest landscapes to support beneficial insects, birds and wildlife, he maintained.

Niaz said this diversity helps maintain a balanced ecosystem besides reducing need for unnecessary chemical interventions. These practices contribute to healthier animals and produce meat, dairy and eggs that are free from harmful residues.

Organic food farming also contributes to environmental conservation by reducing pollution, judicious use of water, promoting soil health and protecting wildlife habitats, he said and added effects of climate change could be effectively controlled by increased production of organic food.

The sales of organic packaged food and beverages in Pakistan has increased by 29 percent in 2020 as compared to just 2 percent growth in the overall packaged food market, said a report of Euromonitor International.

In recent years, consumers are seen preferring organic food for several reasons because they are healthier, safer and free from synthetic chemicals and pesticides, said Qaisar Afridi who has grown an organic kitchen garden in backyard at Gulbahar Peshawar. "I did not use synthetic chemicals or pesticides to control pests, weeds and diseases.

The basics of my production method is to use natural methods like beneficial insect predators, crop rotation and mechanical weed control to manage pests and maintain crop health, he said and added that production of organic food is labor intensive but benefits are more exciting as compared to time consumption and laborious work.

He said that organic food production also confronted with challenges like more labor and lower yields compared to conventional methods leading to increased prices and beyond reach of low-income consumers.

However, the demand for organic food continues to grow day by day globally as more consumers are becoming conscious of health priorities, he added.

He said that increase in demand of organic food substantiate the fact that people are now attracting towards healthy organic food due to health benefits.

Dr Fazal Wahab, Director Agriculture and Research KP said that Pakistan's fertile soil, especially in Northern Punjab and KP was most suited for production of different varieties of organic fruits and vegetables, adding that, the country's walnuts, chalganza, orange, locots, chauns mangoes and peas were being preferred in domestic and international markets due to their high nutritional value and better taste.

The wheat and maize flour of southern districts of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh were organic in nature as there is hardly any use of pesticide in it.

Dr Wahab cited a research study suggesting that amount of certain nutrients could vary between conventional and organic bananas, adding that the latter was higher in zinc, fiber and vitamins than the former.

"Approximately 1,000 organic plants, including herbs, saffron, aloe vera, medicinal and cosmetic are being produced in the country," he said, adding still we have to import different herbs plants to cater the needs of pharmaceutical industry.

Saffron, aloe vera and olives cultivation have been started in the country including KP where the market size of organic products had almost been doubled during the past few years.

The agriculture department has launched a mega project 'certification of agriculture products and organic food farming,' in the province under which farmers investing in organic farming are being imparted free training and certification services to explore new markets for their products inside and outside of the country, he added.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah presiding over a meeting. Secretary Health Mehmood Aslam Wazir also present on occasion.

Three drugs dealers held in operation

PESHAWAR (APP): Three drug dealers arrested in a joint operation of Hayatabad Police Station and Khyber District Police, ASP Hayatabad Nayab Rizwan said here Sunday.

He disclosed that half a kilogram of ice, opium, six kilograms of hashish and Rs. 600,000 in cash were recovered from the possession of the accused. During the operation, a drug supplying vehicle and weapons were also recovered, ASP Hayatabad said.

The arrested accused is a resident of Khyber district, where Jamrud Shah used to manufacture drugs in his house, ASP Hayatabad said. The accused used to supply drugs in different areas including Hayatabad, ASP Hayatabad said.

The arrested suspects include Rokhan, Idris, Noordal and a case has been registered against the accused with further investigation has started.

Six cases of power theft registered

PESHAWAR (APP): Major operations of FIA Kohat Zone with six cases have been registered against elements involved in electricity theft, a spokesman of the FIA said here Sunday.

As a result of the raids, 6 accused were also arrested. The raids were carried out by Composite Circle Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. The arrested accused identified include Muhammad Atif, Ziaullah, Muhammad Luqman, Khalid Usman, Hayatullah and Gul Islam, FIA spokesman said.

The accused were stealing electricity by hooking the main power line at several shops.

PESCO officials disconnected the illegal connections on the spot with cable and other equipment used for illegal electricity supply have also been seized, FIA spokesman said. The national exchequer was losing lakhs of rupees due to electricity theft. Raids were conducted in DIK area of Danpur and Niaz Chowk and Bannu area of Sarani and the accused was arrested and investigation has been started, Police said.

CM reduces power, gas load shedding

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A senior leader of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf and president Traders Federation Ghulam Bilal Javed, stated that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has indeed honored his commitment to the people of the province by reducing power and gas load shedding in Ramadan.

He emphasized that electricity and gas load shedding during Sehri and Iftar has been practically eliminated.

Ghulam Bilal stressed the importance of the KP Cabinet aligning with the vision of Imran Khan, just as the Chief Minister is doing. Practical actions should replace mere photo sessions. He reiterated that our current objective is to ensure Khan's release from jail.

A peaceful protest is proposed on March 30, not only in Peshawar but across all of KP, to expedite our mentor's release. During the meeting, former Cantt Board member and Vice Chairman of Peshawar Traders Chamber, Ghulam Hussain Chand, expressed confidence in Khan Sahib's supporters to follow his path. Despite their recent appointment as ministers, our ministers have already shut off their mobile phones.

They need to become true representatives of the people and learn to live among them.

He emphasized the need for a cabinet like that of Chief Minister Ali Amin, always ready to serve the people and the business community.

A significant number of members from the business community participated in the meeting. In conclusion, Ghulam Bilal thanked the business community and assured them that he would soon arrange a meeting with Chief Minister KP, Ali Amin Gandapur, where all businessmen can present their issues.

He expressed confidence that Chief Minister KPK's leadership would promptly resolve all problems.

PTI not satisfied with Punjab govt treatment of Parvez Elahi

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Adviser on Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif has said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is not satisfied with treatment provided by Punjab government to party President Parvez Elahi.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he talked about the reported accident of former Punjab chief minister Elahi. It has been reported that the PTI leader suffered injuries after falling on the ground Adiala Jail.

Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said the PTI leadership wanted to know facts; whether Parvez Elahi had an accident or he was tortured.

A team of doctors from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should be given permission to visit him in jail and examine his condition, he demanded.

The Advisor said that if the medical team was not allowed to see Parvez Elahi, the government would take legal action.

On March 19, medical report of Parvez Elahi was presented in the Punjab Assembly by the deputy superintendent of Adiala Jail.

The report, which included an X-ray, revealed that the septuagenarian leader had four ribs fractured after falling in the washroom.

First-ever night tourism event to be held in City

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Army, Archaeology Department and Tour Da Peshawar has jointly organized a night tourism event on March 30 at 8:30pm Peshawar Museum.

This event will offer the public an opportunity to enjoy Peshawar's historical sites, local cuisine, and music. The inception of night tourism will further bolster the tourism sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The KP government has granted formal approval for the decoration and embellishment of Peshawar's historic heritage, including the Storytellers Bazar, to pre-serve its historical legacy.

The Pakistan Army has already undertaken work to refurbish and adorn various historical sites along the Khyber Trail, including Mission Hospital Chapel, Ali Masjid Fort, and others.

The efforts made by the Pakistan Army to preserve the historical sites and promote tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are commendable.

Sanjrani condoles with Aimal

PESHAWAR (APP): Former Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, former Senator Behramand Tangi, Dilawar Khan and former Chief Minister Balochistan Dr Abdul Malik Baloch on Sunday visited Wali Bagh Charsadda and offered Fatiha for departed soul of mother Aimal Wali Khan provincial president Awami National Party (ANP), National Party Balochistan General Secretary Jan Balidi, MNA National Party Palan Baloch, President Pakhtunkhwa Wahdat Dr Sarfaraz and others visited Wali Bagh and offered Fatiha for the departed soul of the wife of Asfandyar Wali Khan and mother of Aimal Wali Khan.



In brief

Son kills father in Kohat

KOHAT (APP): A son killed his father in the jurisdiction of Bilitang police station Kohat on Sunday. According to police the alleged accused Muhammad Atif shot and killed his father Laeeq Shah. The body of the deceased was shifted to the hospital while the accused escaped from the scene immediately. The local police immediately reached the spot on the information of the incident. A case of the incident has been registered in Bilitang police station and investigation has been started.

VC visits Kohat University

KOHAT (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Nasir Mehmood visited the university on the invitation of Kohat University Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin. He visited various departments of the university, incubation center and youth development center and paid tribute to the University Vice-Chancellor and administration.

Police arrest 22 suspects

KOHAT (INP): In a recent search operation led by SHO Billi Tang Ayub Janan and in-charge Choki Shadikhel Khizr Hayat, Kohat police successfully arrested 22 suspects and seized a cache of weapons and drugs. The operation, spanning across Shadi Khel, Kamal Khel, Manda Khel, Daud Khel, and neighboring areas, resulted in the recovery of 2 pistols, 1 gun, 4 chargers, numerous cartridges, and 1.030 kg of hashish from the apprehended individuals. Following the operation, the detained persons were transferred to Billi Tang police station for further investigation. Subsequently, cases have been registered against the accused at the Billi Tang police station, as the authorities take decisive action against those caught with illegal arms and narcotics.

Lightning killed farmer

KHAIRPUR TAMEWALI (INP): A farmer was killed by lightning in Gulpur Talabani, a suburb of Khairpur Tamewali, Punjab, reported on Sunday. The deceased was cutting green fodder in crops for animals. The deceased person was identified as 23-year-old Mohammad Luqman.

Three robbers killed

HYDERABAD (INP): Three alleged robbers were killed when a vehicle skidded off road and fell into gorge on Indus Highway, police said on Sunday. According to details, the police signaled to stop a suspected vehicle near Khanot area in Hyderabad. However, the vehicle riders instead of stopping starting firing and attempted to flee from scene. In retaliatory firing of police, the vehicle got out of control and plunged into gorge resultantly all three robbers were killed on the spot. The bodies were shifted to hospital for postmortem and according to SSP Jamshoro investigations into the incident were underway.

Child electrocuted

SARGODHA (INP): The only son of parents was electrocuted to death during an attempt to catch stray kite here on Sunday. According to details, a child with steel pipe in hand was trying to catch a stray kite in Taqqi Park area of Jhal Chakian. The steel pipe struck high tension power line passing over resultantly the child was electrocuted to death on the spot.

Four members of family killed

TANK (INP): At least four members of a family were killed while another got injured in Tank district on Sunday. According to police, the firing incident appeared in Gomal Area of Tank where unknown armed men opened fire over a family as a result four members of the family died on the spot while another got injured who was shifted to DHQ Tank.

A security guard killed on resistance

A security guard was killed on resistance during a dacoity bid at a private filling station in Shakargarh city in Narowal.

The incident occurred at Bhaati Morre when a security guard namely Mushtaq was killed on resistance when unknown dacoity tried to loot a petrol pump.

Police after shifting the deceased to hospital, registered a case against the unknown accused.

Three held, stolen items recovered

The district police on Sunday claimed to have arrested three alleged thieves recovering stolen items from them here in the limits of Paroa police station.

According to the police spokesman, a team of Paroa police station led by SDPO Paroa Circle along with SHO Sibtain Hussain traced a theft case and arrested three accused.

During initial interrogation, the police also recovered stolen items including eight electric batteries, two electric mixers and three irons from them. The further investigation from the arrested accused was

underway.

Three drug dealers held, Ice recovered in DI Khan

The Dera police on Sunday claimed to have arrested three drug dealers, after recovering 399 grams of Ice drug from their possession here in the limits of City Police station.

According to police spokesman, a team of City police station led by SDPO City Circle Muhammad Adnan along with SHO Arsalan Khan Gandapur arrested three drug dealers named Sunny Maseeh, Qaiser alias Babu and Naeem recovering 98 grams, 97 grams and 204 grams of Ice drug from them respectively.

The separate cases were registered against the arrested accused.

Sono Pakhtunkhwa FM 96 station inaugurated

CHITRAL (APP): Deputy Commissioner Lower Chitral Muhammad Imran Khan, Commandant Chitral Scouts Muhammad Bilal Javed, Member National Assembly Ghazala Anjum, Director News and Current Affairs Sono (Listen) Pakhtunkhwa Aqeel Yousafzai participated in the opening ceremony wherein Sono (Listen) Pakhtunkhwa FM96 Station formally inaugurated here on Sunday.

President Chitral Press Club Zaheeruddin, award-winning snow skiing player Aziza Gul, Senior Journalist and known writer and Poet Muhammad Rahim Baig Lal, members of the Chitral Press Club and officials of the District Administration were also present.

The establishment of Sono Pakhtunkhwa Chitral Station will pave the way to highlight the social, educational and cultural activities of Chitral and their promotion in a better way, MNA Ghazala Anjum said during her address.

Chitral is a region of special geographical importance, listen to the broadcasting of Chitral and it will help the people to solve their problems, Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Imran Khan Yousafzai said.

Sono (Listen) Pakhtunkhwa will play an important role in making the people more aware of the sacrifices made by the soldiers of the forces for the defense of the country and increasing awareness, Commandant Chitral Scouts Muhammad Bilal Javed said in his address.

News, live programs, feature reports and other programs will be broadcast simultaneously in Chitrali, Pashto and Urdu languages in Sono Chitral FM96.

Chitral (PR) Snow Pakhtunkhwa FM 96 station was formally inaugurated in Chitral. Member National Assembly Ghazala Anjum, Deputy Commissioner Lower Chitral Muhammad Imran Yousafzai, Commandant Chitral Scouts Muhammad Bilal attended the inauguration ceremony held on the occasion of Pakistan Day on March 23, 2024. Javed, award-winning snow skiing athlete Aziza Gul, President Chitral Press Club Zaheeruddin, Director News and Current Affairs

Sono Pakhtunkhwa Aqeel Yousafzai and various political, government, social and cultural personalities participated. Speaking on the occasion, Member of National Assembly Ghazala Anjum said that the establishment of Sono Pakhtunkhwa Chitral Station would pave the way to highlight the social, educational and cultural activities of Chitral and their promotion in a better way.

Deputy Commissioner Lower Chitral Muhammad Imran Yousafzai said that Chitral is a region of special geographical importance, listening to the broadcasting of Chitral will help the people to solve their problems.

While assuring full cooperation from the civil administration, he said that his entire team will be ready 24 hours to solve any problem and support. It will play an important role in making the people more aware of the sacrifices and raising awareness.

Director News and Current Affairs Sono Pakhtunkhwa Aqeel Yousafzai while briefing the participants said that Sono Chitral simultaneously broadcasts news, live programs, feature reports, reports based on Chitral issues, culture, sports, history and public opinion in Chitrali, Pashto and Urdu languages would be broadcast.

Shopkeepers protested against 500% hike in rent



Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: The shopkeepers of Modern Shopping Center at Cantonment Board Kohat protested against 500% hike in rent while demanding reversal of the decision in larger interest of business community, on Sunday.

Protest against 500% increase in the protest demonstration, president of Anjuman Tajran Kohat

Cantt: Malik Mansoor Khan Bangash, Chairman of All Kohat Traders Union, Ameer Khan Afridi, Malik Dilawar Khan Awan of Bannu Bazaar addressed the 500% increase in rents. He called the Cantonment Board's cruel decision and described it as an economic murder of the shopkeepers.

According to the details, dozens of shopkeepers of Modern Shopping Center Kohat Cantt: in such a case,

the increase in rents is like snatching food from the mouths of the shopkeepers' children.

All possible relief should be given to the traders, otherwise legal action will not be avoided. To express solidarity with the strike camp, Member of National Assembly Shehryar Afridi and Member of Provincial Assembly Shafi Jan assured the authorities to give them relief.

Three suspects died after police encounter

JAMSHORO (INP): A car carrying three passengers overturned near Indus Highway following an encounter with the police, leading to the death of all three individuals on Sunday.

Police officials revealed that the vehicle was signaled to stop for a snap check over which the individuals in the car responded with gunfire.

However, upon retaliatory firing, the vehicle overturned and plunged into a

nearby pit near the Indus highway.

The police spokesperson stated that the deceased had been transferred to a local hospital for post-mortem examinations.

Meanwhile, the authorities also indicated their intent to scrutinize the criminal records of the deceased individuals.

Earlier this year, a suspect was killed while another was arrested during an alleged police encounter in Karachi's Gulistan-e-

Johar area on Thursday, sources said.

According to reports, the encounter took place between law enforcement personnel and robbers in Block 9 of Gulistan-e-Johar during which the police officials shot dead one suspect, while his accomplice was apprehended in an injured condition.

The police later recovered the weapons and looted mobile phones, and other items from the possession of the robbers.



KARAK: Head of Education and Research Department Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak Dr. Javed Mustafa delivering lecture during a celebration of Pakistan Day.

Army held free medical camp

KASUR (INP): Pakistan Army organized a free medical camp for the residents of Allahabad and its neighbouring villages in Chunian tehsil of Kasur district.

Numerous gynecologists and other specialized physicians as well as paramedical personnel examined and treated hundreds of patients at the medical camp.

Free medical care was offered, along with nutritional supplements and a range of diagnostic procedures, such as ultrasound and ECG. Over 1,300 people had examinations from doctors across different specialties during the entire day at the camp. People were grateful for what the Pakistan Army had done for the public welfare.

Doctors and paramedical staff also gave awareness lectures regarding hygiene, a balanced diet, and the prevention and treatment of various diseases including dengue.

The people also thanked the Pakistan Army for the free medical camps organized frequently in rural areas throughout the year. Organizing free medical camps by the Pakistan Army is a regular part of providing modern public health facilities and free medicines to poor people in remote areas.

Two die in separate incidents

ATTOCK (INP): Two persons were died in separate incidents in different parts of Hazro Tehsil, as reported by police and hospital.

In the first incident, a 22-year-old man, Muhafiz, fell victim to unknown assailants in Shamsabad village. Upon his return home, masked individuals hiding in the area opened fire, fatally wounding Muhafiz, who succumbed to his injuries on the spot. The perpetrators managed to evade.

Meanwhile, in the second incident, 26-year-old Noman Iqbal tragically lost his life when his car collided with a water tanker near Lawrencepur.

According to police sources, Noman lost control of his vehicle, leading to the fatal collision with the water tanker.

As a result, Noman passed away at the scene of the accident. Police have registered two separate cases and launched thorough investigations.

4 suspects held in murder case

KANDHKOT (INP): The police arrested four suspects in connection with murder of school teacher and recovered weapons from their possession.

According to SSP Bashir Brohi, police along with Sindh Rangers was conducting joint operations in Kachha area and village Jamal to arrest key accused of murder of the teacher.

He hoped that the murderers would be arrested and abducted people would be rescued soon.

The police official said that four suspects have been apprehended with arms during door-to-door operation in village Jamal.

SSP Bashir Brohi said that operation would continue till arrest of murderers and recovery of abducted people.

Polio vaccination campaign started

QUETTA (INP): Following the recent emergence of two polio cases in Balochistan after a three-year gap, health authorities are issuing an urgent call to parents and caregivers to prioritize their children's health by participating in the anti-polio vaccination campaign starting on Monday in 11 districts of Balochistan.

Despite significant progress in the fight against polio, the recent cases serve as a stark reminder of the persistent threat posed by this crippling disease. In response, the Emergency Operations Center Balochistan, in collaboration with health partners, is launching a comprehensive vaccination drive to ensure every child under the age of five receives two drops of the polio vaccine.

Scheduled to commence on Monday, March 25, 2024, the campaign aims to reach the children in Chaman, Dera Bugti, Hub, Lasbela, Nasirabad, Sibi, Jaffarabad, Kech, Khuzdar, Usta Muhammad, and Sohatpur. In this campaign, around 889656 children

will be vaccinated for which around 3378 teams will be deployed including 2641 mobile teams, 306 fixed-site teams, and 228 transit points.

Syed Zahid Shah, Provincial Coordinator of Emergency Operations Center Balochistan emphasized the critical importance of vaccination in protecting children from the debilitating effects of polio.

"The recent polio cases in Balochistan are a sobering reminder that our work is far from over. We urge all parents and caregivers to ensure their children are vaccinated during this campaign to safeguard their health and prevent the spread of poliovirus", he said.

He said that the polio vaccine is safe, effective, and essential in the global effort to eradicate polio once and for all.

By vaccinating children up to the age of 5 years, parents not only protect their own families but also contribute to the health and well-being of future generations, he added.

The coordinator also mentioned that despite all sorts of harsh weather conditions, polio workers have fulfilled their national duties with zeal and courage. The success of this campaign depends on the active participation of every member of the community.

Parents are urged to cooperate with vaccinators, ensure their children are available for vaccination, and spread the word about the importance of polio vaccination in their circle. He said adding that all teams participating in the polio campaign will be provided with security.

Syed Zahid Shah stated that the initiation of this special Anti-polio campaign is due to the presence of the poliovirus in the environment.

He urged the civil society, scholars, and religious leaders to ensure their cooperation, particularly in this special campaign.

It should be noted that in Balochistan, after three years, two polio cases have been reported in Dera Bugti and Chaman last week.

DFC visits Timergara fruits, vegetables markets

DIR LOWER (APP): On the order of the provincial government. Inspection of Timargarh market along with District Food Controller Sunday visited different vegetables and fruits markets and checked the price lists issued by the district administration and quality of the food items.

Talking to media men, DFC Kashif Ehsan said that on the orders of the provincial government to ensure the sale of food items to the

public at official rates during Ramadan and check the quality of the food items.

Deputy Commissioner District Dir Wasil Khan also briefed after the visits to different markets, District Food Controller Kashif Ehsan, who was accompanied by Food Inspector Shabbir Ahmed, said.

He said they checked Timergara Bazar, Hospital Road and shops of various vegetable and fruit sellers, butchers and chicken sell-

ers located on Mian Banda and Zawal Baba.

Notices were issued under the Food Act against the shopkeepers for not displaying the official price list and for exceeding the official rate and instructions were issued to all the shopkeepers to provide maximum facilities to the people in the month of Ramadan.

He said stern action would be taken against profiteering and hoarding.

Man, son killed in Bhawana

CHINIOT (INP): A man and his son were killed after they were buried underneath rubble while cleaning a well at Bhawana in Chiniot on, local said on Sunday.

Their bodies could not be retrieved even after the passage of 24 hours.

Umar Hayat, one of the rescuers, also lost his life when bricks fell on him.

To make matters worse, both the deputy commissioner and DPO Chiniot did not reach the site to console the families of the dead.

Seeing indifference on the part of the administration, families of the deceased blocked the Chiniot-Jhang road for all kinds of traffic to register their protest.

The protestors shouted slogans against the administration and said it left

their loved ones to die.

They appealed to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz to take notice of the incident and send heavy machinery to the area so that the bodies of those buried could be retrieved.

Father, son die in road accident at Taunsa Sharif

A speeding tractor-trolley crushed father and son, who were sitting on a motorcycle, to death on Indus Highway.

The deceased were identified as 18-year-old Muhammad Hanif and 55-year-old Allah Wasaya, who were going to the market to buy animals.

Rescue personnel shifted the bodies to Taunsa Hospital.

Police, however, chased the tractor-trolley and succeeded in arresting the driver.

DC visits markets

MARDAN (APP): Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayyaz Khan Sherpao Sunday paid a surprise visit to Fruit and Vegetable Markets Mardan early in the morning.

He monitored the bidding along with the officials of the food department and prepared the price list in his presence. On this occasion, he said that strict legal action will be taken against the dealers and shopkeepers who create artificial price hikes.

He further directed that Assistant Commissioners will monitor the bidding on a daily basis for which a schedule has been prepared. He said that the purpose of monitoring the bidding process is to control artificial inflation. He directed the officers to strictly implement the official price list so that people may get the essential items at reasonable prices.

Levies Force recovers stolen heavy bike

QUETTA (APP): After Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti took notice of the incident of snatching a motorcycle, mobile phone and cash from a biker in Barkhan, the Levies Force recovered the stolen heavy bike within 24 hours.

According to Deputy Commissioner Barkhan Flight Lieutenant (R) Bilal

Shabbir, the incident took place the other day evening in Chhapir area, where armed men took away the motorcycle, mobile phone and cash from the biker Inayatullah son of Bismillah Khilji resident of Quetta.

After the news of the incident went viral, Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti took notice and ordered the con-

cerned authorities to take immediate action, on which the Levies Force Taunsa Road Chhapir in-charge Jamidar Shah Zaman Khetran and his team recovered the heavy bike within 24 hours.

The motorcycle was recovered from the hilly area of Taghao Ror after the exchange of fire with snatchers.



Slovak presidential vote ends, analysts predict runoff



BRATISLAVA (AFP/APP): Slovak polling stations closed on Saturday after the first round of a presidential election pitting the Russia-leaning ruling camp against a pro-Ukraine candidate amid deep divisions on the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

Parliament speaker and former prime minister Peter Pellegrini and liberal ex-foreign minister Ivan Korcok, who is backed by the opposition, are the clear frontrunners among nine contenders.

Analysts predict a second-round runoff between the two on April 6 as neither Pellegrini nor Korcok is expected to clinch the top job by winning over 50 percent on Saturday.

Preliminary results are expected to be available after 2300 GMT.

Pellegrini is supported by populist Prime Minister Robert Fico, who has questioned Ukraine's sovereignty.

Korcok is staunchly pro-Ukraine like outgoing president Zuzana Caputova, a government critic who chose not to seek a second term.

After casting his ballot, Pellegrini said Slovakia would stay anchored in the European Union and NATO after the election, despite Fico's remarks.

"Even if we talk about a more sovereign foreign policy this does not mean that the course of Slovakia's

foreign policy should change," he added. Korcok, who would likely face stiff opposition from the Fico team if elected, said it was important for the new president to be given a strong mandate by voters.

Caputova told journalists she hoped her successor would "represent our country abroad well".

Though the office is largely ceremonial, Slovakia's president ratifies international treaties, appoints top judges and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The head of the NATO and EU member of 5.4 million people can also veto laws passed by parliament.

The latest opinion polls have suggested a tight race. An Ipsos agency survey indicated that Pellegrini would garner 37 percent of the vote, while Korcok would bag 36 percent.

Ondrej Putra, who travelled to Bratislava from Birmingham in England to vote, said the president was the "most visible representative" of Slovakia. "Ivan Korcok is a career diplomat with a consistent opinion. He is perfect for this position," Putra told AFP, highlighting Korcok's "reputation and contacts".

Bratislava pensioner Juraj Jankovich said Pellegrini would "put things in order in Slovakia".

"He is straightforward and he has never let people down. He was a calm and wise prime minister and he will be a good president," Jankovich added. Analysts say a Fico-backed president could further cement the government's anti-Ukrainian foreign policy.

"Pellegrini... will most likely act as an ally for the government coalition led by Robert Fico," Bratislava-based analyst Pavol Babos told AFP. "Ivan Korcok will very likely be a counterweight to the government coalition, he will use various tools to correct their undemocratic tendencies," he added.

The war in Ukraine since February 2022 has been an electoral campaign fixture that has split the country.

Pellegrini recently told AFP Slovak politicians were split into two groups -- those who want the war to continue and those who would prefer peace talks.

"I belong to the latter," he said.

His long-time ally Fico has over the years appointed Pellegrini to various positions, including parliamentary speaker and education minister.

The 48-year-old became head of government after Fico was toppled as premier in 2018. Korcok is a diplomat who has represented Slovakia in the United States, Germany and Switzerland. The 59-year-old has criticised Fico's calls to negotiate with Moscow.

"The Russian Federation has trampled on international law... I do not think Ukraine should give up part of its territory to achieve peace," he told AFP. In the final presidential debate, the two clashed over Ukraine, with Pellegrini urging "an immediate ceasefire and the opening of peace negotiations".

"Peace cannot mean capitulation," Korcok replied, adding that peace could come "immediately" on condition that Russian troops withdraw.

Though running as an independent, Korcok is backed by opposition parties who believe a Pellegrini win would pave the way for presidential pardons of government allies found guilty of corruption.

Southeast Brazil battered by downpours, more than 10 killed

PETRÓPOLIS (AFP/APP): A powerful storm has claimed more than 10 lives in southeastern Brazil, mostly in the mountainous parts of Rio de Janeiro state, where authorities on Saturday deployed rescue teams to deal with a "critical" situation.

The deluge came as Brazil, South America's largest country, suffers through a string of extreme weather events, which experts say become more likely due to climate change.

The storm caused a house to collapse in the city of Petropolis, 70 kilometers (45 miles) inland from the capital, killing four people, the Rio state government said.

An AFP team witnessed the rescue of a girl Saturday morning who had been buried more than 16 hours in the rubble. Her father, who was found dead next to her, "heroically protected the girl with his body," a neighbor and owner of a local bar told AFP.

"We are in pain, but grateful for this miracle," said Luis Claudio de Souza, 63. Other deaths were reported earlier in Santa Cruz da Serra, where a man drowned when his truck plunged into a river; in Teresopolis, where a resident died in a house collapse; and in Arraial do Cabo, where a person was struck by lightning.

Farther up the coast, in the state of Espirito Santo, officials reported four deaths. And in Sao Paolo state, two children were hospitalized for injuries sustained during the storm on Friday. Late Friday, Rio Governor Claudio Castro said the situation in Petropolis was "critical" due to

"intense rains and the overflowing of the Quitandinha River."

Dozens of soldiers with dogs were deployed to the scene, while schools opened their doors to the displaced, the governor said.

Some 90 people have been rescued alive since Friday, according to a bulletin from an emergency committee comprising Rio government and civil defense officials.

Images on local media showed rivers of water, mud and debris rushing down slopes in picturesque Petropolis, where memories remain fresh of a catastrophic storm in February 2022 that claimed 241 lives.

In the town of Mimoso do Sul, a fire truck was seen being dragged down a street by currents.

Forecasts predicted heavy rainfall

continuing Saturday in the mountains and north of Rio.

Petropolis has already recorded 30 centimeters (11.8 inches) in 24 hours, while other cities, such as Teresopolis and Mage, added more than 22 cm, according to official estimates.

The National Institute of Meteorology had predicted a severe storm, particularly in Rio, with rainfall of 20 cm a day from Friday through Sunday. Normally, the area receives 14 cm of rain in all of March. Rio authorities had declared an administrative holiday on Friday as the storm approached and urged people to stay home.

The storm follows a record heat wave, when humidity helped send the heat index soaring above 62 degrees Celsius (143 degrees Fahrenheit).



New gunfire hits Haiti capital as locals wait for talks progress

P O R T A U P R I N C E (AFP/APP): Heavy gunfire erupted early Saturday in the Haitian capital as residents, already enduring chaotic violence and grave food shortages, waited for word of progress in forming a transitional government meant to restore stability.

Residents contacted by AFP said armed criminals had attacked a base of the Departmental Operation and Intervention Brigade (BOID), a rapid-response force, in the Fort National neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. Another specialized unit in the capital area, the Motorized Intervention Brigade (BIM), was also attacked, locals said.

The scenes of chaos played out as the impoverished Caribbean country

continued a tense wait for the establishment of a transitional government -- part of a deal that brought the promised resignation of unpopular Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

A video meeting set for Saturday afternoon between members of a presidential transitional council, representing a range of Haitian society, with representatives of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was delayed until Monday, according to an official close to the council. The council members met among themselves Saturday morning, but were unable to reach an agreement on how the body will function. Henry agreed on March 11 to resign when the council is in place, but

negotiations over its formation have been slow despite pressure from neighboring Caribbean countries and the United States.

The council is meant to name an interim prime minister to oversee the country's first elections since 2016. The political chaos and street violence are taking place against a backdrop of increasingly desperate hunger.

Farhan Haq, a spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said roughly half the Haitian population faces "crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity."

Haiti has been rocked by violence since late February, when the country's gangs launched a coordinated offensive, raiding a prison and releasing thou-

sands of inmates as they demanded Henry resign.

Amid the sharply worsening conditions, more than 33,000 people have fled the capital area in the past two weeks, according to the UN International Organization for Migration.

A state of emergency has been declared in the capital region until April, while an overnight curfew has been prolonged until Tuesday, the prime minister's office said. Many foreigners have fled the country, and the US Embassy has been evacuating American citizens hoping to leave. The State Department said Friday evening it had helped 230 citizens leave since March 17. And it renewed a blunt warning to US citizens: "Do not travel to Haiti."

Senegal votes for new president after years of crisis

DAKAR (AFP/APP): The Senegalese go to the polls on Sunday to elect a new president in a totally unpredictable race after three years of turmoil and political crisis.

Some 7.3 million voters are registered in the West African nation where two favourites have emerged: the ruling coalition's former prime minister Amadou Ba and anti-establishment candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye. They were both once tax inspectors but now appear to have little in common. Ba, aged 62, is offering continuity, while the 43-year-old Faye promises profound change and left-wing pan-Africanism.

Both say they will claim a first-round victory -- but a second round looks probable with 15 other candidates in the field, including a sole woman, at a date yet to be decided.

Former Dakar mayor Khalifa Sall, 68, is considered to have an outside chance. The eventual winner will be tasked with steering traditionally stable Senegal out of its recent troubles, and managing revenues from oil and gas reserves that are shortly to start production.

Voting will end at 1800 GMT and provisional results could be known

overnight. The first official results are expected during the coming week.

Senegal has traditionally been considered a beacon of democracy and stability in the coup-hit region, where Russia is strengthening its influence.

Hundreds of observers will be out representing civil society, the African Union, the ECOWAS regional group and the European Union.

A raucous campaign, lasting just two weeks after being shortened, followed a dramatic last-minute delay to the election date, originally scheduled for February 25.

President Macky Sall's intervention to delay the presidential vote sparked unrest that left four people dead. Sall, who won praise abroad last year by renouncing a possible third-term bid, said he called off the vote over fears it would not go smoothly.

After weeks of political crisis, the country's top constitutional body stepped in and forced him to reset the date to March 24, despite clashing with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Sall's hand-picked would-be successor Amadou Ba has positioned himself as a last bastion against "bandits", and

urged people to vote "for experience and competence instead of entrusting the reins of the country to adventurers".

"We don't need officials who need two years of apprenticeship," Ba said at his final campaign rally on Friday.

"We need to consolidate what we have. We need to go even faster and further." He has vowed to create one million jobs in five years -- but he will also face the darker side of Sall's legacy which includes mass arrests, persistent poverty, with 20 percent unemployment and thousands setting off on the perilous voyage to Europe each year.

The recent unrest in Senegal was the latest chapter in episodes of violence since 2021, triggered partly by the stand-off between the firebrand opposition figurehead Ousmane Sonko and the state. Economic and social tensions, as well as concerns that Sall would run for a third term, also fuelled the unrest that left dozens killed and hundreds arrested. The election has also been fired up by a rapidly passed amnesty law that led to the March 14 release from prison of opposition leaders Faye and the charismatic Sonko. Although Faye is Sonko's

Hit by worker shortage, German city gets students to drive trams

N U R E M B E R G (AFP/APP): Seated before the tram's control panel, Benedikt Hanne, 24, deftly steered the red and white wagons, hours before heading to Nuremberg university to study for a social work degree. As an apprentice, Hanne was watched closely by a trainer, and the tram he drove had no passengers.

But if all goes well, he will soon become a fully-fledged tram driver moving people across Nuremberg in the evenings or at weekends, when he does not have classes to attend.

Squeezed by a serious

manpower shortage, public transport operators like Nuremberg's city service VAG have had to find new sources to expand their pool of workers.

The VAG needs to recruit 160 new drivers annually to run its metro, trams and buses.

For Harald Ruben, who heads the company's recruitment and training team, it was clear that "we won't reach this target unless we explore all possible possibilities".

The transport company put out an advert targeted at university students, offering a part-time job to drive

trams outside school hours.

To qualify, they need a regular driver's licence, be above 21 years of age, and be "reliable and suitable for driving and shift work".

Many sectors in Germany, like other European countries, are suffering from a serious manpower shortage which is expected to worsen unless urgent measures are taken. Public transport operators have warned they may have to reduce the number of buses, trams or metros as tens of thousands of jobs are expected to remain vacant in the coming years.

The worker gap has led public transport employees across the country to go on strike in the last weeks to underline their plight, with union Verdi warning of deteriorating conditions. Many operators are reporting up to 20 to 30 percent unfilled posts, with shortages contributing to a vicious circle of over-worked employees who are then falling ill, exacerbating the situation.

Other German cities like Mannheim and Munich have also begun tapping students as potential part-timers to fill public transport gaps.

UK Labour party turns to Thatcher in courtship of right

LONDON (AFP/APP): Margaret Thatcher remains despised by many on the left of British politics, but the main Labour opposition seems comfortable citing her as it woos the right before this year's election.

Labour leader Keir Starmer and senior colleagues have recently referenced the Conservative icon, highlighting the party's shift to the centre since Starmer succeeded left-winger Jeremy Corbyn.

In December, Starmer described Thatcher as effecting "meaningful change" in the UK during her controversial 1979-1990 premiership while foreign affairs spokesman David Lammy this week called her "a visionary leader". Such comments would have been unthinkable under Corbyn.

He also cited Thatcher in the 2019 general election but said her government "waged a war against working class communities in

the 1980s" and warned that "Boris Johnson's Tories are more of the same."

Corbyn lost by a landslide to Johnson and then quit as Labour leader.

Citing Thatcher is "a good way to signal that you are a completely changed party," Sophie Stowers, a British politics researcher at the UK in a Changing Europe think-tank, told AFP. The approach is also reminiscent of former prime minister Tony Blair's "New Labour" party of the 1990s and 2000s which embraced some Thatcherite policies. His successor Gordon Brown even welcomed her to Downing Street. "It shows a Labour party that is a lot more pragmatic than ideological," noted Stowers.

Labour enjoys double-digit leads over the Conservatives in opinion polls as the UK waits for current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to announce the date of the election,

likely in the second half of the year.

The centre-left outfit is pitching itself as friendly towards business and as responsible stewards of the economy -- historically not always seen by voters as the party's strengths.

It is also drawing parallels between today's Britain and the one Thatcher -- who died in 2013 -- took over when she became the UK's first woman prime minister in May 1979.

Then, Britain had just endured the "Winter of Discontent" when widespread industrial action calling for pay rises amid steep inflation resulted in rubbish piled high on streets and bodies left unburied in graveyards.

Today, Britons are feeling the pinch of a cost-of-living crisis sparked by high energy prices and inflation, stifling economic growth and triggering widespread strikes.

Harsher critics say the

Turkey's Communist mayor embarks on conquest of Istanbul district

ISTANBUL (AFP/APP): Fatih Macoglu, the popular "Communist Mayor" of a city in eastern Turkey, is now vying for control of a vibrant and hip Istanbul district along the Asian banks of the Bosphorus.

In 2019, he was elected mayor of Tunceli, a majority Kurdish Alevi city in eastern Anatolia known for being extremely secular and left-leaning. During his five-year term, he won plaudits for knocking down the doors of his office as a form of transparency.

This time, in the March 31 elections, he is setting his sights on the Kadikoy district of Istanbul, a bastion of the secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The charismatic, moustached 55-year-old is standing as a candidate for the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), which has no seats in the national parliament. In an interview with AFP during his election campaign in Kadikoy, Macoglu said his experience as mayor proved good governance was possible.

Under siege, Sudanese risk their lives to feed each other

CAIRO (AFP/APP): Sameh Makki's soup kitchen is barely 100 metres from the market, but it can take two hours to make the journey through Sudan's war-torn streets, often through hails of bullets.

The 43-year-old, his family and local volunteers have risked everything to get supplies to feed around 150 families caught in the crossfire between the army and paramilitaries.

"The only thing that matters is that people eat. If I had died while making that happen, so be it," said Makki. Since the war began last April between the army of General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, tens of thousands have died and millions more have been forced to flee their homes. Initiatives like Makki's are some of the only ways that people survive as the impoverished country hangs on the verge of famine.

Makki fled to Egypt to get medical care for his

daughter and left the soup kitchen in the care of his mother and young volunteers from the neighbourhood. Like many of his compatriots, he now coordinates donations from the Sudanese diaspora to send back to those trying to survive the fighting.

Shortly after the conflict's first shots rang out, young people began volunteering to cook in their homes, volunteer coordinator Abdel Ghaffar Omar told AFP in Cairo.

The idea quickly spread and hundreds of self-funded "community kitchens" popped up across the country. They were able to use grassroots neighbourhood youth groups called "resistance committees" that had previously organised pro-democracy protests and helped coordinate the Covid-19 response.

When war erupted, the committees created Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) to provide civilians in the line of fire with healthcare, evacuation help and food aid.

Most ERRs run their own kitchens, others help

with coordination and funding. International aid groups call them the front-line of Sudan's humanitarian response and the United Nations has said ERRs have helped over four million civilians across Sudan.

Several volunteers told AFP the kitchens serve anywhere from a few dozen to 200 families each day.

In the capital alone, tens of thousands rely on ERRs for daily meals, consisting mainly of rice, beans, lentils and the occasional animal protein.

Volunteers like Makki were occasionally able to broadcast mealtimes from the local mosque in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city.

The situation is starkly different just across the River Nile in Khartoum North, also known as Bahri, which has been under siege for nearly a year.

"The army thinks of Bahri as an RSF stronghold, and treats anything going in like RSF supplies," one activist told AFP, requesting anonymity in order not to compromise his work.

The Frontier Post

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Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town,
Peshawar.

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Pakistan’s sovereignty is supreme

President Asif Ali Zardari has emphatically stated that Pakistan will not compromise its sovereignty. Addressing the Pakistan Day Military Parade in the national capital, the President categorically told the world that Pakistan is a peace-loving and responsible nuclear state that seeks good and fraternal relations with all its neighbors. However, Pakistan will not tolerate any efforts by terrorists, any group, or a nation to destabilize our country. The Pakistani nation and its armed forces are always ready and capable of defending the country and responding to any aggression in a befitting manner.

The political and geostrategic dynamics in the broader South Asia region along with the internal Security dynamics in the country have significantly evolved over the past almost two years. There has been a sharp uptick in cross-border terrorism from the western border with Afghanistan, where the banned terrorist groups including the Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) are currently camped and attacking Pakistani troops and military installations in the country. Similar situations exist on the Pak-Iran border, wherein, Baloch insurgent groups camped on Iranian soil frequently illegally cross the border to perpetrate terrorism in the country. Historically, the proscribed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has become a major irritant in Islamabad's relations with the Taliban regime in Kabul as the militant group remained one of the major actors of violence in Pakistan after the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan. Amid such heightened national and transnational terrorism threats to the country, Pakistan externally faces new security threats from impending perilous outcomes in Afghanistan, shifting global power dynamics, growing Indo-US Strategic Partnership, advancing technology and rising cyber threats pose significant challenges to the country which is also embattled with serious economic impediments at the moment.

On the other hand, Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic ties and severe trade and economic relations with India after later revoked the Article 370 and Section 35A of the Constitution of India scraping special status of the Jammu and Kashmir valley which was primarily framed by the Indian government inline with the UN Security Council resolution the Kashmir dispute. Despite both countries possessing nuclear weapons, the probability of crises, conflicts, and the risk of a full flugged war between India and Pakistan always remains high. India aims for escalation dominance through advanced conventional and modernized nuclear forces causes serious challenges for Pakistan. Despite fiscal constraints and a simmering terrorism challenge at home, Pakistan strives hard to create balance in asymmetrical power equation and maintains effective nuclear deterrence against its eternal enemy so far.

Pakistan has displayed utmost resilience in the face of ruthless terrorism against its troops and innocent citizens whilst it did not seek escalation with India in the aftermath of post August 5, 2019 scenario. In fact, Pakistan's unnecessary lincency in dealing with the issues and other states turned the Pakistani soil a haven for transnational criminals, illegal migrants and unlawful enterprises. The Pakistani leadership has now decided in principle to protect national sovereignty and defeat the menace of terrorism at all cost. Pakistan's surgical strikes against Baloch insurgents inside Iran and the recent intelligence based operation against the TTP on Afghan soil is a clear message to terrorist outfits and the neighboring states that Pakistan will not compromise its sovereignty anymore. The terrorist and their sponsors will be dealt with the same coin and the country will use its full might and all available resources to protect its people, secure its interests and achieve its strategic objectives in the contemporary world. This is a right decision that will bring peace and prosperity to the country very soon.

Clean Drinking Water, Everybody Right

Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi recently announced several measures to provide clean drinking water to the citizens. On the eve of World Water Day, WASA authorities announced a wide range of measures to repair and renovate mini-filtration plants across the city besides timely replacement of filters, purification, and improvement of water quality. As said, WASA authorities are aware of the citizens' problems and the usage/importance of clean water in citizenry life, hence every effort is being made to ensure doorstep service delivery to the masses. Our country faces a water crisis due to a lack of access to clean drinking water, shortage, or mismanagement of water resources, and the worst effects of climate change which leads to water waste in case of glacier melt or either non-availability of water in case of droughts and desertification in certain regions. Poor water quality often leads to waterborne disease-causing 16% of child deaths.

According to a UN report, one-third of the 240 million populace do not have access to clean drinking water. The lack of access to safe drinking water and the presence of stagnant water in the streets lead to the outbreak of dangerous diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, dengue, and Malaria. In fact, clean and safe drinking water is of utmost importance for human health. Water makes up over 60% of the human body, it reduces body temperature and generates flexibility and mobility in the human body. Access to clean water is a fundamental right of all citizens. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.1 aims for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water. However, geographical and sociocultural disparities cause difficulties in the provision of clean water in rural and far-flung areas in the country. No provision of clean drinking water is a widespread problem in urban as well as rural areas across the country, which requires urgent action, investment, and a political commitment to ensuring the provision of clean drinking water to a cent percent population in the country. Although, WASA authorities have issued a ceremonial press release to celebrate World Water Day, yet their professionalism and commitment to the cause will be evident through service delivery to the public in the days to come.

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Netanyahu’s Israel is fast losing its American friends

Yossi Mekelberg

When a hard-hitting speech by the most senior Democrat in the Senate, one delivered from the floor of the chamber, is praised by the US president as a “good speech,” those who are on the receiving end of its tongue-lashing should take note, as if the words came straight from the mouth of the president.

Come to think of it, the heartfelt speech by Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, about the fallout from the war in Gaza could, and should, have been delivered by Joe Biden himself.

What Schumer stated, passionately and eloquently, could also easily have been pieced together from what the president and many members of his top foreign policy team have been publicly expressing over the past few weeks, albeit in dribs and drabs and without forming a coherent policy toward achieving an immediate ceasefire and establishing a plan for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians in the aftermath of this devastating war.

Following Schumer’s speech on March 14, much was made of his call for Israel to hold a general election, which for all intents and purposes was a call not only to get rid of the country’s current, ultra-nationalist government but for an end to the Benjamin Netanyahu era.

Certainly, he outlined four obstacles to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement based on a two-state solution, among which, as might be expected, was Hamas but also the Palestinian Authority, including President Mahmoud Abbas.

However, his forthright call for the change of a democratically elected government, in a country that happens to be one of Washington’s closest allies, was unprecedented.

Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish American in the US government, stated bluntly: “I believe that holding a new election once the war starts to wind down would give Israelis an opportunity to express their vision for the postwar future.”

Netanyahu’s response to Schumer’s portrayal of him — as an obstacle to peace who should be removed — was to call it inappropriate, coming from a sister democracy, and to declare that the issue was for the Israeli public alone to decide because Israel “is not a banana republic” — a claim that these days sounds more hollow than ever.

Firstly, the public is all-too desperate to make its wishes known at the ballot box, as has been repeatedly made clear over the past five months in survey after survey.

After all, who would not like to see a new leadership replace a government that has presided over the worst disaster in the country’s history?

Secondly, no other leader in Israel’s history has taken the country so far along the road to becoming a banana republic, through implication in corruption scandals and the distortion of good governance as a

result of cronyism and incompetence, than Netanyahu.

Moreover, he has no leg to stand on when he complains about intervention in the domestic affairs of another country, for he has done so throughout his political career, particularly with regard to the US.

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For many years they have been two of Israel’s closest friends and supporters, and in Schumer’s case representative of the segment of the Jewish community in America that wholeheartedly supports Israel and the very idea of a Jewish state.

Netanyahu might pour scorn on the current position of Biden and Schumer but the people of his country should not, not only because of the merits of that position, but for the price that might have to be paid for ignoring it. If in the early days of Israel’s independence American support was derived primarily from what both sides believed to be shared democratic values, together with a US sense of obligation to help ensure the security and well-being of Israel for historical reasons, a true strategic alliance subsequently evolved between the two countries. This is increasingly jeopardized every single day that Netanyahu remains prime minister. If the trend continues, the close relationship between the nations will increasingly come under scrutiny and, in addition, support from its Jewish community might also suffer long-term damage.

For months now, Netanyahu and other prominent Israelis have been dismissive of criticism about the contempt with which they have treated civilian lives while conducting the war in Gaza. They shrug it off as originating from lefty-liberal progressives who oppose Israel and Zionism. Whatever merit there might be in this view is very limited, at best, and by no stretch of the imagination do Biden and Schumer fit such a profile. For many years they have been two of Israel’s closest friends and supporters, and in Schumer’s case representative of the segment of the Jewish community in America that wholeheartedly supports Israel and the very idea of a Jewish state. Netanyahu might pour scorn on the current position of Biden and Schumer but the people of his country should not, not only because of the merits of that position, but for the price that might have to be paid for ignoring it. If in the early days of Israel’s independence American support was derived primarily from what both sides believed to be shared democratic values, together with a US sense of obligation to help ensure the security and well-being of Israel for historical reasons, a true strategic alliance subsequently evolved between the two countries. This is increasingly jeopardized every single day that Netanyahu remains prime minister. If the trend continues, the close relationship between the nations will increasingly come under scrutiny and, in addition, support from its Jewish community might also suffer long-term damage. As truthful and appropriate as it is to blame Netanyahu and his government for being so detrimental to efforts to reach a peace agreement based on a two-state solution, the very people who now level this criticism should ask themselves why it has taken them so long to reach that conclusion.

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Regardless, now that doubts about the value of supporting Israel without applying close scrutiny of its actions have entered the conversation between the two countries, they will remain a strong feature in the relationship, which might actually prove to be a positive development and put their relations on a healthier footing.

There is no suggestion that Washington is about to abandon its close relationship with Israel. However, the war in Gaza is demonstrating that the US should be extremely cautious about giving Israeli authorities carte blanche to operate however they see fit, whatever the circumstances, and should not provide the means with which to behave so irresponsibly and in contradiction of US interests, which in this case are also threatened by the growing possibility of regional and international instability.

Israel also needs to finally recognize what is now being expressed more clearly by US officials in general, and in no uncertain terms by Schumer: If Israel wishes to enjoy the full support of America, it must genuinely commit to a two-state solution, starting with the prevention of settler violence in the occupied West Bank and by halting the expansion of Jewish settlements there.

A significant, though long overdue, sign that the US is losing patience with Israel was its decision to impose sanctions on violent settlers and on certain settlements that are notorious for being breeding grounds for settler terrorism. It is still a very limited response but at least this Rubicon has now been crossed.

Most importantly, the new policy is not directed only at the settlers but at an Israeli government that allows them to act with impunity.

Netanyahu and his government have proved unresponsive to the voice of reason, even coming from its closest ally. Until now, there have been few consequences of this but the more often that straight-talking remarks, such as those delivered by Schumer and endorsed by the president, are aired publicly, the more they are likely to resonate with the Israeli public and the choices it makes in terms of its leadership and the direction the country should take.

The invisible costs of ‘Fortress Europe’

Hafed Al-Ghwell

Europe’s approach to managing migration has long been predicated on a delicate balancing act that aims to uphold the continent’s cherished values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law while simultaneously securing its borders against irregular migration. However, the strategies deployed to achieve these aims increasingly highlight a paradox at the heart of European policy.

In dealings with the Maghreb in particular, a region that is crucial to Europe due to its geographical proximity and role as a transit zone for migrants heading toward the continent, the EU finds itself in a catch-22 situation. The quandary arises from Europe’s reliance on agreements with local strongmen to curb migrant flows, a tactic that risks entrenching authoritarian rule and compromising the very democratic ideals the bloc purports to embody.

The thrust of this narrative hinges upon acknowledging the complex interplay between the European desire for security and its purported commitment to promoting democracy. Europe’s engagements in the Maghreb, and potentially beyond, exemplify this dilemma.

Even a cursory analysis of Brussels’ strategies to harmonize divergent European policies in North Africa reveals the bloc has often made significant financial and political concessions to authoritarian regimes in an effort to bolster the capacities of those regimes to manage migration flows, thereby effectively acting as gatekeepers for “Fortress Europe.”

While the immediate effects of such policies might seem beneficial to the EU in terms of its migration concerns, the medium-to-long-term implications reveal myriad “invisible costs.” These costs not only undermine the EU’s foundational values but also perpetuate instability and human suffering in the very regions it aims to stabilize. This predicament underlines a stark reality: In its quest to control migration, Europe might inadvertently become an underwriter of future despots.

By funneling billions into the coffers of authoritarian leaders, ostensibly for border management and migration control, the EU empowers these regimes, affording them both the means and the legitimacy to tighten their grip on power. The provision of external diplomatic backing that is often inherent in these deals further entrenches the regimes, as it is perceived as tacit endorsement of their brand of governance.

One of the most profound invisible costs of such a strategy has been the exacerbation of human rights abuses in origin and transit countries. Authorities in these places, often bolstered by European funds, reportedly engage in practices ranging from arbitrary detentions to torture and other extrajudicial abuses of desperate migrants.

Notably, the EU’s support for the Libyan Coast Guard has been roundly criticized for facilitating the interception of migrants at sea and repatriation to Libya, where they face appalling conditions in makeshift detention facilities to which humanitarian organizations are often denied access.

This assistance, albeit aimed at curtailing migration, inadvertently helps to uphold an ecosystem of well-documented abuses and violations of fundamental human rights that Europe repeatedly refuses to address.

Another troubling cost is the strengthening of authoritarian regimes which, backed by European funding and political support, might further entrench their power. The financial and technical assistance provided to these governments for the purposes of migration management often ends up supporting the security apparatus that suppresses opposition and dissent, undercuts democratic movements, and sustains exclusionary patronage networks.

Such provision of blank checks can make the EU complicit in the reinforcement of authoritarian practices and undermine the

prospects for democratic governance in a restless part of the world.

Moreover, the injection of funds into regimes with notable governance deficits and a lack of rule of law does little to address the root causes of migration, such as economic instability, high levels of unemployment and social inequality.

Instead, the focus on securing borders and migration control detracts from investments that could foster economic development and stability, reduce incentives for irregular migration, and ultimately benefit both transit and destination countries.

Furthermore, by channeling substantial funds toward repressive regimes, the EU risks contributing to the further economic decline and social fragmentation of already poverty-stricken countries, as governance becomes more focused on maintaining power rather than promoting development and welfare. A less-discussed spillover of all this is the irony of how the EU’s myopia in its “cash for migrant control” schemes will only make migration itself a very valuable leverage point, even for origin countries.

Recognizing the EU’s desperation to curb migration flows, governments might use the threat of loosening border controls, or even actively pushing migrants toward Europe, as bargaining chips to extract more favorable deals, aid or concessions from Brussels. These deals are often premised on vague promises to address the push factors of migration, which these governments are either unwilling or unable to tackle meaningfully due to entrenched governance deficits.

Lastly, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure that EU funding and aid are used as intended represents a critical oversight. Without stringent monitoring, transparency, and accountability measures, there is a significant risk that this assistance will not reach the intended targets, be they programs for economic development, capacity building or the protection of human rights. Instead, the assistance might end up bankrolling corrupt practices, enriching elites, and fortifying the security structures of oppressive regimes.

The implications of Europe’s current strategy are clear and profound. Firstly, it contravenes the foundational values upon which the EU is built, thereby eroding its moral and ethical standing both at home and on the international stage.

Secondly, it is a short-sighted tactic. While it might yield immediate reductions in migrant arrivals it neglects the root causes of the migration, such as conflict, persecution, the intensifying effects of climate change, and economic disparity, all of which are exacerbated by authoritarian governance.

Finally, the European approach risks fostering instability in the region. By supporting authoritarian regimes, the EU might inadvertently destabilize those very governments, either by bolstering opposition forces or by contributing to the grievances that fuel dissent.

The situation presents European policymakers with a profound moral and strategic challenge. The pursuit of Fortress Europe through deals with authoritarian regimes not only compromises the bloc’s foundational values but also risks long-term instability in origin and transit countries in the Maghreb, right on Europe’s doorstep.

Addressing this challenge necessitates a reevaluation of European migration policies, with an emphasis on options that do not sacrifice democratic principles for the sake of expediency. Moreover, Europe must invest in long-term solutions that address the root causes of migration, fostering cooperation and development rather than dependency and autocracy. Developing more sustainable, ethical and effective approaches to migration will not only benefit the EU but also contribute to global stability and prosperity.

Brazil’s ambitious G20 agenda is threatened by geopolitics

Since the war in Ukraine began, the G20 is widely considered to have been diminished in terms of its effectiveness, as a result of growing global geopolitical divisions. Nonetheless, Brazil, which holds the presidency of the organization this year, has been promoting an expansive, ambitious agenda, some elements of which will be hard to deliver.

Brazil’s G20 leadership year began in December and so is already almost four months old. One of the most ambitious proposals so far from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is the reform of postwar multilateral institutions, including the UN, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank. Lula’s argument is that the changing balance of global power, as well as the proliferation of conflicts around the world, means such a shift in the multilateral order is increasingly necessary.

However, such reforms have been discussed for at least three decades and will prove far from easy to deliver. While a growing number of countries agree on the case for change in principle, forging a consensus around specific proposals in practice is difficult.

For instance, one of Brazil’s ideas for reform of the UN is that the P5, the five permanent members of the Security Council (the US, China, Russia, France, and the UK), relinquish their power of veto if an issue under debate affects them directly. Presumably this would apply to Russia, for example, in decisions related to Ukraine.

This specific proposal is unlikely to receive the backing of the P5. One of the reasons why building a

consensus behind this, or any other agenda for reform, is so hard is because the permanent members have long been reluctant to embrace change and are increasingly divided geopolitically.

Nonetheless, Lula is pushing this agenda hard. The goal is to assemble a meeting of G20 leaders, and a broader collection of ministers, in New York City during the UN General Assembly in September to try to agree on a plan of action for moving forward.

Another distinctive way

in which Brazil is using its leadership of the G20 is by focusing on the sustainability agenda. This spans multiple dimensions of sustainable development, including economic, social and environmental, and includes the fight against hunger and poverty.

One key reason for the increased focus on food security is a gathering storm, including the effects of the war in Ukraine, that the former director of the UN’s World Food Programme, David Beasley, said is fueling a global hunger catastrophe.

Brazil sees itself as a genuine “agri-superpower” that can serve as a breadbasket for much of the rest of the world. Since authorities in the country made

Andrew Hammond

major investments in the sector in the 1970s, Brazil has become the world’s second largest exporter of agricultural products, specializing in produce such as meat, coffee and corn. Such has been its success, several large economies now rely heavily on Brazil to deliver many of their food needs. During his country’s presidency of the G20, Lula will formally announce Brazil’s intention to launch a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty.

The pinnacle of all this will be a leadership summit in Rio de Janeiro in November attended by about 30 heads of state and government from G20 member states and invited guest nations, plus top officials from international organizations such as the UN, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and the IMF. The biggest single challenge Lula faces as he attempts to ensure a successful year of G20 summitry is the geopolitical divisions that have grown since the start of the war in Ukraine.

These are just two of the platforms that form part of Brazil’s ongoing G20 summitry, which includes dozens of meetings involving ministers, other officials, and representatives of civil society from around the world.

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mitry is the geopolitical divisions that have grown since the start of the war in Ukraine. During recent G20s, tensions have run high over Moscow’s invasion, and have resulted in diplomatic fireworks.

In 2022 and 2023, G20 foreign ministers clashed repeatedly, with Russia’s Sergey Lavrov walking out of some meetings, and there were none of the customary group photographs of the so-called “G20 family.” With Ukraine continuing to prove so divisive, huge barriers remain to

still enjoys, despite the widening geopolitical divisions. Presidents and prime ministers from China, Germany, India, Japan, Australia, Brazil, the UK, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, France, Italy, Germany, Canada, South Korea, Argentina, Mexico, the EU, the US, and Russia will be in attendance at the leadership summit. Collectively, these powers account for about 90 percent of global gross domestic product, 80 percent of world trade and about 66 percent of the global population.

Lula is well aware that in the past decade and a half, while the G20 is widely seen to have seized the mantle from the G7 as the premier forum for international economic cooperation and global governance, it has failed so far to realize the full scale of the ambition some have thrust upon it.

In part, this is because it has no formal mechanisms to ensure enforcement of agreements reached by world leaders.

All of this highlights why 2024 is proving to be one of the most unpredictable years for the G20. While there is an outside chance it could all collapse into rancor, there is a greater possibility that significant agreements could be reached, building on the summitry that has taken place over the past four months.

Amid the uncertainty, what is certain is that the Brazilian presidency will continue to work to exceed the expectations placed upon it. Whether it succeeds in this will depend, for the most part, on whether the post-Ukraine divisions between the West and Russia continue to grow in the months ahead.

constructive discussion this year.

It is not only the conflict in Ukraine that is creating challenges, however. Tensions have long run high, too, between China and the West.

In this context of uncertainty, Lula is trying to make his mark as host of the G20. He has been helped in his efforts by recent supportive noises from Chinese President Xi Jinping, who said that he and US President Joe Biden must find ways to get along better in the face of the longstanding chill in bilateral ties.

Part of the reason Lula is so keen to chair proceedings and leverage his country’s presidency of the G20 is the prestige the group

Sinem Cengiz

2012 during his tenure as prime minister. Next month’s expected visit is considered to be crucial in settling any tensions between Baghdad and Ankara on political, security and economic issues. A delegation of high-ranking Turkish officials, business figures and representatives from various companies are to accompany him.

When states aim to push their relations to another level, heads of state tend to pay visits, often with large business delegations accompanying them. Although much of the focus is on what the leaders say during these visits, the most important task falls to the businesspeople behind the scenes, who drive the newly restored relations.

Iraq and Türkiye have myriad issues to address, including stalled oil exports, trade and water management. Ankara wants to institutionalize its relations with Iraq and plans to ink various agreements on these issues. The two countries also aim to create a strategic framework for all aspects of their relationship and establish joint standing committees on counterterrorism, trade, energy, water and transport.

Ahead of his visit, Erdogan signaled Türkiye’s intention to launch a military incursion into Iraq and

Syria. He said on Monday that Türkiye would “complete unfinished business” with the PKK and its offshoot, the YPG, in northern Iraq and Syria by this summer. Fidan also said that Iran may be included in the economic and security dimensions of the discussions, as Ankara often discusses Iraq and the issue of terrorism when holding meetings with Tehran.

Turkish officials have reportedly stated that Ankara’s main purpose in these operations is to eliminate the presence of the PKK, which has the potential to seriously threaten the Iraq Development Road Project — a planned 1,200-km highway and railway project that will connect the Arabian Gulf to Türkiye through Iraq. Türkiye aims to secure the area for the construction of the project by “killing two birds with one stone.”

Both Türkiye and Iraq, as well as the Gulf states, want to see the project finalized, as it will allow goods to be carried from Al-Faw port in Iraq’s Basra governorate to international markets via Türkiye.

The primary objective of the project is to enhance economic cooperation between Iraq, Türkiye, the Gulf states and Europe. This is in line with Türkiye’s economy-oriented foreign policy paradigm and makes Iraq a strategic

Ranvir S. Nayar

around the world continue to fail to monitor and control the way in which these products are disposed of.

It would be a colossal mistake to allow the current situation, in which nothing tangible is done to regulate the management of e-waste around the world, to continue. This so-far lackadaisical approach needs to change immediately but this will happen only when significantly more public pressure is applied to governments to deal with rapidly growing mountains of e-waste.

There is a clear path to get us there. Look, for example, at how, in face of growing public awareness about the mortal threat posed by increasing plastic pollution, many governments have now banned production of some categories of plastics and imposed strict rules governing the production, use and disposal of many plastic

products, most notably single-use grocery bags.

But in absence of any significant pressure on the electronics industry, the problem of managing e-waste has so far been largely ignored. Yet it is not the case that solutions are extremely difficult to imagine or implement. Europe has taken some initial steps to address this, all of which have been in the right direction, but they need to be tightened and enforced more strictly.

For instance, one of the biggest issues with electronics products is that, in wealthy countries at least, the cost of repair is often more than, or at least close to, the cost of buying a brand new product. In an attempt to tackle this, the EU has passed a law demanding manufacturers make it simpler for their products to be repaired, even outside of their own

EU’s world-first AI law to reverberate in America

Maria Maalouf

The European Parliament last week passed the Artificial Intelligence Act, which is viewed as the world’s first comprehensive law to define the legal aspects of AI. It provides for EU-wide regulations in reference to quality of data, transparency, human oversight and accountability. The law will apply to the providers and developers of all AI systems that are marketed or used within the EU, regardless of whether they are based inside or outside the bloc. Therefore, it will have implications for the use of AI in the US.

The act will impose fines on any company or group violating its rules. The exact amount will be a percentage of the global annual revenue that AI generates. The European AI law is being defended as not stifling innovation. Quite the opposite, in fact, as small and medium-sized enterprises will be adopting AI techniques. This will enhance innovation.

The European law on AI squares well with the main scope of AI, which is to achieve a competitive advantage in e-commerce. This will be gained in the processes of manufacturing, managing human resources, fostering customer relations and promoting advertisements and marketing. In other words, enterprises’ performance will be raised and this can increase profits, lower costs, save time, better collect data and reduce production and distribution errors, among other advantages.

The political history of the new act began in April 2021. It was the culmination of negotiations between the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. Agreement on the text was reached in December 2023. Last week’s vote in the European Parliament turned that political consensus into law.

Most of its bylaws will enter into force two years after its introduction. However, any provision that has to do with the application of prohibited AI systems will be enforced within six months of its signing into law. In addition, any of its stipulations in reference to generative AI will be enforced after one year.

The act will abolish several AI applications that are considered to be a threat to the rights of citizens. These are related to biometric categorization systems that originate from sensitive characteristics. This will also deal with the practice of untargeted scraping of facial images by the internet or in CCTV. Such a practice aims to create a facial recognition database. These AI applications will be forbidden, in addition to the techniques that AI employs to control emotion recognition. These methods are considered manipulative of human behavior and exploit humans’ vulnerabilities.

The law is a direct response to the proposals submitted by average European citizens to the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2021-22. Many of their concerns centered on how to boost the European economic advantage in a few strategic economic sectors. They wanted to improve their

ability to access information and data regardless of any particular trait or ethnic, political or religious affiliation.

The European AI Office will now be founded. It will function according to the European Commission’s rules. It will not conflict with the AI authorities and government bodies controlling the AI operations of individual member states. It will rather offer guidance on how European countries can best utilize AI and its capabilities. It promises not to discriminate against any European government or organization using this technology. However, political observers will not

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enforcement and migration authorities, and prohibitions so full of loopholes that they don’t actually ban some of the most dangerous uses of AI.”

On the other hand, the UN General Assembly is studying many draft texts as it seeks to announce a statement that can be a general declaration of humankind’s use of AI.

Finally, the European AI Act will have a great impact on any company doing business in the EU. Every American company must review its AI systems before they are used in Europe. This reviewing process could be costly and time-consuming. And American businesses cannot rely on US law because

there is no federal legislation that allows or bans certain AI policies. The US government and private sector companies have no other option but to abide by the European law. The only American alternative to this law would be to rely on state laws and regulations governing privacy in the US. But this would be a very short-sighted approach as far as AI laws in America are concerned. Therefore, the Europeans are far ahead of any other nation or group of nations in providing guarantees on how to use AI the right way.

The only smart choice in dealing with our defunct devices is recycling

Even as manufacturers of consumer electronics continue to line up new product launches several times a year, a report published by the UN this week revealed that the amount of “e-waste” generated around the world rose to a record 62 million tonnes in 2022.

The researchers found the amount of such waste had increased by 82 percent since 2010 and will continue to grow; by 2030, they predicted the total amount of e-waste generated around the world each year will rise by a further 30 percent to 82 million tonnes.

Even more worrying, the report states that barely 1 percent of global demand for rare earth elements, most notably lithium and nickel, which are key components in the manufacture of batteries, and a host of other key minerals needed for electronic gadgets is currently met by recycled materials.

This means almost all of these materials used for manufacturing electronics end up on ever-growing garbage heaps around the world. The amount of waste generated is increasing five times as fast as recycling.

The amount of e-waste we produce is growing by 2.6 million tonnes a year and only 22.3 percent of it was recycled in 2022. Not only did this waste come at a cost of more than \$62 billion in 2022 alone, it poses a huge threat to the health of humans and all other forms of life on the planet.

Discarded products with plugs or batteries contain toxic and hazardous substances such as mercury, lead, lithium, benzene and many other chemicals known to cause damage to the brain and other body functions.

The publication of the UN report could not come soon enough. In recent years, the widespread adoption of electronics in all

aspects of our lives has accelerated tremendously. This includes a significant increase in the adoption of electric vehicles; although they still represent a small percentage of the motor vehicles produced each year, the numbers will only increase. Add to this the growing use of electronics and smart devices in all spheres of business, our homes and even public spaces, and we can expect a multifold increase in the global consumption of the materials used to manufacture these devices in the next few years.

From ever-more powerful computers, cameras and smartphones and the growing adoption of e-vehicles to the increased use of artificial intelligence and software-driven services, many more computer chips and batteries will be produced all around the world, a large proportion of which will end up in landfill if governments and regulators

around the world continue to fail to monitor and control the way in which these products are disposed of.

It would be a colossal mistake to allow the current situation, in which nothing tangible is done to regulate the management of e-waste around the world, to continue. This so-far lackadaisical approach needs to change immediately but this will happen only when significantly more public pressure is applied to governments to deal with rapidly growing mountains of e-waste.

There is a clear path to get us there. Look, for example, at how, in face of growing public awareness about the mortal threat posed by increasing plastic pollution, many governments have now banned production of some categories of plastics and imposed strict rules governing the production, use and disposal of many plastic

official service networks. It has also introduced a mandatory requirement that companies ensure sufficient supplies of spare parts for their products are available for a set period of time — say 5 or 10 years — so that consumers know devices can be repaired even when they are no longer the latest model. Another requirement that has been introduced by the EU, again a no-brainer, is standardization of at least common accessories, such as chargers, across all brands. From the end of this year, for example, it will be mandatory for all smartphones, tablets and digital cameras to come with a USB-C charger.

This measure alone is expected to reduce e-waste in the EU region by at least 11,000 tonnes a year. This might seem like a very small amount, compared with the 62 million tonnes of e-waste generated annually, but it will be through the adoption of small measures such as this that the issue of e-waste will be tackled, to a large extent.

Another measure, which could be implemented even in the face of opposition from manufacturers, is to make companies more responsible for all their products throughout their life cycles, even after they stop working or when consumers want to replace them with upgraded versions. Governments can enact legislation making it mandatory for manufacturers to “buy back” old products when consumers upgrade to a newer version, or even if they simply decide to stop using it.

Electronic goods contain a lot of valuable metals that can be extracted, recycled or reused in the manufacture of new products. By making it mandatory for manufacturers to buy back old versions of their products, therefore, governments can ensure companies invest in creating a so-

called “reverse supply chain,” the purpose of which is to obtain used products from consumers, return them to the factory and recover the valuable parts and materials that can be recycled and reused.

Certainly, businesses might be opposed to some of these measures, not least because their margins are best served by selling regularly upgraded new products, and recovering and recycling their older products would force them to invest in services and processes that are nowhere near as glamorous as an exciting new product launch. But the challenges the world faces in finding ways to deal with the rapidly rising amount of e-waste in a safe manner are now so many and so large that regulators and governments must cast aside any concerns about glamour and prestige, and instead display some grit in grappling with the problem.

Persistent fiscal deficit, debt repayments cause high gross financing: PIAF

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol has observed that persistent fiscal deficits and debt repayments have resulted in consistently high annual gross financing needs, averaging 27 percent of GDP over the past decade. This level is notably higher than the emerging market threshold of 15 percent. He said that the growing debt stock carries significant fiscal costs and exposes the country to debt vulnerabilities.

The leader of the PIAF said that in the past two decades, Pakistan has witnessed two consecutive years of the highest budget deficits in 2022 and 2023. He pointed out that for the current fiscal year, a budget deficit of 7.7 percent of the GDP is anticipated, a staggering Rs1.3 trillion above the government's target. He expressed concerns over these persistent large budget shortfalls, which have led to the rapid accumulation of public debt. This, in turn, has crowded out private investment and contributed to macroeconomic volatility. Referring to the SBP data, he unveiled an alarming 39 percent increase in the external debt

of the federal government, reaching Rs24.2 trillion within a year. A substantial Rs6.7 trillion increase in external debt was primarily attributed to currency depreciation. As of Dec 2023, external debt stood at Rs17.4 trillion, excluding the International Monetary Fund's liabilities.

Out of the total external public debt of \$85.18 billion, the government owed \$64 billion to multilateral and bilateral development partners including IMF which meant more than two-thirds of the total external public debt was on concessional terms with a longer maturity, 16pc from international capital markets and foreign commercial banks, and 7 percent of the total external public debt constitutes deposits from friendly countries like China and Saudi Arabia.

Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that this unsettling trend has raised concerns about fiscal sustainability and the adverse impacts of steep currency devaluation come at a time when the World Bank has cautioned Pakistan about the growing risks of its macroeconomic framework. For the past one and half year, the country is facing a serious financial crunch and continually relying on borrowing to

meet its financial needs. He said that high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for businesses, as ever-increasing cost of production is the real threat to the economy amidst frequent upward revisions in policy rate and continuous fluctuations in rupee against dollar.

The PIAF Chairman said that the government liquidity and external vulnerability risks are elevated and there remain considerable risks around to secure required financing to fully meet its needs for the next few years. He said that constant hike in power tariff has pushed the electricity prices higher and added to the already soaring cost of trade and industry. He asked the government to shut down all expensive oil-based power plants to ensure availability of cheaper energy for consumers.

He condemned the government for shifting power distribution companies' inefficiencies' burden to the consumers by jacking up the tariff under the guise of Fuel Charges Adjustment. He observed that the aggressive economic measures, high borrowing rates, inflation, oppressive taxation and unstable currency have been negatively affecting running businesses.

With a view to deal with fiscal challenges he asked the economic managers to work on the three-way strategy by implementing short-term goals that will help to keep generating resources for smooth fiscal operations, medium-term goals where they should focus on financial inclusion, documenting the economy by designing a system where all businesses can be registered and properly document their income including collection of sales tax, initiating the process of privatization as well as improving governance by introducing reforms in each sector. As a long-term goal, the country must focus on improving its human capital, and revamping IT sectors by extending facilitations and providing all the requisite supports. In the same way, we also need to work on designing a comprehensive and proactive strategy to tackle challenges related to strengthening border security and implementing effective and comprehensive Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing measures holding accountable and taking to task all those who are involved in illegitimate activities, undermining both our economy and national interests.



ISLAMABAD: A labourer loading sack of potatoes on a delivery truck at Fruit and Vegetable Market.

55 gas connections disconnected

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 55 connections; Rs1.3 million fine imposed. In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while another 2 on use of compressor. In Multan 4 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 5 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs0.166 million against gas pilfers.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 30 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs1.0726 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal two connections were disconnected illegal use of gas.

In Sheikhupura 8 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs0.0120 million booked against gas theft cases.

In Faisalabad the team disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while imposing fine of Rs0.163 have been booked against gas pilfers.

China's price index edges down

BEIJING (APP): The index tracking the development of China's bulk commodity market edged down in February, industry data showed.

The index tracking the country's bulk commodity prices stood at 111.4 last month, dipping 0.7 percent month on month, according to the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

It attributed the price drop to the decrease of demand during the Chinese New Year holiday. The government's counter-cyclical adjustment policies are gradually taking effect and enterprises' production is becoming increasingly active after the holiday, the federation said, holding positive expectations for the price index in the next stage.

Bikulon sees vast scope in pharma, textile sectors

LAHORE (APP): Head of Regional Development and Investment Attractive Department of National Investment Agency Kyrgyzstan Bikulon Damirbek said the pharmaceutical and textile sectors of Pakistan hold vast scope for bilateral trade with Kyrgyzstan, having a wide array of opportunities for economic cooperation between the two countries.

He stated this while talking to a Pak trade delegation led by Kyrgyz honorary Consul Meher Kashif Younis, currently visiting Kyrgyz to explore the potentials of enhancing bilateral trade, said the consul's spokesman here Sunday.

Bikulon said Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector is one of the largest in the Islamic world, with a diverse range of products catering to both domestic and international markets. Its pharmaceutical companies have developed expertise in producing high-quality

generic drugs, which could address Kyrgyzstan's healthcare needs. By exploring partnerships and collaborations in this sector, Kyrgyzstan could gain access to affordable medicines while Pakistan could expand its market presence in Central Asia.

Bikulon said exploring the vast scope of Pakistan's pharmaceuticals and textile industry in Kyrgyzstan requires concerted efforts from both governments to facilitate trade and investment. This could involve initiatives such as trade delegations, joint ventures, and the establishment of trade agreements to create a conducive environment for business collaboration.

He was of the view that enhanced connectivity through improved transportation links and logistical infrastructure would further facilitate trade between the two countries, asserting that investments in transportation corridors

and border facilitation measures would reduce trade barriers and enhance the efficiency of cross-border trade.

On this occasion, Meher Kashif Younis said that Pakistan's pharmaceuticals and textile industry in Kyrgyzstan offer a significant opportunity to strengthen bilateral trade and economic ties.

"Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan can unlock new avenues for economic growth and prosperity by tapping into each others potential and fostering collaboration."

He said Pakistan's textile industry is a cornerstone of its economy, accounting for a significant portion of its exports. With a well-established infrastructure and skilled workforce, Pakistan produces a variety of textile products. Kyrgyzstan, with its strategic location in Central Asia, could serve as a gateway for Pakistani textile exports to reach other countries in the region.

Pakistani dealer impressed by innovative products

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

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

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

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

also interacted with several exhibitors and learned about the latest advancements in smart home technology. He was particularly impressed by the high level of innovation displayed by Chinese brands.

Lauding Chinese brands for their cutting-edge technology and commitment to innovation, he said adding that Chinese brands have truly excelled in this field. He said their products are not only technologically advanced but also user-friendly and aesthetically appealing.

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

Call for using quality seeds, modern farming practices to ensure food security

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan can harness its agricultural potential to ensure food security, economic prosperity, and sustainable development by promoting horizontal and vertical expansion through the adoption of high-quality seeds and modern farming practices.

Pakistan Hitech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) Chairman Shahzad Ali Malik stated this while talking to a delegation of agricultural experts led by Prof Dr Muhammad Arshad Javed Head of Plant Breeding and Genetics Punjab University here on Sunday.

Malik said that to enhance agricultural productivity, it is imperative to pursue a dual strategy focusing on both horizontal and vertical growth. Horizontal

growth entails expanding the cultivation area, particularly in Cholisthan's barren lands, which hold untapped potential.

By reclaiming and efficiently utilizing such land, Pakistan can significantly increase its agricultural output. He said, vertical growth was also equally crucial for enhancing per acre yield through the adoption of high-yielding quality seeds and modern agricultural practices. "Utilizing advanced seed technology and agricultural techniques can substantially boost productivity without the need for additional land resources. This approach aligns with sustainable farming practices while addressing the growing demand for food security in the country," he remarked.

The PHHSA Chairman said recent initiative by the Prime Minister to crack down on the mafia selling substandard seeds is commendable and indicative of a proactive stance towards improving agricultural standards. The establishment of National Seed Development and Regularity Authority reflects a step towards promoting quality seed usage and ensuring the availability of superior agricultural inputs to farmers across the country.

He said PHHSA's recognition of the government's efforts in boosting the agricultural economy highlights the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors in achieving agricultural development goals. Advocating for representation as a stakeholder in

the National Seed Development and Regulatory Authority, he added, the PHHSA aims to contribute its expertise towards shaping policies and regulations that foster innovation and quality assurance in the seed industry.

Incorporating stakeholders' perspectives and expertise, especially from reputable associations like PHHSA, can facilitate the formulation of comprehensive strategies to address the challenges hindering agricultural productivity, he argued. He stressed the need for collaboration among public sector, industry players, and agricultural stakeholders is essential for implementing holistic approaches that promote sustainable growth and resilience in Pakistan's agriculture sector.

Saudi Real Estate Fund boosts homeownership

RIYADH (Arab News): Homeownership in Saudi Arabia is set to increase as the Real Estate Development Fund deposited SR963 million into the accounts of Sakani beneficiaries for March.

The funds were disbursed to beneficiaries through the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing, as per the Saudi Press Agency.

The Sakani program facilitates homeownership by providing affordable housing options and financing assistance, particularly targeting individuals facing challenges in accessing the housing

market. Mansour bin Madi, the CEO of the fund, clarified that the total support for the current month of March was allocated to bolster profits of various housing support contracts.

He highlighted that the total amount deposited into the Sakani beneficiaries' accounts since the announcement of the transformation scheme in June 2017 until March reached approximately SR57.5 billion.

Bin Madi explained that the continuity of housing support confirms the ongoing efforts to assist beneficiaries in owning suitable housing in partnership with

financial institutions.

This comes in line with achieving the targets of the housing program — one of the components of Vision 2030 — to raise the citizens' housing ownership rate to 70 percent and provide sustainable housing and financial solutions through building supportive systems and legislation.

Additionally, it provides the "Design Your Support" service within the Real Estate Advisor platform, allowing beneficiaries to tailor their housing support and access optimal financial and housing recommendations.

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has pleaded for formulating economic plan aimed at reviving growth in large-scale manufacturing, small and medium-sized segments, the service sector, and exports.

The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said the government should prioritize resolving the energy crisis by providing sufficient and affordable electricity and gas to industries. The import bill should be reduced by imposing bans on luxury products. He highlighted controlling inflation to ensure affordable living costs for the masses and containing the

cost of production for businesses at a local level.

He stressed the need for a revisit of the economic policies, as the economic indicators throughout the 2023 remained very depressed amidst high inflation, low exports, depleting foreign reserves and continued uncertain position of the local currency.

FPCCI former president Anjum Nisar said that almost all indicators of the economy continued to show poor performance during 2023, including volatile exchange rate, unprecedented hike in markup rate, repeated increases in electricity rates, gas shortage, price spiral, mismanagement and bad governance, becoming the hallmarks of the government. He observed the negative economic indicators and uncertainty over

resumption of the International Monetary Fund program continued to push the rupee towards a new historic low against the US dollar especially in first half of the calendar year of 2023.

He said that massive fall of rupee value continued to damage the economy, as the rupee witnessed a huge depreciation; one of the highest devaluations of local currency in Pakistan's history in this period. Mian Anjum urged the policy makers to concentrate on increasing tax-to-GDP ratio which was the lowest in Pakistan in the region in 2023. The BMP leader warned if the govt failed to take appropriate measures for economic revival, the trade and industry will face a complete shutdown, asking the government to convene a conference, taking

the business community onboard.

He called for solid economic plan from all the stakeholders, in view of deteriorating energy crises following the tough conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), making this fiscal year more complicated and unstable for the economy. The FPCCI former president said that the government should provide its economic stability plan to avert further losses, warning that numerous global issues are impacting world economies.

The FPCCI former president observed that besides increasing exports and controlling imports the government will have to take administrative measures, as a large demand of cash dollars are seen in the market. He argued that this devalu-

ation of the currency was dictated by the IMF through prior actions and it has nothing to do with macro-economic fundamentals. He said that there was a complete breakdown of economic policymaking, as the country's fiscal policy had become subservient to monetary and exchange rate policies. He said that the monetary tightening and exchange rate depreciation resulted in higher inflation, public debt and debt servicing. The empirical evidence showed that the one percent monetary tightening hiked the inflationary pressure by 1.3 percent in the case of Pakistan, he added. The government needs to devise a strategy on war-footing to increase foreign investment in Pakistan so as to stop the upward trajectory of the dollar, he added. The rupee

during through the whole year remained uncertain, as the uncertainty pertaining to the IMF program was causing pressure on the Pakistani rupee while the country's foreign exchange reserves have also declined, which was another source of concern for investors, he said.

Media reports called for a fully-fledged and sound plan with a highly competent team to handle local challenges forthwith, but unfortunately, they have no solid plans or directions. The 2023 could be divided into two parts, as a tough time was witnessed until June when there was no IMF program, and the country was near default. Then the IMF program came, the caretaker setup took over, and the first review of the IMF went better, he said, adding that

the second review of the IMF on track would be good. He said when it comes to the second half of 2023, it has brought macro-wise stability relatively.

He foresees the next year full of challenges for businesses and industries in Pakistan due to political uncertainty on global and local fronts. Although 2024 is considered the year for general elections, fears are looming for a possible political crisis in the country. The incumbent government should come up with drastic measures to give confidence to local industrialists-cum-entrepreneurs and foreign investors through industry-friendly and investment-friendly policies. In this regard, the interest rate should be gradually reduced to boost economic activity and industrialization.

Court Notice

In the Court of Qaisar Khan Afridi Additional District Judge III/Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Dagar. Appeal No. 47/13. Institution 3/6/2023. Date of hearing 24/4/2024. Chanrhay Vs. Sartaj Khan etc. Notice to 4. Hidayatur Rehman. 6. Samiur Rehman sons of Yaras Khan. 43. Mohamad Saleem Khan. 44. Mohamad Inam. 45. Amir Aman. 46. Kifayatullah. 48. Sher Aman sons of Fared Khan. 50/1. Riaz Khan. 50/2. Imtiaz Khan sons of Mst. Jihan Pari late. 105. Amirzeb. 106. Khanzeb. 107. Akhtarzeb. 108. Bakhtzeb. 109. Anwarzeb. Maqsood late. 93. Hazrat Habib s/o Ghulam Habib. 12. Safia Bibi d/o Yaras Khan. 100. Mst. Riasat d/o Ghulam Habib. 27/1. Zahirul Haq. 27/2. Harmen Khan. 27/3. Mohamad Arif sons of Mian Zaman. 27/4. Mst. Norsheeda d/o Mian Zaman. 36. Abdul Maten. 37. Abdul Hamed sons of Shamin Khan. 66. Rafiq Khan. 68. Shakil sons of Jan Said. 73. Saeed Shah. 74. Said Marof Shah. 75. Said Hakim Shah. 76. Said Farooq Shah. 77. Sardar Husain sons. 79. Mstzb Bakht Sana. 80. Asia Bibi. 81. Chand Bibi. 82. Zenab Bibi ds/o Mohamad Shah. 117. Parvesh Khan s/o Musal Khan. 119. Mohamad Alyas son. 120. Mst. Gul Shema d/o Mian Zar resident of Bataara Gulunu Bawrhay Budal Tehsil Chaghorzai 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 24/4/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



In brief

Master Tenpin Bowling C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation (PTBF) would be holding Pakistan Master Tenpin Bowling Championship at Leisure City Bowling Club, Jinnah Park, Rawalpindi from April 27 to 30. According to President, Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation Ijazur Rehman, players from all over the country would participate in the Championship. Two categories competitions will be held in the championship, including men's singles and men's doubles, he said. The registration of players to participate in the championship would be opened on April 1 and the players who wish to participate in the championship can register their names by April 15. The championship would continue till April 30 and the first runner-up in the men's singles events of the championship will be awarded a prize money of two lakh rupees, while the second and third runners-up will get a prize money of one lakh rupees and fifty thousand rupees respectively. Prize money for the men's doubles competition include the first runner-up will get a prize money of Rs 100,000 while the second and third runners-up will be awarded a prize of Rs 50,000 and Rs 25,000, respectively.

ICC pays tribute to Shaharyar Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has expressed its sorrow at the passing away of former Pakistan cricket chief Shaharyar Khan at the age of 89. Shaharyar was a career diplomat, who served as the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chair from 2003 to 2006 and again from 2014 to 2017, also representing the PCB on the ICC Board. In a statement on Sunday, ICC Chief Executive Geoff Allardice said, "This is sad news for the cricket world. Shaharyar was a very prominent and important figure who contributed hugely to the development of the game over many years. 'His experience as a diplomat helped him lead cricket administration very skillfully in Pakistan and he was also a respected member of the ICC Board. On behalf of the ICC, I would like to offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends as well as to our colleagues at the PCB.'"

Naseem to showcase his exceptional talent

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani speedster Naseem Shah's exceptional talent has propelled him into the upper echelons of the highest-paid players in the recent player draft for England's cricket tournament, The Hundred. Birmingham Phoenix has welcomed Naseem Shah into their lineup, securing his services for a substantial sum of 125,000 pounds. This milestone not only establishes Naseem Shah as the first Pakistani cricketer to command such a hefty price tag but also translates to an impressive 4.5 crore Pakistani rupees. The Hundred has also embraced other Pakistani cricket players. All-rounder Imad Wasim and fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi have been recruited into the tournament. Trent Rockets have acquired Imad Wasim for a fee of 100,000 pounds, while Welsh Fire has secured Shaheen's services for the same amount, marking his second consecutive season with the team, as per n.e.n.e.w.s.p.k. Furthermore, Welsh Fire has retained the talents of Haris Rauf from the draft, while Manchester Originals have kept Usama Mir on board, further enhancing the Pakistani presence in The Hundred.

PCB announces 7-member selection committee with unprecedented powers

LAHORE (APP): Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday announced an all-powerful seven-member selection committee for the Men's national, U-19 and Pakistan Shaheens cricket teams, and with the mandate to pick the team captains.

Addressing a press conference at the PCB headquarters at Gaddafi Stadium, he said no chief selector had been appointed to the selection committee comprising former test cricketers Muhammad Yousaf, Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq, Asad Shafiq, team captain, team head coach and a data analyst, adding that one two coordinators will also be appointed but they will not have a vote on the committee. The data analyst will provide the members with insightful statistics and data to help in team selection.

Justifying the logic behind absence of chief selector in the committee, Mohsin Naqvi said

that all members would enjoy equal powers in the committee and the majority decision would prevail. He said the selection committee would take all decisions regarding team selection, appointment of captain and other professional affairs.

Defending his decision to pick comparatively recently retired test cricketers, the chairman said: "I personally believe these cricketers are more familiar with the current players than the cricket greats who retired some two decades ago. I believe this is the best of the best group of selectors in the present scenario."

The PCB chairman also announced doing away with the previous practice of picking the team captain as chairman, adding that the selection committee would select captain of the cricket team. He said he believed the former cricketers were better placed to decide on the matter of appointment of

team captain rather than the chairman PCB. "I am management man and I will take administrative decisions for betterment of the PCB, but the selection of a captain should be left to the professionals," he added.

The PCB chairman dispelled the impression that team captain's inclusion in selection committee would raise conflict of interest issue, adding that the captain must have a say in selection of the team, as he is to lead the team and account for results, adding that consultation is not enough and the captain must have full say in the selection of the team.

About appointment of the team captain, Naqvi said that the team captain for the national T20 team would be picked by the selection committee by the end of the team's fitness camp, starting from March 25 (tomorrow). He said that the new captain would be appointed for a long tenure.

Naqvi said that the PCB was



negotiating with the foreign coaches and a dream coaching panel comprising foreign and local coaches would be finalised and details would be shared with the media and Pakistan cricket fans shortly.

Naqvi said Imad Wasim had been invited to play the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the United States and the Caribbean, adding that No Objection Certificate (NOC) for foreign leagues had not come under discussion with the veteran all-rounder.

About Haris Rauf, the PCB chairman said his Central Contract had been restored after a satisfactory response from the ace fast bowler, adding that the PCB was concerned about his

shoulder injury, but it would be taken care of well. However, he stressed to implement the PCB policy of no more than two NOCs for foreign leagues.

To a query, he said that the PCB coffers would be opened for the players and the development of infrastructure, adding that he did not believe in keeping money in the banks for profit. He said the Gaddafi Stadium, Pindi Stadium and National Bank Stadium Karachi would be revamped in preparations for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 to be held in Pakistan.

To a query, the PCB chairman was confident that the Champions Trophy 2025 would be held in Pakistan and said the Board was doing what was

required to ensure a successful Champions Trophy event in Pakistan. He said he did not have a magic wand to make the teams reach the ICC top rankings, adding that he would work with honesty and dedication to make the team reach top of the world.

Naqvi, responding to a query, said the PCB COO Slaman Naseer was working diligently on the Pakistan Super League (PSL) for Women besides weighing the possibilities of raising the number of franchise teams to eight in the next edition of the HBL PSL. Without disclosing his plans, the PCB chairman promised that a lot was being done behind the doors for promotion of Women's cricket in Pakistan.

Mohammad Amir says he is available for T20 World Cup selection

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Amir says he is available for the upcoming T20 World Cup after having "positive discussions" with Pakistan Cricket Board officials.

The left-arm fast bowler played his last T20 international against England in August 2020 before he quit international cricket, saying he was mentally tortured.

"I still dream to play for Pakistan!" the 31-year-old Amir wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Sunday.

"Life brings us to the points where at times we have to reconsider our decisions. There have been a few positive discussions between myself and the PCB where they respectfully made me feel that I was needed and can still play for Pakistan, and after discussing with family and well wishers I



declare that I am available to be considered for upcoming T20 WC.

"I want to do this for my country as it comes before my personal decisions. Donning the green jersey and serving my country has always been, and will continue to be, my greatest aspiration." Amir is the second Pakistan player who has come out of retirement and shown interest in returning to international cricket over the last two days.

On Saturday, all-rounder

Imad Wasim said that he's also available until the T20 World Cup after guiding Islamabad United to its third title in the Pakistan Super League earlier this week.

Amir also played in the PSL for Quetta Gladiators and took 10 wickets in 9 games with an economy rate of 8.41. Both cricketers have experience of playing T20 league cricket in the West Indies, which is a T20 World Cup co-host nation alongside the United States.

Sri Lanka push Bangladesh to brink after de Silva, Mendis feat

SYLHET (AFP): Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both slammed their second century of the match as Sri Lanka set up a 511-run target for Bangladesh before pushing the hosts to the corner in the first Test on Sunday. The visitors were all out for 418 in their second innings at Sylhet, with Mendis making 164 runs to go with his 102 in the first innings and De Silva, who also scored 102 runs in the first innings, adding 108.

Sri Lankan pacers began the victory push immediately, reducing Bangladesh to 47-5 at stumps, with 464 more needed for an unlikely win. Vishwa Fernando claimed 3-13, while Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara each claimed a wicket as Mahmudul Hasan (0), Najmul Hossain Shanto (6), Zakir Hasan (19), Shahadat Hossain (0) and Liton Das (0) all departed.

"Of course, it's a bad thing, because we're all doing bad together," Mehidy Hasan Miraz said of Bangladesh's batting.

"Everyone has to play well in Test cricket, otherwise it will be difficult."

The sorry display from Bangladesh batsmen came after de Silva and Mendis had dominated the bowlers for the better part of the day, becoming only the third pair in Test history to score a century in both innings. The Chappell brothers, Greg and Ian, of Australia achieved the feat against New Zealand in March 1974, before Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali emulated it against Australia in Abu Dhabi in 2014.

The pair, who shared 202 runs in Sri Lanka's first innings total of 280 runs, put on 173 runs together this time. "Talent and determination" "I'm very happy... the main reason is the talent and determination these players possess," Sri Lanka batting coach Thilina Kandamby said.

Mehidy broke their partnership, before finishing with 4-74 for Bangladesh. Resuming on 119-5, the visitors lost nightwatchman Fernando (four) early to Khaled Ahmed, before de Silva and Mendis took control. De Silva brought his second century into the game with a single off Mehidy, before he was dropped by Nahid Rana off Shoriful Islam on 101.

Mehidy ensured the drop did not hurt the team more, soon ending de Silva's innings, with Zakir taking the catch at short midwicket. Mendis put away a full toss of Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto to bring his own hundred off 171. Mehidy removed Prabhath Jayasuriya, who made 25, and Lahiru Kumara off successive deliveries to give Bangladesh some relief.

Mehidy could have grabbed his fifth wicket if Liton Das did not drop Mendis on 133. Mendis protected last man Rajitha to add 52 runs in the final wicket pair, piling misery on Bangladesh.

World Open: Judd Trump beats Ding Junhui to win title in China



SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Judd Trump thrashed Ding Junhui 10-4 to win the World Open title in China and claim his 28th ranking title.

The world number two knocked in breaks of 88, 79 and 78 on the way to opening up a 7-2 lead at the end of the first session in Yushan.

The 34-year-old started the evening session with a 130 before a 106 and 85 helped him to clinch victory. Trump's victory over China's Ding gave him a fifth title of the season and the £170,000 winnings.

It took Trump's prize money for the season to £1,061,000 and drew him level with Steve Davis on

28 title wins.

Only Ronnie O'Sullivan (41), Stephen Hendry (36) and John Higgins (31) have more titles.

Trump also defended the World Open title, which he won the last time it was held in 2019 before a four-year hiatus because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Sainz wins Australian GP in Ferrari 1-2 as Verstappen fails to finish

MELBOURNE (AFP): Ferrari's Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix Sunday after being passed by front-row partner Sainz on lap two.

The Dutchman blamed a brake issue for his first retirement in two years. "What we can see so far from the data is that as soon as the lights went off the right-rear brake just stuck on," he said. "It just caused the damage and it kept on increasing so it was also basically driving with the handbrake on."

It was his third grand prix win and first since Singapore last year. "I'm happy to be in a one-two with Charles here. It shows that hard work pays off," said Sainz, who missed the last race in Saudi Arabia and was bed-ridden for a week afterwards.

"Life sometimes is crazy... the podium in Bahrain, then the appendix, the comeback, the win. It's a rollercoaster but I loved it and I'm extremely happy." While he celebrated, it was a disastrous day for

pole-sitter Verstappen, who limped out with smoke billowing from his car after being passed by front-row partner Sainz on lap two.

The Dutchman blamed a brake issue for his first retirement in two years. "What we can see so far from the data is that as soon as the lights went off the right-rear brake just stuck on," he said. "It just caused the damage and it kept on increasing so it was also basically driving with the handbrake on."

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes, with the British seven-time world champion suffering engine failure on lap 17.

To add to Mercedes' woes, teammate George Russell crashed heavily on the last lap with the car ending on its side. Russell climbed out unscathed, the Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso faulted for "potentially dangerous" driving over the incident and slapped with a 20-second

penalty. Verstappen emphatically won the opening two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with both a Red Bull 1-2, and was hot favourite to make it three from three.

He had been aiming to match his own record set last year of 10 consecutive wins -- one more than Sebastian Vettel in 2013 -- and was unbeaten in his last 18 starts from pole position. But while Verstappen was favoured to win, the Ferraris had proved highly competitive in practice and qualifying on the fast and flowing Albert Park track.

Despite not being fully fit, Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year, topped Q1 and Q2 to fire a warning shot.

'Incredible weekend' Oscar Piastri in the other McLaren was fourth ahead of Red Bull's Sergio Perez. Alonso dropped to eighth after his penalty with teammate Lance Stroll elevated to sixth and RB's Yuki Tsunoda to seventh.



SYDNEY: Smoke billows from Max Verstappen's Red Bull as he retires from the Australian Grand Prix.



MIAMI (Agencies): Andy Murray gained a measure of revenge against Tomas Martin Etcheverry by beating the Argentine in the second round of the Miami Open.

Etcheverry had beaten the Briton in the first round of the Australian Open earlier this year, but Murray won 7-6 (7-0) 6-3 this time around.

The match resumed at 3-3 after being suspended because of rain on Friday.

Murray convincingly won a first set tie-break before one break in the second was enough to secure victory.

The 36-year-old produced a delightful backhand cross-court lob on the way to breaking Etcheverry in the sixth game of the second set.

Murray survived a break point in the next game and went 5-2 up with a hat-trick of aces. Serving for the set, Murray was 40-0 down before getting to deuce with a backhand that just caught the line. He then secured victory in two hours 16 minutes when Etcheverry,

ranked 30th in the world, sent a forehand long and wide on match point.

Overall, Murray served 10 aces, hit 28 winners compared to 17 from his opponent, and saved seven of seven break points. He will play Tomas Machac, who is 60th in the men's rankings, of the Czech Republic in the last 32.

Murray is a two-time champion of the tournament but this is expected to be his final appearance in Miami as he plans to retire later this year.

"Miami has been like my tennis home really. I've done so much of my work and training and preparation here, and I love the city - and this is my last time playing here, so it's nice to get another opportunity," he said.

Norrie through but Draper knocked out British number one Cameron Norrie, seeded 30th, is through to the third round after a 7-5 6-7 (4-7) 6-2 win over Italy's Flavio Cobolli.

Norrie will face defending champion Daniil Medvedev

of Russia after he progressed to the last 32 with a 6-4 6-2 victory against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics.

Briton Jack Draper was knocked out as he suffered a defeat by Nicolas Jarry in three hours 33 minutes.

Draper failed to take two match points when serving at 5-4 in the decider before Chile's Jarry won 7-6 (7-5) 4-6 7-6 (7-2). Only eight matches were completed on Friday because of rain and the start of Saturday's play was delayed by three hours because of the weather.

When play did resume, American Taylor Fritz was beaten 6-3 6-4 by Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild, while Denis Shapovalov of Canada earned a 6-2 6-4 win against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner is through to the next round courtesy of a 6-3 6-4 win against fellow Italian Andrea Vavassori while top seed Carlos Alcaraz cruised past Spanish compatriot Roberto Carballes Baena 6-2, 6-1.



In brief

PFA discards 1500 kg of adulterated tea

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) in its ongoing drive to check food outlets, discarded over 1,500 kg of adulterated tea while inspecting various sites. The PFA spokesman said that the Deputy Director of PFA on a tip-off conducted a raid in the Kashmiri Bazar area and seized 1500 kg of spurious tea worth Rs 2 million. The team also confiscated different types of material and packing machines from the spot as the tea was being prepared with a mixture of colours. He further said that strict action was being taken against violators to ensure hygienic food to the residents.

CDA imposes heavy taxes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) has imposed heavy taxes on real estate properties in federal capital Islamabad. According to notification, owners of 140 square yards plots in sectors and housing societies like Shehzad Town, Margala Town, and Rawal Town will now pay Rs24,000 in taxes. Farmhouse owners with eight kanals will pay Rs180,000, while those with 90 to 120 kanals will pay Rs442,000. Commercial properties in the blue area will be taxed at Rs32 per square foot for ground floor, Rs22 per square foot for basement, and residential apartments at Rs26 per square foot.

1500 kg adulterated tea confiscated

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a major crackdown on food adulteration, the Punjab Food Authority (PFA), led by Deputy Director of Operations, conducted a major operation at a warehouse in Kashmiri Bazaar on Sunday. Under the supervision of Deputy Director of Operations, the Authority confiscated 1500 kg of adulterated tea with the cost of 20 lacs. The adulterated tea was being packed with colour and chemicals, posing a serious risk to public health. The action was taken after confidential tips received by the PFA. DG PFA, Asim Javed, emphasized the ongoing efforts to combat the adulteration mafia, highlighting the commitment to ensuring food safety for all citizens. The action underscores the PFA's dedication to upholding food standards and safeguarding the well-being of the people. Such operations serve as a deterrent to those engaging in unethical practices, sending a clear message that adulteration will not be tolerated, he concluded.

Rahat honored with 'Hilal-e-Imtiaz'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ustad Rahat Fateh Ali Khan was conferred Pakistan's second highest civilian award 'Hilal-e-Imtiaz' by President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Pakistan Day for his services to the Pakistani and South Asian music industry. Khan, the star of Pakistan and music icon, was honored with the 'Hilal-e-Imtiaz' for his contributions to the fields of arts, Qawwali, and singing, as well as for elevating Pakistani arts to an international platform with his captivating performances of Qawwali and contemporary music. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan said he was grateful for the honour. The singer said: "It is with profound gratitude that I accept the prestigious Hilal-e-Imtiaz & Sitara-e-Imtiaz awards bestowed upon me by the esteemed President. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my cherished family, friends, and devoted fans whose unwavering support has been my guiding light on this remarkable journey.



ISLAMABAD: Painters busy coloring a pedestrian bridge at Expressway.

Pakistan Day sales compel buyers to shop for Eid-ul-Fitr

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Day's lucrative discounts and special offers by different brands outlets in the federal capital are attracting a number of customers especially women who are eager to buy dresses, shoes and all required stuff for the upcoming festival of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The trend of online shopping from the official websites of the famous brands is already in practice by a large number of people especially women in capital city while visiting the shops physically are still preferred by majority of the buyers. Sania Mushtaq, a housewife said, "I have visited different brands outlets to complete Eid shopping for my family taking advantage of this sale at the start of the summer season".

"The online shopping

facility offered by different brands, shopping marts and food outlets have made the lives of citizens quite easier but still visiting markets for buying clothes and shoes is a better option in terms of checking the sizes and quality of dresses and shoes, she said while talking to APP.

Amina Usman, a government employee said "visiting markets for Eid shopping is a difficult task during the month of Ramazan however the attracting Resolution Day sales by brands offering up to flat 30 has compelled public to rush to the markets". "I always prefer visiting markets myself to shop for my family for any occasion instead of online shopping as visiting markets again and again for changing he purchased items is very annoying for me", she said.

It has become a common

practice for the brands, eateries and even the cab-hailing and salon services to offer good discounts on different occasions including New Year, Christmas, Independence Day, Pakistan Day, Eid festivals and holy month of Ramazan etc. "The changing weather is always a time when we need to shop clothes, shoes and other accessories for ourselves and kids for the whole upcoming season and sale on such occasions are perfect time to do so", Shahid Khan, a businessman said.

It is a good tradition that not only famous brands are offering discounts on dresses and shoes but also the famous online retailers of all the home, electronics and kitchen accessories are offering good discounts ahead of Pakistan Day, he observed.

Authorities directed to remove encroachments

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Director General (DG), Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza has directed the authorities concerned to take strict action against encroachments along Nullah Lai and remove all kinds of encroachments from the banks of the Nullah. According to RDA spokesman, the DG ordered that a large-scale operation should be carried out against encroachments and those dumping solid waste in Nullah Lai.

She further instructed that the difficulties being faced in the Nullah Lai project must be resolved so that the residents living near Nullah Lai and in low-lying areas could be saved from flash flood risks during heavy rains.

She said that negligence on part of the officials concerned would not be tolerated. The DG had also instructed the authorities concerned to renovate Fawara Chowk Parking plaza, the spokesman informed. The Estate Management (EM) Directorate of RDA had been directed to undertake extensive renovation work, he said. The DG emphasized the urgency of optimizing the functionality of the parking plaza.

Kinza Murtaza instructed the EM Director to expedite the work to operationalize the basement of the plaza and promptly install rooftop sheds.

Moreover, she also underscored the importance of maintaining cleanliness within the premises.

The spokesman informed that RDA was ensuring all possible facilities for the citizens.

Commissioner directs strict action against profiteers, hoarders

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak has directed the authorities concerned to take strict action against profiteers and hoarders.

According to a Commissioner office spokesperson, the Commissioner had ordered the administrative officers to remain active in the field to provide relief to the people.

The essential items were available at 20 to 25 percent lower rates at Ramadan Bazaar and Agriculture Fair Price Shops. The price magistrates were instructed not to allow overcharging even in the open market, she said.

The number of the Price Magistrates in Rawalpindi Division had been increased to 178, the spokesperson said adding, fines amounting to Rs 12,183,500 were imposed across the division regarding price control during March. Over 4,074 violations were reported during 167,808 raids conducted during current month, she said and informed that 30 FIRs against profiteers and hoarders were lodged. 44 shops were sealed and 885 violators were arrested in ongoing operation being conducted against the rules violators.

Show cause notices were being issued to the Price Magistrates on poor

performance, the spokesperson said.

The Commissioner had 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.

She 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, she said adding, 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.

Solid steps were being taken in the light of the government orders to solve public problems, she 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. The representatives of all the departments concerned should remain present in the wholesale bazaar to help and guide the people, the Commissioner ordered.

One mln saplings to be planted in Rwp district

RAWALPINDI (APP): One million saplings would be planted in Rawalpindi district under spring plantation drive 2024, said Commissioner Rawalpindi. Engineer Aamir Khattak.

He informed that the Forest Department, Parks and Horticulture Authority, Education and Environment Departments would make efforts to achieve the target set for the plantation drive.

He said that a large number of saplings had been planted at Swan bridge, Gorakhpur, Chakri Road, Misa Kaswal, Gujar Khan and Kallar Syedan under the plantation drive.

The departments concerned had planted over 10,000 saplings on International Forest Day observed on March 21, Thursday. The saplings would also be planted in Rawalpindi and Chaklala Cantt Board areas under Plant for Pakistan campaign, Aamir Khattak said adding, all the organizations should work together to make the plantation drive a success. The private sector should be included in the campaign and the banners should also be displayed to create awareness among the citizens about the plantation drive, the Commissioner directed the officers concerned.

Awareness seminars

should be organized at schools, colleges and university level, he directed and urged the citizens to grow plants in the open areas of their homes.

He asked the citizens to take care the saplings after planting under spring plantation campaign 2024.

According to a district administration spokesman, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema had inaugurated Gorakhpur nursery set up by Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) on nearly 1000 kanals land with objectives to promote plantation.

The DC said that the world, especially Pakistan, has been facing challenges arising from environmental changes and these challenges could only be dealt with by spreading forests and planting trees.

Highlighting the importance and usefulness of the forests in the country, he said that forests are the guarantor of human survival on the planet and the government is continuing to take positive steps to deal with the challenges caused by global environmental changes.

Hassan Waqar Cheema also stated that Gorakhpur nursery is the largest nursery in the region,

which would play an important role to promote plantation.

All-out efforts would be made to achieve the target set for the ongoing plantation campaign in Rawalpindi district, said Hassan Waqar Cheema.

Director General, PHA Rawalpindi, Ahmed Hassan Ranjha said that the Gorakhpur Nursery would prove to be very important in the ongoing initiatives regarding Green Pakistan from where large scale plants would be provided.

The plants would be supplied in the coming months and a variety of plants and grasses would be produced at Gorakhpur nursery, he added. According to a PHA spokesperson, the Punjab government had provided 1000 kanals land in Gorakhpur to set up a grand nursery to promote plantation. PHA on the directives of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif would make all-out efforts to make the spring plantation campaign a success, she said.

PHA Rawalpindi had also launched a special plantation drive in the city and free saplings were being distributed to the public in this regard to ensure the success of the plantation drive in the public sector, she added.

PSF invites research proposals under CRP

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) has invited research proposals from the faculty members and researchers of public sector institutions under its Competitive Research Programme (CRP) aiming at fostering academia-industry cooperation.

According to an official of PSF, the programme is being executed under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Pakistan Science Foundation Pakistan and The Scientific and Technological Research Institution of Turkey (TUBITAK).

As per MoU, the HEC Chartered/Recognized Universities, Public Sector Research Institution (only the regular faculty members/researchers) in collaboration with Industry are invited to submit research and development proposals in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Electric Vehicles and Oceanography.

The aim of the call is to intensify cooperation between Turkish and Pakistani scientists/researchers in science and industry by means of Academia-Industry Cooperation Proj-

ects. The call is open between March 18 to June 03.

About the general guidelines, the official informed that the proposals should be submitted through the Research Grant Management System (RGMS) of PSF from the Pakistani side whereas from the Turkish side, the proposals should be submitted through TUBITAK's Project Application System (<http://uidb-pbs.tubitak.gov.tr>).

The PSF will support the projects upto Rs. 20.00 Million whereas TUBITAK will support projects up to 4.00 million Turkish Lira (TL).

Railways shift 16,535 electric meters of residential colonies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has shifted as many as 16,535 out of 26,660 electric meters of the railway's residential colonies to Distribution Companies (DISCOs) and Karachi-Electric (KE) to rationalize its expenditure on utilities.

"The electric meters of residential colonies are being shifted to DISCOs by the department and the step has resulted in savings of Rs 1,300 million so far," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. He said Pakistan Railways had taken certain austerity measures to moderate its losses and all these austerity measures have been taken in line with the instructions issued by Finance Division from time to time.

In addition to austerity measures, he said the department has rigorously followed a diversified approach to reducing its different costs along with measures to improve its revenue streams.

He said in order to further reduce the electricity bills, Pakistan Railways had prepared a plan to shift to solar energy for that purpose the work has been initiated by awarding the feasibility study to M/s NES-PAK. The official said around 100 sites with heavy consumption of electricity had been identified and once shifted to solar

energy, it would result in savings of Rs 1,000 million.

He said that the human resource strength of Pakistan Railways was being critically analyzed to bring it to a rational level. This step will result in the reduction of salary bills and, in the long run, will reduce the overhead of pension payments.

Around 1,377 posts from the Ministry of Railways, Headquarters office, and extra division had been abolished which was likely to save Rs 720.551 million per year, he added.

In order to improve the revenue streams, certain other steps have also been taken included to reduce manual working, streamlining financial operations and minimizing the risk of ghost employees and pensioners, SAP-based ERP system is under development to bring transparency and increase the revenue stream.

The official said the short-term leasing of land had been introduced instead of long-term leasing to stay competitive in the market for increased revenue flow.

He said railway passenger train fares and freight rates had been rationalized and were constantly being monitored based on supply and demand and volatile prices of fuel to generate more revenues.



ISLAMABAD: Tailors busy stitching clothes for upcoming Eid ul Fitr festival.

IEA condemns attack

KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Moscow and considered it a blatant violation of all human values. Abdul Qahar Balkhi, spokesperson of MoFA of Afghanistan, has posted on his X handle that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan strongly condemns the recent terrorist attack in Moscow, Russia, claimed by ISIS, and considers it a blatant violation of all human values.

Diplomat visits embassy

KABUL (Ariana News): J.P. Singh, who is in charge of PAI division at Indian foreign ministry, visited Afghanistan's embassy in New Delhi. This comes after the embassy was closed temporarily last year. Zakia Wardak, consul general of Afghanistan in Mumbai, said on X that the sides discussed Afghanistan and India fund, which was productive. "Singh highlighted India's longstanding support for Afghanistan and expressed gladness at the Embassy's operations," she added.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 14, 1445 — Monday, March 25, 2024

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

UNSC on Kandahar attack: Terrorism unjustifiable anywhere

KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations Security Council condemned the "heinous terrorist attack" in Kandahar on 21st March.

The Security Council in a statement drafted by Japan said that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is one of the most serious threats to peace and security in Afghanistan and the world.

"The members of the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to peace and security in Afghanistan as well as in the world. The members of the Security Council underline the need to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers, and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice," the statement reads.

Concurrently, the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the embassies of Japan and Turkey for Afghanistan have also condemned this attack.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan in its statement has called terrorism a common concern of both countries and has called for a bilateral attention to this matter.

Pakistan's foreign ministry in a statement strongly condemned the terrorist attack that took place in Kandahar on Thursday.

The statement said that Pakistan reiterates its strong condemnation of terrorism in "all its forms and manifestations." Terrorism is a "shared concern that both countries need to address through collective efforts," the statement said.

"The Government and the people of Pakistan extend their sincere condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the early

recovery of the injured. Pakistan reiterates its strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Terrorism is a shared concern that both countries need to address through collective efforts," the statement said.

"Unfortunately, 40 years of war in the region have created extremist groups, and there is no doubt that some countries use these groups for their strategic interests," said Tariq Farhadi, international relations analyst.

Meanwhile, The United Nations Assistance mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and The US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, Rina Amiri have also called for accountability for the perpetrators of such attacks in Afghanistan.

"UNAMA unequivocally condemns yesterday's Islamic State (KP)-claimed

attack in Kandahar that left dozens killed or wounded. Such abhorrent acts, during Ramadan or any other time, should have no place in Afghanistan," said UNAMA on X.

"Daesh is an oppressive phenomenon that does not see the right path and targets civilians; however, their hideouts have been destroyed, and they themselves are on the verge of extinction. Insha Allah, the Islamic Emirate has ordered its forces to be active against all Daesh actions in all areas," said Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate.

Although the Islamic Emirate has not yet shared the casualty figures of this event, the spokesperson for the Kandahar Security Command had previously stated that three people were killed and twelve were injured in this incident. However, some sources have told TOLONews that the number of fatalities is higher than that reported.

Continued expulsion of migrants

KABUL (Khaama Press): Following the expulsion of Afghan migrants from Iran and Pakistan, the Ministry of Refugees announced the expulsion of more than two hundred individuals from Iran and Pakistan.

The ministry stated in a newsletter that 130 Afghan migrants residing in Iran returned to their home country after being expelled. The ministry noted that these migrants returned to the country via the Islam Qala-Herat border crossing on March 2.

Additionally, the ministry reported that 96 Afghan migrants were expelled from Pakistan on March 2 and 3 by the Pakistani government and subsequently entered the country through the Torkham border crossing.

The Torkham border authorities in Nangarhar Province stated that 19 families, totaling 96 individuals, returned forcibly from Pakistan.

The ministry's newsletter mentioned that the returning migrants reentered the country voluntarily and forcibly. This comes amid a recent intensification of the expulsion process of migrants from Pakistan and Iran, highlighting a concerning trend.

In addition to the forced deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran, Afghanistan is grappling with a dire humanitarian crisis within its borders.

The lack of essential resources such as food, water, medical care, and job opportunities has exacerbated the suffering of the Afghan populace.

Many families struggle to secure basic necessities, leading to widespread hunger and malnutrition among vulnerable communities.

The healthcare system is overwhelmed, unable to cope with the increasing demand for medical services amidst widespread poverty and unemployment. As a result, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, requiring urgent international assistance and support.

3 killed, 2 hurt in blast

HELMAND (Khaama Press): Officials in Helmand report that three children have lost their lives, and two others have been wounded as a result of the explosion of an unexploded bullet in the Gereschk district of this province.

The office of the governor in Helmand Province stated, stating that the incident occurred in the Laki area of Gereschk district.

According to the statement, the incident occurred this morning when children were playing with the unexploded bullet they found. The casualties of this incident, as mentioned in the statement, include one girl and two boys who lost their lives and one girl and one boy who were wounded.

The source added that the wounded in this incident have been transferred to the hospital and are under treatment. Unexploded bullets and mines left over from the war in various provinces of Afghanistan occasionally claim victims, especially children.

Afghanistan's susceptibility to such incidents is exacerbated by the four decades of conflict in the country. Continuous warfare has left behind a landscape littered with unexploded ordnance, posing a constant threat to civilians, particularly children, who may unwittingly come across these deadly remnants of war.

IEA edicts against women keeping Afghanistan aid dependent: US envoy



KABUL (Ariana News): The edicts of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) against women and girls are keeping Afghanistan poor and aid dependent, and forcing Afghan families to leave their country, United States envoy Rina Amiri said on Saturday.

"It is heartbreaking to mark another year where school doors open without the participation of Afghan girls above the age of 12,"

Amiri, who is the US Special Representative for Women's Affairs and Human Rights in Afghanistan, said on X. "The world stands behind the calls to the Taliban (IEA) to reverse the destructive decrees destroying the potential of over 50% of the population."

She stressed that there is "no substitute for all Afghans participating in the formal education system, which has existed for over

100 years." This is third year that schools open without girls above the sixth grade allowed to attend.

Earlier, Amiri said that Afghanistan is losing more than \$1 billion annually due to the IEA's extreme decrees against women and girls.

The Islamic Emirate emphasizes that it is committed to ensuring the rights of women and girls according to Sharia.

Mujahid urges US envoy to consider Afghanistan's progress

KABUL (TOLONews): Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said that the US special representative for Afghanistan Thomas West should take into account the current progress in Afghanistan during his travels to countries in the region and meetings with officials from various countries.

Mujahid added that the interim government has had good achievements in the areas of security, economy, and anti-corruption.

The spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate told TOLONews: "Our position

is that the advances in security and stability in Afghanistan should be considered and supported, as this will lead to various dimensions and also lead to regional security and the alleviation of concerns."

This comes as the US special representative for Afghanistan Thomas West recently traveled to India and discussed the development of diplomatic relations with Afghanistan with some officials of that country.

West said on X: "Great to return to India and connect with close colleagues

about the way ahead in Afghanistan. Spent valuable time with HE Foreign Secretary Kwatra and Joint Secretary JP Singh. India continues to deliver critical humanitarian aid and medicine to the Afghan people, and we discussed 2024 needs. Also exchanged views on development of a unified diplomatic approach in support of collective interests."

Sayed Ishaq Gilani, leader of the National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan, told TOLONews: "The major countries are in no hurry like us; they want to investigate something, gather general opinions, and then act again. The best thing will be to facilitate discussions with Afghans."

Bilal Fatemi, a political expert, referring to Thomas West's trip, said: "Not only humanitarian aid to Afghanistan is being discussed in this trip, but it is above that, and they just make it appear as if the topic is aid to Afghanistan."

Thomas West, the US special representative for Afghanistan, is expected to travel to the United Arab Emirates after his trip to India this week.

Over 1,200 drug factories destroyed since IEA return

KABUL (TOLONews): The Counter-Narcotics Directorate of the Ministry of Interior stated that since the return of the Islamic Emirate, over 1,200 large and small drug processing factories have been destroyed in the country.

Haseebullah Ahmadi, the head of the counter-narcotics office of the Ministry of Interior, said that the Islamic Emirate is committed to fighting drugs in the country and that drug trafficking, cultivation, and trade in the country have nearly reached zero.

Ahmadi said: "About 1,250 alcohol and drug processing factories in various provinces of the country have been destroyed, and the serious fight against the cultivation, trafficking, and trade of drugs in the country continues."

The head of the counter-narcotics office of the MoI warns that individuals who still engage in the cultivation, trafficking, and the trade of drugs will be referred to judicial and legal authorities.

Haseebullah Ahmadi said: "The Islamic Emirate



is committed to the fight against drugs and intends to allow no one to engage in the cultivation, trafficking, and trade of drugs. If someone continues to do so, they will be introduced to judicial and legal authorities."

Some experts said that the Islamic Emirate should educate the public about the harms of drugs and provide alternative crops

for farmers.

Gul Mohammaddin Mohammadi, a political affairs expert, said: "In the fight against drugs, public awareness is needed, and alongside it, alternative programs should be implemented for farmers so that people refrain from cultivating drugs."

Najib Rahman Shamal, another expert, said: "I hope the interim govern-

ment of Afghanistan can cooperate and support the neighboring and regional countries in the fight against cultivation, trafficking, and trade of drugs."

According to the Counter-Narcotics Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, 15,500 hectares of crops used for illicit drugs in various provinces of the country have also been cleared.

Tourism Industry reopens as IEA ensures safety



KABUL (BNA): In a significant development for Afghanistan's tourism sector, the Institute of Tourism and Hospitality, affiliated with the Ministry of Information and Culture, has reopened its doors to students.

The reopening ceremony took place in the presence of Mullah Khairullah Khairkhan, the acting Minister of Information and Culture, along with other officials.

Addressing the attendees, Mullah Khairkhan emphasized the establishment of complete and reli-

able security in Afghanistan under the leadership of a strong central government, following years of war and insecurity.

Highlighting the commitment of the Ministry of Information and Culture to the growth of the tourism industry and the warm hospitality of the Afghan people, Minister Khairkhan stated that the reactivation of the Tourism and Hospitality Institute showcased their dedication.

He further dismissed claims by those who portrayed Afghanistan as unsafe, asserting that their

motives would not be fulfilled.

Mawlawi Saduddin Sayed, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Finance, and Administration, also spoke at the ceremony, emphasizing the role of tourism in showcasing the real image of Afghanistan to the world.

The Institute of Tourism and Hospitality, established under the Ministry of Information and Culture in 1391 (according to the Afghan calendar), played a vital role in training professionals for the tourism industry.

Karzai condemns Russia concert hall attack

KABUL (Khaama Press): Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the armed attack on concert attendees in the capital of Russia, which left dozens dead and wounded.

The former president of Afghanistan expressed his condolences to the families and survivors of the event in Russia, condemning the attack on Saturday, March 23, on his social media

platform X.

ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack in the Russian city of Krokus, which left at least 115 dead and over 100 wounded.

Abdulqahar Balkhi, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taliban, also stated in a press release on Saturday that ISIS demonstrated with this attack that it is a group manipulated by intelligence

agencies, aiming to tarnish Islam and create a threat to the entire region. Armed attackers stormed a concert hall in Moscow last night, shooting at the audience.

As a result of this shooting, at least 115 people were killed, and out of the 145 wounded in this event, the condition of at least 115 individuals has been described as critical by Russian health officials.

1 killed, 3 injured in Paktia traffic accident



GARDEZ (Pajhwok): Four members of a family were killed and injured in a traffic accident in Gardez, the capital city of southeastern Paktia, an official said.

Police Spokesperson Munib Zadran, told Pajhwok News, the accident happened at around 1:00 pm on Kabul Gardez road. He said one member of a

family was killed and three others got injured.

The injured had been shifted to the hospital but there was no update about their health condition.

Number of students learning computer science surges in Kabul

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of computer science students and professors say technology has become an integral part of people's daily life and has a wide scope of opportunities, thus attracting the youth.

According to students, in the future, people's dependence on technology will further increase.

Abdul Rahim Taj, who passed the university entrance exam and suc-

ceeded to the journalism faculty, joined the computer science faculty due to his interest in the field.

Taj said today was the age of computers and technology and computer workers were needed in every sphere of life.

Ahmad Farzad, another Computer Science student, said he was learning computer because it had a wide scope and the society needed computer and technology.

Fazaluddin Radmanish, a first-year computer science student, also said studying cyber security and software engineering was financially rewarding, which was why he became interested in this field.

On the other hand, a number of officials and professors of universities say that the main reason why young people are more interested in computer science is the field has a vast

scope of opportunities in today's technology driven world. Gholam Farooq Muslimyar, an administrative employee in one of the private universities, says the enrollment of young people in computer courses has increased recently.

Samiullah Rahimi, a professor of computer science at a private university, says that the world has become a small village and computer has more

work space in the current situation.

Rahimi, however, stressed young people should recognize their tendency and evaluate which field they were interested in and could progress in.

Two months ago, officials of some educational centres told Pajhwok that the number of students and their interest in learning English and computer has doubled.

Four wounded in Israeli strikes on east Lebanon

BEKAA VALLEY (AFP/APP):Four people were wounded by Israeli air strikes near Lebanon's eastern city of Baalbek overnight, one of which hit a two-storey building, an AFP correspondent said on Sunday.

Israel and Hamas ally Hezbollah have been exchanging near-daily cross-border fire since the Gaza war erupted in October.

But fears have surged of an all-out conflict in past weeks, with Israel launching air strikes deeper into Lebanese territory, targeting the Baalbek area -- a Hezbollah stronghold -- several times.

The Israeli military said in a statement fighter jets "struck a Hezbollah manufacturing site containing weapons in the area of Baalbek".

The AFP correspondent said the Israeli strikes targeted a Hezbollah centre that had been deserted for some time, wounding four residents in nearby buildings.

"The Israeli air force fired five missiles at a two-storey inhabited building in Al-Osseira, on the outskirts of Baalbek," he said.

The Israeli military also said "approximately 50 launches were identified from Lebanon toward northern Israel, a number of launches were intercepted while the rest fell in open areas". Hezbollah said it fired "more than 60 Katyusha-type rockets" at two Israeli military positions in the occupied Golan Heights in response to the Israeli strikes.

The strike at Al-Osseira, some 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the Israeli-Lebanese border, ended a period of relative calm that had lasted around 10 days.

Hezbollah began launching near-daily attacks against Israel on October 8 in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas in Gaza and said on Saturday it had carried out several more strikes.

It says it will only end its attacks

Israel besieges two more Gaza hospitals, forcing evacuations

CAIRO (Reuters): Israeli forces besieged two more Gaza hospitals on Sunday, pinning down medical teams under heavy gunfire and forcing the evacuation from one hospital of most patients and displaced people sheltering there, the Palestinian Red Crescent said. Israeli forces say hospitals in the Gaza Strip where war has been raging for over five months have frequently been used as strongholds of Hamas militants harbouring bases and weapons. Hamas and medical staff deny this.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said one of its staff was killed when Israeli tanks suddenly pushed back into areas around Al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in the southern city of Khan Younis, amid shelling and gunfire. Israeli armoured forces sealed off Al-Amal Hospital and carried out extensive bulldozing

operations in its vicinity, the Red Crescent said in a statement, adding: "All of our teams are in extreme danger at the moment and are completely immobilised." It said Israeli forces demanded the complete evacuation of staff, patients and displaced people from Al-Amal and fired smoke bombs into the area to try to push out its occupants. Hours later, the Red Crescent said all patients who could be moved as well as displaced people who found refuge from fighting in the hospital compound had been evacuated westwards to Al Mawasi, a coastal beach settlement.

Hospital staff remained along with nine severely ill or wounded people and 10 companions as well as a displaced family with special needs, it added. "There is a need to evacuate these patients and wounded (safely)."

gaps with Israel in truce talks: Deep differences exist between Hamas and Israel in negotiations for a Gaza truce, an official from the Palestinian militant group with knowledge of the talks told AFP.

The difficult talks over a ceasefire and possible exchange of hostages and prisoners resumed in Doha this week, with Israel's spy chief joining Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators.

"There is a deep divergence in positions in the negotiations between Hamas and the occupation (Israel) because the enemy understood the flexibility shown by the movement as weakness," the official said.

The official added that "the enemy wants to reach a temporary ceasefire after which it can resume its aggression against our people."

Hamas official speaks of big

on Israel if there is a ceasefire in Gaza.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant warned in February that a possible truce in Gaza would not affect Israel's "objective" of pushing Hezbollah back from its northern border, by force or diplomacy.

At least 323 people have been killed in Lebanon, most of them Hezbollah fighters, but also at least 56 civilians, according to an AFP count. At least 10 soldiers and seven civilians have been killed in northern Israel, according to the military.

The exchange of fire, which was initially confined to areas close to the border, has also displaced tens of thousands in southern Lebanon and northern Israel.



GAZA: Palestinian children react near the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.

Kyiv says 2 Russian ships hit in Crimea strikes

KYIV (AFP/APP): Ukraine claimed Sunday to have hit two Russian military ships stationed at the annexed peninsula of Crimea in overnight strikes, as it suffered another night of "massive" Russian aerial attacks.

Ukraine's ally and neighbour Poland said a Russian cruise missile headed for western Ukraine breached its airspace overnight, after it had put its armed forces on high alert amid intense Russian aviation activity.

"The Ukrainian Armed Forces successfully struck the amphibious landing ships Yamal and Azov, a communications centre, and a number of the Black Sea Fleet's infrastructure sites," the Ukrainian armed forces' strategic communications centre said Sunday.

Moscow-installed officials on the peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014, said their forces had repelled a major Ukrainian aerial attack late Saturday night. "It was the most massive attack in recent times," the Russian-appointed governor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, said in a Telegram post.

He said a 65-year-old man was killed and four people injured. He did not mention any damage to Russian war ships. Footage shared on social media showed a large blast in the city, sending a fireball and plume of black smoke into the air, as well as what appeared to be Russian air defences intercepting incoming projectiles.

Ukraine has claimed to have destroyed around a third of Russia's Black Sea Fleet since the start of the war, usually in attacks at night using

sea-based drones packed with explosives. Satellite images show Russia has moved much of the fleet further east, to the port of Novorossiysk, amid the spate of attacks. Moscow also recently replaced its navy chief.

Ukraine's capital Kyiv and the western region of Lviv also came under a "massive" Russian air attack early Sunday, officials said, though no casualties were reported.

Ukraine's air force said Russia had fired 29 cruise missiles and 28 drones at its territory overnight.

It said it had downed 18 of the missiles and 25 drones.

Russia has significantly escalated its air attacks against Ukraine in recent days, in what it says is retaliation for a wave of Ukrainian strikes on its border regions.

In the early hours of Friday, Moscow launched its largest aerial barrages against Ukraine's energy sector since the start of the war, firing almost 90 missiles and 60 drones.

Russia has also resumed targeting Kyiv, carrying out its first strikes at the city since early February.

Russia "does not give up its goal of destroying Kyiv at any cost," Sergiy Popko, head of the city's military administration, said on Telegram.

US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink also noted the increased frequency of recent attacks.

"Russia continues to indiscriminately launch drones and missiles with no regard for millions of civilians, violating international law," Brink wrote on X. Poland's army said

Sunday that one of the Russian missiles fired at western Ukraine had entered its airspace. "Polish airspace was breached by one of the cruise missiles fired in the night by the air forces... of the Russian Federation," the army posted on X.

"The object flew through Polish airspace above the village of Oserdow (Lublin province) and stayed for 39 seconds," it said.

The country's Armed Forces Operational Command (RSZ) had said earlier that its forces were on a heightened state of readiness because of the "intensive long-range aviation activity of the Russian Federation tonight" and the missile attacks in Ukraine. Poland, which has been a staunch ally of its neighbour Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022, said Sunday that it would demand an explanation from Moscow. On the battlefield, Russian forces are seeking to press their advantage in manpower and ammunition as Kyiv faces delays of additional Western aid.

Moscow claimed Saturday to have seized a village on the western outskirts of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

Its capture last month of Adviiivka, near the Russian-held stronghold of Donetsk, was the first major territorial gain made by Russia since the devastated city of Bakhmut was seized 10 months ago.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed that success as a sign that Russian forces were back on the offensive.

PM Shehbaz reconstitutes ECC with Aurangzeb as its chairman

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif reconstituted the federal cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC). According to the official notification, the Economic Coordination Committee has been reconstituted and Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb was appointed as its chairman. The notification stated that the finance minister will head the panel with the four other ministers including economic affairs, commerce, power, petroleum, and planning, development and special initiatives, notified as its members.

It is pertinent to mention here that before the reconstitution of the ECC, Prime Minister used to hold the chairmanship of the Economic Coordination Committee.

Earlier, Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif formed a steering committee for reforms and automation in Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR).

As per details, PM Shehbaz will be chairman of the 10-member steering committee and a formal notification has also been issued in this regard.

The Federal Ministers of Finance, Industry, Commerce and Production, and Law will be members of the high profile Committee.

The Finance Division will provide Secretarial support to the Steering Committee, which will monitor the implementation of the FBR reform plan. Prior to this, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to ensure the implementation of all projects for the stability of national economy.

The prime minister said all stakeholders of different sectors of the economy should be consulted for the implementation of this plan.

National day of mourning in Russia after concert hall massacre

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): Russia will observe a national day of mourning on Sunday after a massacre in a Moscow concert hall that killed more than 130 people, the deadliest attack in Europe to have been claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has vowed to punish those behind the "barbaric terrorist attack".

The Islamic State group wrote on Telegram Saturday that the attack was "carried out by four IS fighters armed with machine guns, a pistol, knives and firebombs," as part of "the raging war" with "countries fighting Islam".

Putin, in his first public remarks on the attack, made no reference to a statement by IS claiming responsibility.

At least 133 people were killed when camouflaged gunmen stormed the Crocus City Hall, in Moscow's northern suburb of Krasnogorsk, and then set fire to the building on Friday evening.

The Islamic State group wrote on Telegram Saturday that the attack was "carried out by four IS fighters armed with machine guns, a pistol, knives and firebombs," as part of "the raging war" with "countries fighting Islam".

It is the deadliest attack in Russia for almost two decades. Russian officials expect the death toll to rise further, with more than 100 wounded in hospital.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said rescue workers were still pulling bodies from the burnt-out building on Saturday.

The emergency situations ministry has so far named 29 of the victims, the blaze having complicated the process of identification. The ministry posted a video Sunday of heavy equipment arriving at the scene of the fire to dismantle damaged structures and clear debris.

Chinese-owned tanker hit by Huthi missile in Red Sea

DUBAI (AFP/APP): A Chinese-owned oil tanker was attacked off Yemen Saturday by ballistic missiles fired by Huthi rebels, who have intensified strikes on Red Sea shipping, the US military said.

The Panamanian-flagged, Chinese-owned and operated Huang Pu issued a distress call but did not request assistance, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement on social media platform X early on Sunday.

"No casualties were reported, and the vessel resumed its course," the statement said.

The Iran-backed rebels, who control much of Yemen's Red Sea coast, have launched dozens of missile and drone strikes on shipping over the past four months, actions they say are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

CENTCOM and the British Navy's United

Kingdom Marine Trade Operations (UKMTO) said a fire had broken out on board the ship but was extinguished within 30 minutes.

The Marinetraffic tracking website later had the vessel sailing out of the Red Sea into the Gulf of Aden heading for its next port of call which, according to maritime security agency Ambrey, was New Mangalore in India.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which UKMTO said struck 23 nautical miles west of the Yemeni port of Mokha.

CENTCOM said Huthi rebels had launched four anti-ship ballistic missiles in the Red Sea near the Huang Pu before a fifth hit the vessel.

"The Houthis attacked the MV Huang despite previously stating they would not attack Chinese vessels," it said.

According to Ambrey, "the tanker's registration details, including name and operator, had been changed as recently as February 2024".

It had been registered in 2019 by British firm Union Maritime Ltd, Ambrey said, and another vessel affiliated with the same company had previously been targeted by the Huthis.

The Huthis have vowed to target Israeli, British and US ships, as well as vessels heading to Israeli ports, disrupting traffic along the vital trade route.

The United States, which leads an international coalition meant to protect Red Sea shipping, has been hitting Huthi targets in Yemen since mid-January.

CENTCOM said that, following the attack on the Huang Pu, US forces engaged six drones launched by the Huthis, five of which crashed into the Red Sea.

PTI no satisfied with Punjab govt's treatment of Parvez Elahi:Barrister Saif

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Adviser on Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif has said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is not satisfied with treatment provided by Punjab government to party President Parvez Elahi.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he talked about the reported accident of former Punjab chief minister Elahi. It has been reported that the PTI leader suffered injuries after falling on the ground Adiala Jail. Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said the PTI leadership wanted to know facts; whether Parvez Elahi had an accident or he was tortured.

A team of doctors from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should be given permission to visit him in jail and examine his condition, he demanded. The Adviser said that if the medical team was not allowed to see Parvez Elahi, the government would take legal action. On March 19, medical report of Parvez Elahi was presented in the Punjab Assembly by the deputy superintendent of Adiala Jail. The report, which included an X-ray, revealed that the septuagenarian leader had four ribs fractured after falling in the washroom.

Govt appoints Ghulam Nabi Memon as new IGP Sindh

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The federal government on Sunday appointed Ghulam Nabi Memon as Inspector General of Police Sindh for the second time.

Memon, a BS-21 officer of police service of Pakistan, was serving as State Life Insurance Corporation executive director until now. A notification, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, issued by the cabinet secretary office, said: "With the approval of the federal government, Mr Ghulam Nabi Memon [...] is transferred and post as Provincial Police Officer (PPO), Govt. of Sindh, under Section 10 of the Civil Servants Act, 1973, with immediate effect and until further orders."

Memon comes with vast policing experience and also served at the UN Mission in Bosnia and as the Pakistan High Commission in the United Kingdom. It is the second time he has been appointed as the provincial police chief. He was appointed as the IGP Sindh in 2022 and was removed by the caretaker set up, which appointed Riffat Mukhtar Raja as the IGP. Memon had also served as Additional IGP Karachi twice between

Aid to Gaza requires Israel 'removing obstacles'

CAIRO (AFP): United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said Sunday in Cairo that delivering the necessary aid to famine-threatened Gaza "requires Israel removing the remaining obstacles and chokepoints to relief".

Guterres repeated his call for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" to alleviate "the plight of Palestinian children, women and men struggling to survive the nightmare in Gaza", during a joint press conference with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. He had visited on Saturday the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, where nearly six months of war and siege have displaced the vast majority of the territory's 2.4 million people and destroyed its civilian infrastructure.

"Looking at Gaza, it almost appears that the four horsemen of war, famine, conquest and

death are galloping across it," the UN chief said.

"The whole world recognises that it's past time to silence the guns and ensure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire," he continued.

The Israeli government is under growing international pressure to ease its bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza, which the territory's health ministry says have killed at least 32,226 people, most of them women and children.

The war was sparked on October 7 by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel, which resulted in about 1,160 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures. Israel has vowed to pursue its retaliatory military campaign all the way to Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where 1.5 million Palestinians have sought shelter, penned in by the

Egyptian border.

Guterres, who also met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, called the Rafah border crossing and Egypt's El-Arish airport where assistance is sent "essential arteries for life-saving aid into Gaza".

"But those arteries are clogged," he said, with massive lines of trucks piled up on the Egyptian side, only trickling in as the humanitarian situation worsens. Calls have mounted for Israel to ease its restrictions on aid and open more crossings into Gaza.

"Palestinians in Gaza desperately need what has been promised -- a flood of aid. Not trickles. Not drops," Guterres said.

The UN has repeatedly warned of famine in the Palestinian territory, particularly in the north, which has been largely cut off from aid deliveries.



‘Govt making efforts to reduce electricity prices, inflation’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Housing and Works Riaz Hussain Pirzada on Sunday said that the government was making all-out efforts to reduce the electricity prices and inflation.

The minister visited the utility stores in Vehari district, checked the quality of the food items provided at cheap prices under the prime minister's Ramadan Relief Package.

He directed the administration of Utility Stores in Vehari to provide complete relief to the people of the district under the subsidy given by the prime minister so that they do not face any difficulties in buying daily

items during Ramadan.

Talking to the media on this occasion, Riaz Pirzada said that supply of cheap flour is being ensured, efforts are being made to reduce electricity prices and inflation, staff at utility stores are working in the best way.

He said the government has taken a revolutionary step for the citizens by giving Ramadan package and expressed the hope that they will get the country out of crises in two years through hard work and struggle. He said, "According to the vision of the prime minister, we will make the Ramadan package suc-

cessful, our job is to serve the people."

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif was working day and night for the prosperity of the country and its people, he added.

The minister said, "I have come for the visit on the instructions of the prime minister and being his team, we are trying to get the country out of crisis." Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) contested the general elections to alleviate the inflation, he said adding that the government was making plan for the development of agriculture, soon it will be implemented across the country.