

Tarar victory challenged
LAHORE (INP): Challenges have been formally lodged against the electoral triumphs of PML-N leader and Federal Minister for Information, Attaullah Tarar, in NA-127, and Samiullah Khan in PP-145, before the Lahore High Court on Thursday. Presided over by Justice Sultan Tanveer of the Election Tribunal, both cases are set to undergo thorough scrutiny.



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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif exchanging views with Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.

Steps for stoppage of electricity theft reviewed

PM lauds Pakistan Navy for safeguarding country's maritime interests

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a high level meeting on stoppage of electricity theft and directed that immediate disciplinary action should be initiated against the officers and exemplary punishment should be given to them for abetting the crime and causing loss of billions of dollars.

He said it was their responsibility to create a stable system by taking measures like launching a campaign to stop electricity theft. The present situation of the economy could not bear the problem of electricity theft, he added. He said a strategy should be formulated at the earliest for decreasing line losses and for upgradation of transmission lines. He said generation companies were a burden on the national exchequer and work should be started on their privatization at the earliest.

A report on complete plan for solarization of tubewells in Balochistan should be presented, he added. During the meeting, it was decided to install smart meters on transformers under the public sector development programme. Feeder monitors would be deployed at the feeders which were causing huge losses. The meeting was briefed that the areas with low rate of electricity theft would have less loadshedding.

An amendment was brought in section 462(O) of Pakistan Penal Code through an ordinance to make electricity theft a cognizable offense. Due to the anti-theft campaign in September last year, the rate of electricity theft had seen a considerable drop. The prime minister said under the anti-theft campaign, since September 2023, Rs 57 billion were recovered.

A whole of the government approach was adopted during the campaign to stop theft of electricity. Under the electricity anti-theft campaign, 45,777 people in Punjab, 1250 in Sindh, 5121 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 181 were arrested in Balochistan. During the campaign, 350 personnel of distribution companies were suspended for their bad performance or abetment.

It was told that the task forces set up at district and division levels for stopping theft of electricity would be given part of the recovery amount for their good performance. Federal Minister for Power Awais Ahmed Leghari, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Cheema, Federal Minister for Law and Justice

Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Industry and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Petroleum Musadiq Malik and relevant officers attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited the Naval Headquarters here wherein he appreciated the services of Pakistan Navy to safeguard the maritime interest of the country despite limited resources.

The prime minister, who was accompanied by the federal ministers, especially lauded the professional response of the Pakistan Navy to foil the recent terrorist attack on Naval Airbase Turbat. Upon arrival, the prime minister was welcomed by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf and was presented Guard of Honour by a smartly turned out naval contingent.

The prime minister also laid a wreath at the Shuhada monument and afterwards was introduced to the Principal Staff Officers of Naval Headquarters. During the meeting, matters pertaining to the Regional Maritime Security milieu and operational readiness of the Pakistan Navy were discussed.

The Naval Chief apprised the prime minister on roles, capabilities and future modernization plans of the Pakistan Navy. Later on a detailed briefing was presented by Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) on the prevailing maritime environment, challenges being faced by Pakistan Navy and its response to meet the challenges.

The prime minister was especially apprised about the capability requirements of Pakistan Navy to meet the current and future challenges being faced by the country in the maritime domain. He was also apprised of the measures to benefit from economic prospects of the maritime sector. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stressed that a strong economy held the key to meet all the challenges faced by the country. Towards the end, the prime minister also visited the Command Operations Centre of Pakistan Navy. The naval chief thanked the prime minister for his visit and reposing his confidence in the Navy.

He also assured that Pakistan Navy with Allah's help would continue to defend the country's sea frontiers and maritime interests and would shoulder the responsibilities with honour both during peace and war.

PTI to stage rallies on Sunday

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Thursday announced putting up a show of street power on Sunday for the autonomy of the judiciary and the release of prisoner number 804 — party founder Imran Khan — imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

"The PTI is going to stage a rally for the freedom of judiciary on the directives issued by the founder of PTI," party Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said while talking to the media after a meeting with Imran Khan.

Speaking on the occasion, Marwat said a rally would be held in Peshawar at 2 PM on Sunday. "PTI invites all parties to participate in the rally." He said on April 6, the PTI leadership and activists would fill up the Islamabad's Parade Ground. "Our gathering will be peaceful and our ultimate goal is to get Khan out of jail." To a question, Marwat said the judges' letter to the Supreme Court talks about the pressure faced by them in rendering their professional duties. Unleashing his anger at the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif, PTI leader Latif Khosa said a convicted criminal was given a red-carpet protocol from London.

He added: "All cases of Nawaz Sharif and his family have been closed. All prominent figures of Pakistan have written letters regarding pressure faced by judges of high courts." Earlier, Gohar also said that the government had allowed all the other vehicles to pass, but the PTI cars were stopped outside the prison, forcing them to walk one kilometre on foot to meet the party founder. "We have informed the Jail Superintendent about the blockade of roads and also requested permission to take our documents along with us," Barrister Gohar said.

Eight of a family killed in Buner mishap

F.P. Report

BUNER: Eight people of a family were killed when their vehicle plunged into a gorge in Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday.

The victims, including five women and two children, were travelling from Sawari Bazaar to Shahi area when their vehicle plunged into a ravine after its brakes failed near Chagharzai Pandir area and Buner, according to police. Police and rescue teams arrived at the scene and moved the bodies to the hospital.

The local residents and the rescue team carried out a rescue operation in the rugged mountainous area to remove the bodies and shifted the bodies to the native village where a Qayamat Saghra broke out in the entire village and no one was there to formally open the fast. There was mourning in the entire area. Meanwhile, PK 26 MPA Advisor Youth Affairs Syed Fakhr Jahan Bacha and Tehsil Chagharzai Nazim Haji Sharif Khan have expressed their grief over this sad incident and offered condolences to the deceased. And prayed for Patience for the bereaved families.

"The acts targeting Pakistan-China friendship are particularly aimed at creating mistrust between the two iron brothers," the prime minister was quoted as saying in the official statement.

During the meeting, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Asim Munir reiterated the resolve of armed forces to eliminate the scourge of terrorism afflicting the country. Noting the recent surge in terrorist incidents, Gen Munir underestimated the resilience and grit of the state and the people of Pakistan". "We shall not leave any stone unturned to ensure that every foreign citizen, especially Chinese nationals, contributing to the prosperity of Pakistan, is safe and secure in Pakistan. We shall fight terrorism with all our might, to the very end," he added.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) also urged all UN member states to actively cooperate with Pakistan and China in apprehending the perpetrators of the Bisham attack. In a statement issued in New York on Wednesday, the Security Council members strongly condemned the "heinous and cowardly terrorist attack".

"Pakistan will continue to work with our Chinese brothers in ensuring the safety and security of Chinese nationals, projects and institutions in Pakistan," she said. The commitment to eradicate terrorism was echoed in an emergency meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The high-level meeting was also attended by Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Gen Asim Munir, federal ministers, all chief ministers, chief secretaries, inspector generals of the provinces, chief secretaries, and IGs of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

It was decided in the meeting that the government would crush the resurgence of terrorism in the country at any cost. According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), PM Shehbaz offered his deepest condolences to the victims' families and assured them that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

The premier said the whole nation was saddened by the loss of Chinese lives and also gave instructions for a thorough joint investigation to be conducted, utilising all state resources.

Bisham attack planned by Pak-China enemies: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) said on Thursday that there was no doubt that Tuesday's suicide attack in Bisham — which claimed the lives of six people including five Chinese nationals — was "orchestrated by the enemies of Pak-China friendship".

FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch addressed a weekly press briefing on Thursday, where she said that Pakistan was contact with the Chinese government regarding the "heinous attack". She said Pakistan was "fully committed to bringing terrorists, and their facilitators and abettors to justice". "Such despicable attacks further strengthen Pakistan's resolve in combatting terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations," the FO spokesperson said.

"Pakistan and China are close friends and iron brothers. We have no doubt that the Bisham terror attack was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship," she stated. "Together, we will resolutely act against all such acts and forces and defeat them," Baloch said.

The Frontier Post

Five coal miners die due

DUKI (PP): Five coal miners died after the roof of a mud room collapsed in Miraj Coal mine area of district Duki in Balochistan on Thursday. According to levies force information, the roof caved in due to rain in Miraj Coal area of Duki, resultantly, five coal miners sleeping in the room came under the debris of collapsed roof and died. The victims were identified as Inayatullah, Ibrahim, Wali, Sudtuddin and Zahoor Ahmed.

Govt to place IHC judges' letter before cabinet today

Commission to probe spy agencies' interference in judiciary after Prime Minister-Chief Justice meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After a high-level meeting with Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday decided to constitute a commission to probe into allegations levelled by the Islamabad High Court's (IHC) judges against the country's spy agencies of interfering in judicial matters.

The premier-CJP huddle comes after six judges of the IHC — Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kiyani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz — wrote to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to convene a judicial convention over the matter of the alleged interference of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, in judicial affairs.

"PM Shehbaz assured CJP Isa that no compromise will be made on the judiciary's independence," Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said in a press conference after the

key meeting on Thursday. Tarar added that the federal government has responsibility to investigate the matter under supervision of an impartial judicial personality, which may be a retired judge with good reputation, under the Commission of Inquiry Act.

At the same time he also announced that a decision in principle has been made to constitute a commission, and the "premier will take up the matter during the federal cabinet meeting today (Friday)". "The federal government considered the content of the judges' letter an extremely serious matter as no one should be allowed to meddle in any institutions' affairs, and it should be probed."

To a question, Tarar categorically rejected speculations of concealing facts or slowing down probe process. He said such complaints should not be shied away and the PML-N-led government always publicised outcomes of every probes through commissions.

The letter underscored that the code of conduct for judges prescribed by the SJC provides no guidance on

how they "must react to and or report incidents that are tantamount to intimidation and interfere with judicial independence". A day earlier, a full court meeting of the apex court was held in the federal capital to deliberate on the judges' letter that sought guidance from the SJC "with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on the part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with the discharge of his/her official functions and qualify as intimidation".

The two-hour huddle, convened by CJP Isa, took place after bar associations of Sindh, Lahore, Islamabad and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as senior lawyers demanded a probe into the letter which arguably might have serious consequences for the country's judiciary. Separately, a plea has also been filed in the apex court seeking an open court investigation of the IHC judges' letter. The constitutional petition, submitted by Mian Dawood Advocate, calls for the constitution of an empowered commission to investigate the "premediated" letter.

Interference in judicial affairs intolerable: CJP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In response to Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges' letter alleging interference of intelligence agencies, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa has said that meddling by the executive in the affairs and "judicial workings of Judges will not be tolerated" come what may.

In a statement issued following the top court's full court meeting and CJP Isa's meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, a Supreme Court spokesperson said the top judge received a letter dated March 25, 2024 from six judges of the IHC on March 26. "Considering the gravity of the allegations levelled in the said letter, the CJP called a meeting on the same day with the Chief Justice and all the Judges of the Islamabad High Court after Iftar at 8 pm at the Chief Justice's residence," the statement added.

It said the concerns of all the judges were heard individually in a meeting that lasted for over two and a half hours. The following day on March 27, the CJP met Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan and Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar and thereafter the CJP along with Senior Puisne Judge Mansoor Ali Shah met with the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and the senior most member of the Pakistan Bar Council present in Islamabad, as per the SC statement.

A Full Court meeting of all the judges of the Supreme Court was called under the chairmanship of CJP at 4pm the same day and the huddle deliberated over the issues raised in the letter sent by the six judges of the Islamabad High Court. "A consensus was developed amongst the majority of the members of the Full Court that in view of the gravity of the situation, the CJP may hold a meeting with the Prime Minister of

Pakistan on the issues raised in the said letter and the meeting was adjourned."

Subsequently, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif accompanied by the law minister and the AGP met with the CJP, senior puisne judge and registrar of the Supreme Court at the apex court at 2pm today (Thursday), March, 28 2024. The meeting lasted for about an hour and a half wherein the CJP "clearly stated that interference by the Executive in the affairs and judicial workings of Judges will not be tolerated and under no circumstances can independence of the judiciary be allowed to be compromised".

He and the senior puisne judge stated that independence of judiciary is a foundational pillar that upholds the rule of law and a strong democracy. During the meeting a proposal was made to constitute an inquiry commission under the Pakistan Commissions of Inquiry Act, 2017 which should be headed by a retired judge of "impeccable integrity" to inquire into the matter, as per the statement.

The statement further said that PM Shehbaz undertook that a meeting of the federal cabinet will be called to seek their approval for the constitution of the said commission. It said the premier fully endorsed the views expressed by CJP Isa and Senior Puisne Judge Shah and further assured them that he will be taking other appropriate measures to ensure an independent judiciary, including issuance of directions to the relevant departments, and initiating legislation in accordance "with paragraph 53 of Suo Moto No. 7/2017 (the Faizabad Dharna judgment)". Thereafter, in continuation of the last meeting, the CJP again called a full court meeting and briefed the judges on what had transpired at the meeting with the prime minister, the spokesperson stated in the communique.

Gandapur, Naqvi vow to eliminate terrorism

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur here Thursday vowed to eliminate scourge of terrorism and expediting intelligence based operation further.

Both the leaders expressed deep condolences on killing of the Chinese national at Besham suicide blast. The Interior Minister has arrived at the Chief Minister House where was welcomed by the KP CM and exchanged views on security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

They expressed complete solidarity with families of victims of chinese nationals, people, Govt of China and expressed the resolve to bring the facilitators behind the attack to justice. Mohsin Naqvi said that culprits could not escape from clutches of law.

The Minister directed for effective coordination to counter menace of terrorism and that through such nefarious acts the courage of Pakistani nation could not be shaken. He said the terrorists would be dealt with full might as fight against terrorism was for the country's survival. He assured all out support to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Meanwhile, a delegation of UNICEF headed by Abdullah Fadil, called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur here at Chief Minister's House on Thursday and discussed with him matters of mutual interest with special focus on public welfare activities being carried out in the province with the assistance of UNICEF. Prospects for further expanding mutual cooperation and partnership between UNICEF and the provincial government were also discussed in the meeting.

Speaking on this occasion, the chief minister said that UNICEF is playing an important role for the public welfare in the province. He said that incumbent provincial government also intends to further enhance and expand this partnership to some other sectors including upgradation of schools, supply of clean drinking water, sewerage, solarization of schools, Madaris, tube wells and deserving households in the province.

Touching upon the priorities of his government regarding development of newly merged districts, the chief minister said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially merged areas had been affected badly during the war against terrorism.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur called on by Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Raz Naqvi.

Nepra allows tariff hike

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) on Thursday allowed the federal government to increase electricity rates by Rs2.75 per unit for all consumers across the country for three months — April to June — with additional revenue impact going

beyond Rs85 billion.

The increase was allowed under quarterly tariff adjustment for the second quarter — October to December 2023 — of the current fiscal year. Documents released by the authority on its website said the increase would apply to all consumer categories, except lifeline consumers, including both consumers

of ex-Wapda distribution companies and K-Electric.

A letter said the authority's decision was being sent to the federal government for intimation and action before its notification by Nepra. The authority said it had applied the hike "in the interest of consumers" from April onwards after the expiry of existing applicable quarterly adjustments in March.

SRA member arrested by CTD

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) reported the arrest of Muhammad Amjad Shah, an alleged member of the proscribed Sindh Revolutionary Army (SRA), from a hotel situated on Shahrah-e-Faisal.

Amjad Shah, wanted by the CTD as a proclaimed offender and absconder in a case registered under different sections of the Explosive Substance Act and Anti-Terrorism Act (case number 58/2022), was taken into custody.

His associate, Sheeraz Ali, had previously been apprehended and was already in prison. The CTD stated that further investigations into the matter were currently underway.

Applications open for 6th Cycle of Start-up Incubation under NEP-NICs

LAHORE (APP): National Expansion Plan of National Incubation Centers (NEP-NICs) Program, a collaborative effort of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) and Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT), has opened applications for the 6th cycle of its startup incubation program across Pakistan.

In partnership with the public universities, as many as 13 tech incubation centers have been set up across the country where startups are provided with free of cost workspace, mentorship, networking opportunities, monthly stipend, business support and legal guidance for a period of six months.

The incubation program is tailored to the needs of early stage startups and runs on a zero-equity model. Applications are open for Gujrat, Jamshoro, Karachi, Kohat, Lahore, Muzaffarabad, Quetta, Rawalpindi, Sukkur, Swat and Taxila. NEP NICs successfully incubated 690 startups till date, which have generated a cumulative over Rs. 1,100 Million in revenue and created more than 12,000 jobs overall. In this regard, PITB Chairman Faisal Yousuf stated that the objective of the National Expansion Plan of NICs is to democratize entrepreneurship, boost business activity across the country, grow the IT industry and promote economic growth in Pakistan.

All watercourses in Punjab to be brick lined: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Thursday ordered to complete brick lining of all watercourses in the province in five years under 'Sarsabz Punjab Khushaal Khashtkar' initiative.

The chief minister was presiding over a meeting in which formal approval was given to various agriculture projects.

During the meeting, approval was given to the project under which lining of all watercourses in Punjab would be carried out besides solar tube-well project.

In the first phase, lining of 1,200 watercourses would be carried out in two years at a cost of Rs 10 billion while in the second phase lining of 7,000 watercourses would be ensured. Farmers possessing upto 25 acres of land would be provided solar system in two years. In the meeting, the agriculture secretary briefed the chief minister about agriculture projects.

Decision was made in the meeting to give 56 types of agricultural machinery to farmers on 60 per cent subsidy while farmers would be given 1,000 laser levels in the next six months.

Maryam Nawaz directed the relevant authorities to increase seed production from 400,000 tons to 600,000 tons.

The meeting also discussed proposal to

cultivate soyabean seed on 100,000 acres of land with the cooperation of University of Agriculture, Faisalabad.

The chief minister said the federal government would be contacted to waive off tax and duty on high tech agricultural machinery. To control smog and avoid burning of crops residues, the meeting unanimously decided to contact federal government to waive off tax on rice straw shredder machine. Meeting was told that there was 30 to 37 per cent tax and duty on high tech agricultural machinery.

Under mechanization plan, agricultural machinery would be bought with Rs 2 billion in three months and machinery would be provided to farmers on subsidy.

Under two years mechanization plan, 23,000 agricultural equipment, 2280 laser land leveling would be given to farmers on subsidy. The country's wheat requirement was 29 million tons while Punjab produces 26 million tons.

Annually 1.75 million tons of seed was required for sowing of different crops in the country and seed worth Rs 50 billion was imported. Punjab Agriculture Minister Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani, Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb and others attended the meeting.

IPS signed MoU for scholarship to Afghanistan students



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Good news for all students from Afghanistan.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by Director IPS Bilal Afridi and Director of Attache of Refugees and Repatriation - KP Niaz Muhammad Arif, wherein both organizations committed to providing special scholarships and discounts to Afghan

students. The fields of study covered by this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) are FA/Fsc, BBA, BS-Computer Science, BS- English, B. Ed, and DIT, which are affiliated with BISEP, Technical Board, and University of Peshawar.

Making ensuring that no youngster would be denied an education was the primary goal of this memorandum of understanding.

PM&DC celebrates the achievement of WFME accreditation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Medical and Dental celebrated a momentous achievement as it has been awarded accreditation by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). The accreditation serves as a testament to the institution's commitment to providing high-quality medical education and sets a benchmark for excellence in the field.

Mr. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives graced the ceremony as Chief Guest on this historic achievement. The President WFME Prof. Ricardo León-Bórquez also spared his precious time and participated in the jubilant ceremony. The accreditation ceremony held yesterday brought together esteemed medical professionals, Council members, Deans, vice chancellors of medical colleges and other medical stakeholders to acknowledge and honor the institution's achievement.

The ceremony began with a warm welcome by the President PM&DC, expressing gratitude for the relentless efforts and commitment of PM&DC in meeting the rigorous standards set by WFME. This recognition is a testament to PM&DC's unwavering dedication to ensuring excellence and quality in medical education throughout Pakistan. During the ceremony, PM&DC was praised for its outstanding educational programs, expertise, regulatory and monitoring policies, and dedication to the advancement of medical knowledge and education. Several key moments stood out, includ-

ing inspiring speeches by President WFME, PM&DC and the chief guest.

At the ceremony the Chief guest Mr.Ahsan Iqbal expressed gratitude, saying, "This accreditation is a testament to the hard work and dedication of PM&DC. It affirms their commitment to providing a world-class medical education that prepares our graduates to excel in their careers and make a positive impact on healthcare." The President WFME congratulated PM&DC and emphasized the importance of quality medical education, stating, "Accreditation by WFME signifies that medical schools should meet the highest international standards in medical education. It is a recognition commitment to excellence and a contribution to the global medical community."

The ceremony was attended by more than 150 stakeholders of the medical profession including Deans, Principals, and faculty of medical colleges. The atmosphere was one of joy and pride, with attendees expressing their excitement for the future of medical education.

President PM&DC talking to the ceremony said, WFME accreditation is a significant milestone for Pakistani institutes, positioning it among the top institutions in the field of medical education. This achievement not only boosts the institution's reputation but also instills confidence in current and prospective students, faculty, and stakeholders.

The Council's mission is to ensure the highest standards of medical and dental education, practice, and ethics across Pakistan. As guardians of health and wellness, they bear an

immense responsibility to uphold the integrity of their professions, champion excellence, and foster innovation. They must adapt to the evolving landscape of healthcare, embrace innovation while honouring timeless values of compassion, integrity, and professionalism. He also committed to maintaining the highest standards of medical education and looks forward to further advancements in the field.

Throughout the ceremony, heartfelt appreciation was expressed for the tireless efforts of PM&DC and the core team who played a crucial role in achieving this accreditation. The commitment to continuous improvement and the pursuit of excellence were highlighted as key factors in the success of PM&DC. On the occasion Surgeon General stated that it is undoubtedly a matter of pride for entire Pakistan and especially for Medical Fertility after achieving WFME accreditation. This accreditation will definitely enable Pakistani doctors to work and study abroad without any hassel.

Talking to the ceremony the Federal Secretary Health Mr.Iftikhar Ali Shallwani stated that it was a joint effort of the Ministry of Health and PM&DC to achieve this milestone which holds an important value in the medical field. He added that without the tireless efforts of the entire team, it would have never been possible to attain this recognition.

The delegates who attended the event applauded PM&DC for its remarkable accomplishment. They emphasized the positive impact this recognition would have on medical education standards in

Pakistan, ultimately benefiting aspiring healthcare professionals and the broader community.

The ceremony provided an opportunity for attendees to reflect on the significance of this achievement for the medical community in Pakistan. The collaboration between PM&DC and WFME is anticipated to bring about positive changes in medical education practices, aligning them with global standards.

As the ceremony concluded, President PM&DC expressed gratitude to WFME for its rigorous evaluation process and pledged continued commitment to maintaining and enhancing the quality of medical education in Pakistan and also highlighted the unparalleled efforts of the Federal Minister for Health in achieving this recognition.

The following team was presented with Plaques and certificates at the ceremony in recognition to their hard work.

Lt.Gen.Dr.Mohsin M.Qureshi, Surgeon General, Dr.Nadeem Jan, Mr.Iftikhar Ali shallwani Secretary Health, Mr.Farzand Ali, Dr.Muhamud Aurangzeb, Prof.Dr.Muhammad Shoaib Shafi, Prof.Dr.Zahid Aman, Dr.Naveed Yousaf, Prof.Dr.Mahwish Arooj, Prof.Dr.Fahad Azam, Dr.usman Mahmood, Prof.Dr.Mohammad Amir, Prof.Dr.Mohammad Iqbal Khan , Prof.Brig.Dr.Abdul Samad, Prof.Brig.Dr.Amina Nadeem

Dr.Fareeha Farooqui, Dr.Riffat Shafi, Dr.Adil Haider, Dr. Muhammad Suleman Sadiq Hashmi, Dr.Imdad khush Registrar, PM&DC, Ms.Hina Shaukat Media department and Jamil Bhutta Admin department.



LAHORE: A large number of people offers Dua before break their fast during the holy month of Ramadan at the Badshabad Shahi Mosque.

Project to connect Orange Line and Green Line is underway: Sharjeel

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has announced that the project to connect the Orange Line and Green Line is underway. A shuttle service will be initiated to facilitate this connection.

Chairing a high-level meeting in Karachi, Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that initially, a shuttle service will commence immediately after Eid to Exhibition Tower, while a free shuttle service will be provided from Anubhai Park to Jinnah Women's College.

He mentioned that the federal government had committed to providing 300 buses worth 18 billion under the PSDP project, and discussions will be conducted with them regarding the procurement of these buses.

Sharjeel Inam Memon noted that the caretaker government neglected the Red Line BRT, resulting in project delays.

He emphasized the importance of completing the Red Line BRT promptly to serve the public.



Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that the Sindh government will embark on plans to initiate an inter-city bus service, with the procurement of 500 buses for the convenience of the people under the inter-district transport project. Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted the progress of the Yellow Line bus service, expressing optimism that

it will soon benefit the public. Additionally, the Sindh government will operate buses from Karachi to Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas to Hyderabad, Larkana to Sukkur, and Qamber to Shahdadt. The meeting was attended by Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, MDSMTA Kamal Dayo, Acting CEO of Trans Karachi Shumaila Mohsin, officials from the Red Line, Orange Line, Yellow Line, international consultants, and other officers.

Complete Lady Wellington Hospital new building on time: minister

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique has directed the departments and contractors concerned to complete new building of Lady Wellington Hospital on time. During his visit to the new hospital building site on Thursday, he reviewed the ongoing progress at the site. He was briefed by the officers concerned about progress on the project.

The minister said that the old Lady Wellington Hospital building had become very dilapidated.

There was no shortage of funds for construction of the new building, he added.

Khawaja Salman said that after construction of the new building, thousands of patients would get the best treatment facilities.

"We are trying to complete the ongoing revamping project in all

government hospitals of Punjab soon," he said. Secretary Department of Specialised Healthcare and Medical Education Syed Wajid Ali Shah, Chief Planning Officer Abdul Haq Bhatti, Vice Chancellor King Edward Medical University Prof. Dr. Mehmood Ayaz, MS Lady Wellington Hospital Dr. Saeed Akhtar and officers of IDAP were also present.

Health minister ensures swift action on PIC operation theaters

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister, Khawaja Salman Rafique, has taken proactive steps to address the pressing issue of operation theaters at the Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC).

In a statement on Thursday, he emphasized that the rapid progress on the operation theaters is under

vigilant monitoring to ensure timely completion. Following the revelation of operational challenges on March 11, Minister Rafique wasted no time and conducted a comprehensive inspection of the PIC premises alongside health department officials on March 12. During the visit, he engaged with contractors to expedite the resolution of the issue.

Currently, work at the PIC is being conducted in two shifts to accelerate the renovation process. The Minister acknowledged the distressing conditions faced by patients at the PIC and emphasized the government's commitment to alleviate their suffering.


The minister said that the ministry's proactive approach underscores its dedication to enhancing healthcare facilities and ensuring the well-being of the citizens of Punjab.

Sindh Culture Minister invited for 29th 'Almi Mushaira'

KARACHI (APP): The delegation of Sakinan-e-Shehr-i-Qauid headed by Mehmood Ahmed Khan on Thursday called on Sindh Minister for Culture and Tourism Syed Zulifkar Ali Shah and extended invitation of the 29th "Almi Mushaira" to be held at Expo Centre on April 20, 2024. The Minister was told that poets from Pakistan and across the world will participate the event.

The delegation informed that poets from Islamabad, Lahore, Azad Kashmir, Abotabad, Gawadar and other cities of the country while literary personalities from USA, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and Qatar are expected to attend the "Almi Mushaira".

Syed Zulifkar Shah said Sindh government was taking measures to promote literary activities which always helped in creating peaceful atmosphere. Shah said government will provide every possible cooperation for the success of the literary event. As far as the art and culture is concerned, Karachi has become role model city of the country, the minister said, adding that by organizing literary and cultural events, the positive image of Karachi would emerge across the world.



PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DIVISION BANNU
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

Public Health Engineering Division Bannu invites electronic Bids on (MRS-2022) (2nd Bi Annual) from eligible firms / companies in accordance with KPRA procurement Rules 2014 on single stage single envelop procedure for the following works.

Sr.#	Name of work	Estimated Cost (Rs.)	Bid Security with S/Duty	Time & Date of Tender Submission
Annual Maintenance & Repair for Drinking Water Supply Schemes in Public Health Engineering Division Bannu for the year 2023-24				
1.	Public Health Engineering Sub-Division Surrani / Wazir Sub-Head: Electrical / Mechanical Works	6,000	0.009	15/04/2024 at 1200 hours
2.	Public Health Engineering Sub-Division Bakka Khel/Mira Khel Sub-Head: Electrical / Mechanical Work	6,000	0.009	
3.	Public Health Engineering Sub-Division Surrani / Wazir Sub-Head: Civil Work	4,000	0.004	
4.	Public Health Engineering Sub-Division Bakka Khel/Mira Khel Sub-Head: Civil Work	4,000	0.004	

TERMS & CONDITIONS

(1) Contractors will quote their rates electronically and BOQ can be downloaded from PHED website www.phedkp.gov.pk prior to closing date & time. (2) Instructions to bidders and any other information may be obtained from the office of the undersigned prior to closing date of bid submission on any working day. (3) All bidders / contractor must have registration with KPRA, otherwise bid will be non-responsive. (4) The contractors quoting their bids upto 10% below Engineer Estimate shall submit bid security 2% only of Engineer Estimate. The contractor quoting their rate more than 10% below & up to 20 % below of Engineer Estimate shall submit along with their bids 8% additional security of Engineer Estimated cost in addition to 2%bid security .If the bid is not accompanied with required amount of additional security then bid will be considered non-responsive and 2% bid security shall forfeited in favour of Government and 2" lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. (5) The contractors quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit an additional security on Engineer Estimated cost equal to the differential amount Engineer Estimate and submitted bid (Differential amount :i.e if a contractor quote 25 % below then he will submit 25% additional security of Engineer Estimate in addition to 2% bid security) along with detail rate analysis. (6) In case of more than 20% below bids, if the bid is not accompanied by detail rate analysis and/or required additional security the bid shall considered non-responsive and all other securities with such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Government and 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. In case detail rate analysis submitted with bids is in view of procuring entity not convincing then Head of procuring entity may declare such bid non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reason thereof. (7) Bidding / Tender documents must reach to the office of Executive Engineer PHE Division Bannu on or before dated 15/04/2023 at 1200 Hours, which will be opened on the same day at 1400 Hours. (8) The competent authority reserved the right to reject any or all bids by assigning cogent reason. (9) All others terms & condition will be as per KPRA Rules notified time by time. (10) CDR will not be released till completion of tender process. (11) In case tender submission and opening date is notified / declared as a public holiday then next working day will be tender submission and opening date.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PHE Division Bannu. Ph # 0928-9270049 INF(P)#591/24

Emergency medicine supplies handed over to hospitals

PESHAWAR (APP): Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah handed over the first batch of emergency medicines worth 2.9 billion rupees to district health officers and hospitals in 17 districts of the province, including former FATA.

He handed over these medicines while visiting Provincial Ware House of the Health Department, accompanied by Director-General Health Dr. Shaukat Ali, Additional DG Administration Dr. Siraj, Director Public Health Dr. Irshad Roghani, and DHOs from various districts.

Speaking to the media Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah told that emergency medicines have been dispatched for all hospitals across the province, totalling 17 districts.

A total of 47 different types of emergency medicines have been included in this essential supply.

The Health Minister highlighted that the shortage of essential medicines was a significant challenge for the new government, as hospitals had been facing shortages for the past six months. He expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur for ensuring the provision of medicines on priority basis. Approximately three billion rupees have been released for medicines, ensuring their availability for patients in hospitals; otherwise, hospitals would not benefit from such funds.

Responding to a question, the Health Minister acknowledged that hospitals have been historically plagued by crises in the caretaker government. The biggest and first challenge for the health department is being addressed today. He assured the public that this supply chain will not be interrupted. Currently, medicines are being dispatched for three months, and the next batch of medicines will be sent immediately after the budget. These medicines will be available in all district and tehsil hospitals, including basic health units.

Speaking to media representatives, the Health Minister stated that preparations are underway for timely procurement of medicines. Sixteen percent of the provincial budget will be allocated for health. Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur is focused on health and education. Efforts are being made to bring all medical equipment to a single warehouse, from where hospitals will be supplied according to their needs.



PESHAWAR: Delegation of UNICEF meeting with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur.

Dr Amjad appointed as focal person

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has appointed MNA Dr. Amjad Ali Khan as the focal person for health.

A notification issued here said that Dr Amjad Ali Khan would assist the Chief Minister and Health Minister in health-related activities. Dr Amjad Ali Khan was elected as a Member of the National Assembly from Swat NA-II.

Detained accused killed

PESHAWAR (APP): In an incident of firing in police lines hospital, an accused in police custody was killed. The slain was identified Asfand Yar, confirmed SP Cantt Waqas Rafiq adding that the accused was brought to the hospital for medical check-up when he was targeted by opposite group.

The police immediately held the attacker and shifted to police station.

Vacations announced

PESHAWAR (APP): The Elementary and Secondary Education Department on Thursday notified spring vacations in the public and private educational institutions from April 01 to 08.

Principals of schools, teachers and administrative staff would ensure their attendance at schools during the vacations.

Martyrdom day of Hazrat Ali: SP holds meeting for security arrangements

PESHAWAR (APP): Superintendent of Police, City Division Tayyab Jan on Thursday held a special meeting with the representatives of the business community and presidents of markets for security arrangements on the martyrdom day of Hazrat Ali.

He said the business community is the backbone of the country's economy for which security, a peaceful and conducive environment was the priority of the police. He appreciated the

businessmen community for their cooperation on every occasion with the police and other government machinery.

He said the police officials were in touch with all the schools of thought and the concerned persons of all sects to maintain the atmosphere of brotherhood and inter-faith harmony.

He said the security of Imambarghas, processions, and gatherings would be monitored through CCTV cameras.

The officials of BDU along with sniffer dogs would be deployed to deal with any unpleasant situation.

Checking would be carried out at all entrance and exit points of the city, while security personnel in plain clothes would also perform security duty.

The meeting was attended by ASP Hashtangari Ali Abdullah, DSP Noor Wahid Khan, SHO Khan Raziq police station Salim Khan, representatives of the business community and traders.

FIA conducts 11 raids

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as 11 raids were conducted against elements involved in fake medicines and electricity theft here on Thursday. According to details, 6 cases were registered against the accused involved in electricity theft and 3 accused were arrested.

The accused were stealing electricity from their homes, offices and shops by hooking the main power line, the spokesman said.

Raiding operations were carried out in various areas of Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat with PESCO officials disconnected the illegal connections on the spot.

Cable and other equipment used for illegal electricity supply were also seized, FIA spokesman said. A total of four inquiries and one case have been registered against the accused involved in the sale of fake medicines, FIA spokesman said. The accused were involved in buying and selling fake medicines, he added.

Fake medicines were seized and handed over to Drug Authorities and the accused was arrested and investigation started.



PESHAWAR: Manager BRT Fahad Cheema alongwith officials of Information Department, Radio Pakhtunkhwa and Swat Motorway meeting with Special Advisor to CM Amjad Ali.

‘Steps to be taken to increase disable quota’

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mashal Azam Yousafzai has said that separate directorates of special education and women empowerment would be created soon and steps would be taken to increase the quota for disabled people in government jobs by 10%.

She expressed these views while addressing the annual prize distribution ceremony held at Special Education Complex Hayatabad Peshawar as a

chief guest.

Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa paid tribute to parents of special children and said that these children need support and encouragement of people for continuation of their journey towards empowerment and respectful status in the society.

Speaking on the occasion, Director Special Education Complex, Syed Ali Bakhs, said that there are around 57 special education institutions across the province.

Director Special Education Complex told that more than 650 students are studying in Special Education Complex among which 72 children are staying in the hostel.

Earlier Advisor to Chief Minister, Mashal Azam Yousafzai visited stalls showcasing items made by students in Vocational Training Center of the complex. She appreciated the work of students and assured cooperation to administration in addressing their problems.

Tree plantation drive launched at PFI



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Implementation Support Unit Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa formally kicked off plantation Drive 2024 in the government schools (Boys and Girls) at Pakistan Forest Institute Peshawar with the Technical and Financial support from UNICEF.

According to a press release issued here on Thursday, the initiative was aimed to not only to enhance green cover of the area but also instill a sense of responsibility towards nature among the citizens.

The guests and the participants were welcomed by Director Programs ISU Directorate of E&SE Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syeda Laila Jaffry and program manager Peer Fahad Ali Shah.

The event was graced by the chief guest Chief Field Officer, UNICEF Peshawar Radoslaw Rzehak.

The event was also attended by distinguished guests including Education Manager UNICEF Peshawar Dr. Christine Wanjala, Education Specialist UNICEF Peshawar Syed Fawad Ali Shah, Directress E&SE Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ms. Samina Altaf, con-

servator Forest Department KP Fazal Elahi, Additional Director Generals, PFI Peshawar Kifayat Ullah Baloch and Safdar Ali Shah and others.

Speaking at the occasion Additional DG, PFI Peshawar Kifayat Ullah Baloch said that trees are the greatest gift to life on earth.

He called upon the general public to grow more trees to have greener mother earth.

The conservator Forest Department KP Fazal Elahi added that it's the real time to grow more trees to cope with climate crises. He also added that trees are our only lifelines, and without them, our world will get turned into barren lands.

Addressing the gathering, the chief guest emphasized the potential of collective efforts in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change.

The Chief Guest appreciated and thanked the Implementation Support Directorate of E&SE KP, Forest department for organizing such important event.

Director of Education & Special Education in KP expressed the department's vision to instill awareness among the children regarding the importance of plants for our planet Earth.

65 Deputy Public Prosecutors promoted

PESHAWAR (APP): The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) following recommendations of the Provincial Selection Board has promoted 65 Deputy Public Prosecutors to Senior Public Prosecutors in Grade 19.

According to a notification issued from KP Home Department, the officials promoted in Grade 19 include Shafiullah, Usman Zaman, Qaisar Frooq, Hussain Ahmad, Siffatullah, Taimoor Khattak, Taj Muhammad, Bakhtiar Khan, Wajid Ali, Shaheen Tabassum, Azhar Ali, Jamshed Khan, Qaisar Khan, Ayaz Zarin, Zafar Ali, Sangeen Shah, Asmatullah, Mian Aziz Ahmad, Bilal Qureshi, Akhtar Nawaz, Attiq-ur-Rehman, Zeeshanullah Afridi, Qamar Zeb, Afzal Khan, Javaid Iqbal, Muhammad Shakil Ahmad, Attaulah, Muhammad Nadeem, Hiayat Ullah, Sher Bahadur, Ziaullah Wazir, Khalid Khan, Tasawar Hussain, Amanullah, Muzaffar Ahmad, Javaid Rehman, Falak Ser, Manzoor Alam, Umar Niaz, Rafiullah, Muhammad Tufail, Ibad-ur-Rehman, Asim Mehmood, Waqas Ashraf, Zia-ul-Qamar, Rafiullah, Muhammad Muzaffar, Bakhat Baidar, Anwar Khan, Muhammad Zaib, Muhammad Ilyas, Asghar Asad, Muhammad Inam, Muhammad Naeem, Javaid Ali, Javaid Akhtar Wazir, Noor Salam Khan, Yousaf Jamal, Latif Khan, Zahoor Khan, Sher Alam, Muhammad Suhail, Haseen Syed, Zia-ul-Haq and Fawad Ahmad.

ILO to uphold workers' grievances at ministerial level

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Country Director of International Labor Organization (ILO) GEIR T TONSTOL said that the organization is engaged in Pakistan for welfare of workers. The International Labor Organization will discuss issues like privatization with the Ministry of Railways and the Ministry of Defense. Various issues will be discussed by us so that the issues of workers can be resolved on priority basis.

Railway is a public and national institution and all trade unions are valuable. The problems identified by all the union officials have to be worked on together. He expressed these views during a special event. He was specially assisted by Sagheer Bukhari, Senior Program Manager.

On this occasion, Central President of Railway Workers Union Junaid Awan, Central Vice President Riaz Kashmiri, Central General Secretary Zafar Ijaz Malik, Deputy General Secretary Tahir Mehmood Bhatti, Central Joint Secretary Rehman Taj Shenwari, Central



Secretary Broadcasting Mubarak Hussain, Member Executive Council Mola Bakhs, Gul Hassan, Saeed Awan and Railway Workers Union Workshop. On behalf of the establishment, Inayat Gujjar Central Secretary Rana Masoom Chaudhry, Amir Amir Raza and Pakistan Mazdoor Mahas Central President Pakistan Mazdoor Eitahd Chaudhary Shaukat Ali took special part.

ILO Country Director GEIR T TONSTOL said that they will work on the

basis of social dialogue. Stick to what you promised. Health and safety of workers is the responsibility of every organization. He said that ILO and the World Health Organization were created to address these issues. Trade union professional training was given to you by the International Labor Organization.

The new government, new minister and new administration will work for you and solve your problems. Will fully support you on various issues.

Railways will unite central management and trade union representatives and play their key role in this. He said that Railways is a public and national institution and every trade union is valuable.

All the unions will unite on one platform. Steps will be taken to solve the problems of open line, workshop establishment, carriage factory and others. By utilizing the resources that our organization has, our organization will solve your problems effectively.

Govt announces to celebrate Tirch Mir year, annual festival



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to celebrate the year 2024-25 as the year of

Tirch Mir, the highest peak of the province, and to start the annual Tirch Mir Festival, for which the Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) has

been tasked to take immediate steps.

This decision was made in a meeting on tourism promotion under the chairmanship of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa CM's Advisor on Tourism and Culture Zahid Chanzeb.

In the meeting held at the conference hall of KPCTA, Peshawar, besides Director General Barkat Ullah Marwat, General Manager Planning & Marketing Muhammad Ali Syed and General Manager Tourism Sajjad Hameed, also attended by Tour operators and other tourism stakeholders from serene areas of Chitral, Swat, Shangla, Dir and Guliyat. The participants while welcoming the decision of the provincial government termed it as a milestone initiative for the development of tourism and assured of

their full cooperation in making this extravaganza the most successful feature of the province.

It was also decided in the meeting to waive off the mountaineering royalty and trekking fee for the year 2024-25 and to include Tirch Mir mountain in the tourism symbols of the province. Henceforth Tirchmir peak will also be tourism symbol of KP in future.

It was further decided in the meeting that international mountaineers will be invited to climb the Tirch Mir peak, while the next meeting will be held in Chitral instead of Peshawar and then at other tourist districts headquarters.

On this occasion, the stakeholders relating to tourism industry apprised the Tourism Advisor about their problems and difficulties. Zahid Chanzeb listened to their grievances very patiently and assured them of its redressal on priority basis. He also assured all the stakeholders of full cooperation in the efficient delivery of tourism services. He directed that tour operators and all other stakeholders should organize various programs for the promotion of tourism, while the government will fully support them.

On the issue related to NOC for tourists, he said that it will be resolved soon after meeting with the concerned authorities. He further said that for better results Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Police is being upgraded with first aid boxes and provided with additional motorbikes besides extending more training to them.

The Tourism Advisor clarified that clearance of encroachment in tourist places will be ensured, for which the cooperation of the district administration will also be obtained in addition to making the authorities more streamlined. Similarly, the highways leading to tourist places will also be improved for which sufficient funds are being allocated in the new budget.

Zahid Chanzeb admitted that tour operators and all other stakeholders play a key role in the development of tourism and the provincial government will leave no stone unturned to encourage them at all levels. The participants of the meeting thanked the tourism advisor and the provincial government for encouraging the stakeholders and taking bold steps for the development of tourism as well as assured their full cooperation in achieving the goals set for the promotion of tourism industry in the province.



In brief

FC inaugurates girl's school F.P. Report

GHALANAI: Frontier Corps (FC) North proudly announces the successful completion of a school through "Ilm Tolo Da Para" campaign aimed at rejuvenating educational opportunities in Mohmand district. As part of this initiative, the Government Primary School (GPS) in Manzai China has been meticulously renovated and brought back to life, thanks to the collaborative efforts of NG, SRCP, and the KPK Education Department. The recently reactivated school now stands as a beacon of hope, offering quality educational facilities to both male and female students in the area. An inaugural ceremony marked the completion of the school's refurbishment, drawing participation from esteemed members of the district administration, Frontier Corps North officials, local elders, and a multitude of eager students. The students expressed their heartfelt joy and gratitude for the revival of this essential educational institution in their community. Their enthusiasm underscores the profound impact that such initiatives have on the lives of individuals and the collective development of the area. Frontier Corps North reaffirms its unwavering commitment to furthering educational advancement in Mohmand district and pledges to continue its proactive actions in this noble endeavor.

DC & DPO visits exam hall F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Muhammad Naeem Sindhu along with District Police Officer (DPO) Toba Tek Singh Ibadat Nisar visited the examination center established at Government Girls Latif High School, on Thursday. On this occasion, CEO Education, Mian Tahir Mansoor, Officers concerned, Examination Center Staff and District Information Officer Muhammad Shahbaz Ansari, AO Information Ilyas Akram, PRO (ASI) Muhammad Attaulhah was also present. DC Muhammad Naeem Sindhu checked the identity of students, roll number slips of students and other verification process and talking on the occasion said that the examination staff should perform their duty honestly as the examinations are the most important means to check the ability of the students. And to provide a comfortable environment for the students all resources are being utilized. DPO Ibadat Nisar said that a close watch should be kept on unrelated persons in the examination centers. In the end, of the visit to the examination center, DC Muhammad Naeem Sindhu and DPO Ibadat Nisar planted saplings with their own hands in the lawn of School in connection with the plantation drive.

Safety of public a priority: SSP F.P. Report

LARKANA: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Larkana Ruhul Khan Khoso held 'Kuli Katcheri' in Dokri city for redressal of public problems/complaints at the district level, on Thursday. According to details, more than 100 people presented their requests to the SSP. In which people complained about domestic issues, land disputes and domestic disputes. On several requests, the SSP issued orders on the spot while transparent inquiry was assured on some requests.

Korean envoy visits Swat, impresses by beauty, culture



Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The Korean Ambassador in Islamabad was deeply moved by the beauty, culture, and family values of Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Swat district.

These views were expressed by him during a visit to Swat, highlighting the genuine warmth and

hospitality of our people, leaving a lasting impression, say a statement issued here on Thursday.

Pakistan Boys Scouts Association Commissioner Sardar Waqar Shahzad, alongside four generations of the Gujjar family, warmly welcomed the Ambassador into their home, where a tree was planted symbolizing the growing friendship.

The Korean envoy was accompanied by his spouse during the visit. The family members of Sardar Waqar Shahzad extended very warm welcome to the visiting guests. The Ambassador was particularly impressed by the strong family system and bonding of Pakistani society. Gifts were exchanged, solidifying the cultural exchange between our nations.

Admn delays auction of minerals on riverbed

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: District administration has decided to first determine the limits of the riverbed through the officials of the irrigation department before auctioning its sand, gravel and minerals. The decision was taken by the Lower Dir deputy commissioner Waseel Khan during a meeting with land owners and elders from Malikabad, Kandaro, Diaron, Khungi, Saddo, Tarai, Hajiabad, Koto, Odigram, Munjai, Shehzadi, Malakand and Rani villages.

The local authorities of the mineral and irrigation departments were also in attendance. The delegation was led by the Dir Quami Pasoon chief Malik Jehan Alam Yousafzai. Area elders including Malik Abdul Satar, Malik Azam Khan, Malik Inam Khan, Sardar Javed advocate, Malik Sardar Hameed, Ali Bakht, retired XEN Javed Khan, former president of the district bar Timergara advocate Muhammad Salim, Rahatullah and Malik Hayat.

The delegation met the deputy commissioner at his office and apprised him of the grievances of landowners regarding the auction of sand, gravel and minerals on the riverbed. The elders complained that the district administration had issued a bidding advertisement of sand and gravel on the riverbed in the district due to which unrest prevailed among the landowners. The DC was informed that the 2010 flash floods had washed away agricultural lands on both sides of the Panjkora River thus widening the riverbed.

The elders said that despite the construction of safety walls on the riverbanks the administration had included their lands into the riverbed. They said the Upper Dir administration had fixed the limits of the river so the formula should also be implemented in the Lower Dir district.

After listening to the jirga members the DC said that the officials of the irrigation department along with the landowners would make the demarcation of the riverbed and the minerals would be auctioned after the process was completed. The DC also promised to play his active role in quashing the FIRs registered against some of the land owners for excavation of gravel from their lands near the river. A 12-member committee was formed to look into the matter and also schedule meetings with the local lawmakers for convincing the provincial government as well.

Protest rally: The teachers and students of a private educational institution on Thursday staged a protest rally in solidarity with the Palestinian Muslims and against the Israeli aggression. Carrying banners and placards the protesters marched on the roads and gathered at a square in Timergara city. The school's principal Usmanullah and others while addressing the rally demanded the Muslim leadership and UNO to play their role in stopping the Israeli barbarism. The participants also collected Rs 123,000 for Palestinian Muslims and handed it over to the Al-Khidmat Foundation on the

occasion.
New vegetable and fruits market: The Timergara police on the directives of district administration on Thursday arrested three of the office bearers of the New Sabzi Mandi as the situation became tense on shifting of the sabzi mandi. The business community threatened to stop supply of fruits and vegetables to the entire district if the arrested dealers were not released soon.

Poachers fined

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: The forest department fined poachers in Nowshera on Thursday for hunting down a leopard and posting a video with it.

The poachers hunted down the leopard in Shah Kot area of Nowshera on Thursday, once again exposing the department's inability to protect the rare animal. The department has imposed a fine of Rs250,000 on the poachers.

This is not the first incident of a leopard being killed in the area. A few months ago the lifeless body of a leopard was found by a local man in the Manahi hills of Nowshera. Subsequent investigations revealed that the leopard had been poisoned. According to the forest department, the mountains of Cherat and Nizampur are natural habitats of the leopard.

Commissioner Kohat visits Sasta Bazaar Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: In light of the provincial government's directives, Commissioner Kohat Division Muhammad Abid Khan Wazir along with Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir and other district administrative officers, visited Ramzan Sasta Bazar Kohat on Thursday.

He on this occasion, checked the prices of vegetables, fruits, grocery stores and other food items. He also inspected the encroachment and sanitation situation in the city and issued necessary instructions to start immediate operation against encroachments and improvement of sanitation situation.

On this occasion, he also visited the price control disk established by the District Administration at Sasta bazar Kohat and directed the price control disk team to be present at all times and provide all possible relief to the general public.

Roman defends PhD thesis F.P. Report

KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University (KKKU) Karak proudly announces the successful defense of the PhD dissertation by Roman Ullah in Management Sciences. The defense took place on Thursday, March 28, 2024.

Roman Ullah's dissertation titled "Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Behavioral Biases on Portfolio Investment Decisions: The Joint Moderator Role of Financial Literacy and Market Experience" was defended under the guidance of his Supervisor, Dr. Faqir Sajjad ul Hassan, Head of the Management Sciences Department, and Co-supervisor, Dr. Kashif Saleem.

The panel of examiners included Dr. Muhammad Arif, Assistant Professor of Management Sciences at the University of Swabi; Dr. Sabeeh Ullah, Assistant Professor at IBMS, Agriculture University, Peshawar; and Dr. Saeed Ullah Jan, Head of Library and Information Science department at KKKU. Expressing his gratitude, Roman Ullah extended heartfelt thanks to his Supervisors and Examiners for their unwavering support and guidance throughout his PhD journey.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr. Faqir Sajjad ul Hassan, Head of Management Sciences Department, commended the department's commitment to academic excellence, noting the successful completion of four PhDs within a short span of time.

He congratulated Roman Ullah for his remarkable achievement in successfully defending his PhD thesis. The defense ceremony was attended by a large number of faculty and students, marking a significant milestone in the academic journey of Roman Ullah.

Coward rivals using terrorism against development: Zehri

F.P. Report

HUB: Senior leader of Pakistan People's Party, Spokesman of President Asif Ali Zardari for Balochistan and President of Hub district Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has strongly condemned the killing of 6 innocent people including Chinese citizens in Besham and said that the incident was done by cowardly enemies. In his condemnation statement, he said that the purpose of successive incidents of terrorism in Pakistan is to spread chaos in the country.

In his statement, expressing his condolences to the families of the Chinese citizens who died in the terrorist incidents and the entire Chinese nation, he said that the Pakistani nation is an equal sharer in the suffering of the Chinese brothers and that the cow-

ardly terrorist elements involved in the incident will be punished soon.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the terrorists will be chased to the last extent and they will be sent to hell. He said that targeting the innocent citizens is a proof of cowardice of the terrorists. He further said that the purpose of cowardly incidents of terrorism is to weaken Pakistan towards political and economic stability and push towards instability which will not be allowed to succeed in any case.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the Pakistani nation is fighting the terrorists with determination and courage along with its security forces and soon these cowardly terrorists will be brought to their end. In his statement, he said that cowardly enemies cannot shake our firm resolve with such

actions. Every drop of blood of martyrs will be counted. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the determination of the security forces and the nation will not decrease until the end of the last terrorist. He said that the cowardly terrorist elements should know that they are facing a brave nation which has defeated terrorism in the past and will continue to defeat the nefarious intentions of the enemies.

PPP leader said that the entire nation is with its security agencies until the elimination of terrorists from the country and will not hesitate to make any sacrifice for this purpose. He reiterated his determination that the enemies of the country. Every attempt of elements to sabotage the peace and development of Pakistan will be thwarted.

Catalyst for development and peace

Syed Saad Ullah Shah

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, entrepreneurship stands as a beacon of innovation, resilience, and opportunity. It involves identifying opportunities, creating value, and taking calculated risks to establish new businesses or ventures. Entrepreneurs are drivers of change, leveraging their vision and determination to solve problems, drive economic growth, and enrich communities.

Entrepreneurship education is indispensable in equipping youth with the skills and mindset needed to thrive in today's dynamic world. By integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum at all educational levels, we nurture critical thinking, creativity, and leadership skills essential for success. Practical experiences such as business simulations, mentorship programs, and startup competitions provide hands-on learning opportunities, empowering students to transform ideas into action.

Youth entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for economic development and social progress. In developed nations, it fuels innovation, job creation, and economic diversification. Similarly, in developing countries like Pakistan, youth entrepreneurship offers a pathway out of poverty and unemployment. By empowering young individuals to become job creators, entrepreneurship stimulates local economies, reduces income inequality, and fosters inclusive growth.

Entrepreneurship has been harnessed as a powerful tool to counter extremism in various regions. In the Middle East, initiatives like "Tech for Peace" in Palestine leverage technology entrepreneurship to promote economic stability and peace building. In Africa, programs such as "Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Program" in Nigeria empower youth with entrepreneurial skills to mitigate the risk of radicalization and promote social cohesion.

For Pakistan and its

newly merged districts, entrepreneurship offers a dual solution to socio-economic challenges and extremism. By investing in entrepreneurship education and support programs, Pakistan can unlock the potential of its youth, creating employment opportunities, and fostering economic resilience. Moreover, entrepreneurship serves as a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies, offering alternative pathways to empowerment, inclusion, and community development.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship education and engagement among youth are vital components of a comprehensive strategy for socio-economic development and peace building. By fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers individuals, fosters innovation, and promotes social cohesion, we can pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for Pakistan and beyond.

The writer is Research Fellow at University of Peshawar.

CRA-North commits for women empowerment

F.P. Report

BARA: District administration, in collaboration with Community Resilience Activity North (CRA-N), has successfully concluded a grant with a series of twelve 5-day workshops, and ten 2-Day trainings on Community Resilience and Social Cohesion took place in the Bara and Tirah tehsils Khyber district, on Thursday.

According to details, the activities were attended by a total of 550 community women, encompassed a diverse range of participants including youth, members of the District Committee on the Status of Women (DCSW), students, healthcare practitioners, madrasa teachers, and

government teachers associated with local Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) such as Khyber Brave Sister organization, Alam Godar Falahi Committee, Khidmat -e- Khalaq Committee, and Bismillah CBO, among others.

The Closing Ceremony of this grant took place at Village Alam Gudar Tehsil Bara. The event saw the participation of 29 community women, representing diverse backgrounds such as youth, university graduates, healthcare practitioners, local councilors, religious leaders, and government teachers associated with local CBOs including Khyber Brave Sister organization and Alam Godar Falahi Committee. During

the ceremony, the impact of the resilience activity, which was implemented in three female schools across Khyber district, was discussed.

Beneficiaries lauded the quality and transparency of the services provided, expressing appreciation for the achievement of objectives set at the beginning of the resilience activity. Furthermore, participants highlighted the significance of the training and follow-on community engagement sessions, which not only encouraged females, especially youth students, but also instilled confidence through the knowledge, skills, and learnings acquired as part of the project activity conducted by CRA-North.

Admn inspects 1500 shops in Ramazan, seized two Ehsas cash points

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Following public complaints about illegal deductions in the Ehsas Program cash, Assistant Commissioner Tehsil Rustam Aftab Alam conducted raids on Ehsas Program cash points on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayaz Sherpao. The managers of two points were caught red-handed, devices were confiscated, and the points were sealed, on Thursday.

According to details, on the special instructions of DC Mardan, AC Rustam Aftab Alam raided various Ehsas cash points, during which the managers of Chargulli and Jhongara were found involved in deductions of four to five hundred rupees from the required amount and were arrested red-handed. They were handed over to the police at Chora Station and Chargulli Post and locked up in the lock-up, where formal FIRs were also registered.

The public has demanded that the provincial director and district director of Ehsas Cash take action against the managers of

the relevant points, terminate the points given to them, and retrieve the Ehsas Program devices from them so that no one even thinks of such an act during the blessed month of Ramadan. AC Rustam Aftab Alam emphasized to the public that they should support the administration in preventing such acts.

Meanwhile, district administration of Mardan has checked 11,370 shops in the last fifteen days, and during this period, cases have been registered against 76 individuals for charging more than the set prices.

More than 425 shops have been sealed during Ramadan, and 904 shops have been issued notices. Similarly, 22 shopkeepers have been jailed for continuous violations, and a fine of 5 million rupees has been deposited in the treasury. Additional Deputy Commissioner (G) Saeedullah Jan, speaking in an online open court, said that the district administration is present in the field from morning till night during the month of Ramadan against illegal profiteers.

The district administration is

striving to provide all possible facilities to the citizens. Station Manager Aftab Ahmad was also present on the occasion, while the program was hosted by Junaid Yusufzai.

ADC Saeedullah Jan said that at the DHQ Hospital, on the instructions of the provincial government, citizens are being offered excellent food during Sehri and Iftar times in the Ramadan Dastarkhwan for the poor. Similarly, the list for the distribution of Zakat funds has been received by the district administration from the government and will soon be distributed. In the online open court program, the Additional Deputy Commissioner also listened to the problems of the citizens.

On this occasion, complaints were made about the overcharging of meat prices in Sheikh Maltoon Town, Toru Chowk, Takht Bhai, Mady Baba, Garhi Kapura, and Hoti, upon which the Additional Deputy Commissioner immediately instructed the price magistrates to address the complaints. He said that special monitoring of bakery items will also be done

before Eid, and strict action will be taken against anyone charging more than the set rates. He said that the district administration of Mardan will soon set rates for tailors as well, and Saeedullah Jan said that on the special instructions of Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yusufzai and Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpao, an operation against encroachments is ongoing from Bank Road to Par Hoti Chowk, and citizens will feel the change in this regard.

BISE meeting held: Chairman Mardan Education Board Farid Ahmad Khattak, chaired an open meeting in the conference hall of Mardan Education Board. For the first time in the history of Mardan Education Board, such an open court was organized in which students and parents besides teachers fully participated.

On this occasion, along with the chairman of the Mardan board, the secretary, controller and all the section in-charges were also present. In the open court where people participated

physically, contacts were also made on the telephone numbers in the hall. Different types of problems were heard and their solution was ensured on the spot. He said that for the first time we are feeling that Mardan Education Board is a public institution which is serious about solving our problems, on which we are thankful to the chairman and entire administration.

In the blessed month of Ramadan, open courtrooms were started, which will be extended to Nowshera and Swabi districts so that the problems of students and parents along with teachers can be heard at their doorsteps and timely solutions are ensured. Chairman Farid Ahmad Khattak has said that children are our future and we are striving for quality education. From 2025, instead of traditional marking, grading system will be used.

There will be no compromise on merit. Duplication mafia will be dealt with strictly. He said that for the first time in the history of the board, marking duties were assigned to the teachers of private schools, SLO-based

examinations were successfully tested, which will have far-reaching results, while the e-marking system was also started under which the papers of Physics, English and more subjects will be included in the next exams.

Farid Ahmad Khattak said that jazz cash and easy money facility has been provided for the admission fees of children. The doors of the board are open to every citizen. The chairman of the education board said that a year ago when he was entrusted with the duties of the chairman of the board by the government, he accepted the post as a challenge and started reforms in the board.

For the first time, positive activities such as science expo, sports gala and speech competitions have been started. The message of the board has been spread throughout the country by issuing a newsletter. The chairman board said that the education board is the trust of the people. He said that there is no shortage of talent in our children and all resources will be used to highlight their abilities



BANGKOK: Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, head of the military council, stands on a military truck as he inspects officers during a parade to commemorate Myanmar's 79th Armed Forces Day, in Naypyitaw.

US overlooks Israeli abuses in Gaza to justify arms transfers

WASHINGTON: Israel has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians in Gaza, displaced more than 80 percent of the population, destroyed large parts of the territory and imposed a suffocating blockade, bringing the enclave to the verge of famine. But nearly six months into the war, the United States says it has not determined that Israel has violated international humanitarian law.

Washington's assertion, made public this week as part of an oversight process on US weapons transfers to allies, has spurred bewilderment and condemnation from human rights groups. "It's absurd," said Sarah Leah Whitson, director of Democracy for the Arab World Now. "It invites global mockery and disdain to hear such a statement issued in front of the world by the Biden administration." US laws prohibit arming countries engaged in human rights abuses. But advocates say the administration of President Joe Biden is bending the facts and denying well-documented Israeli violations to appear to be in compliance with the rules. Whitson noted that Biden himself has described Israel's bombing of Gaza as "indiscriminate", which would make it a war crime, and that Washington has openly recognised that Israel is impeding aid to the territory.

The Biden administration has been facing increasing pressure to enforce US law when it comes to arming Israel. A recent public opinion poll suggested that the majority of Americans disapprove of Israel's actions in Gaza. There are several US statutes that regulate the transfer of weapons to foreign countries. Last month, the Biden administration issued a memorandum, dubbed NSM-20, requiring credible, written assurances from the recipients of American weapons that the arms are not being used in rights violations. The allies must also certify that American defence articles are not being used to "arbitrarily deny, restrict, or otherwise impede, directly or indirectly, the

transport or delivery" of US humanitarian aid.

The US Department of State said it received the assurances from Israel and found them "credible". "We have not found them [Israel] to be in violation of international humanitarian law, either when it comes to the conduct of the war or when it comes to the provision of humanitarian assistance," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters. A day later, he said the US is conducting its own assessments of the war - not merely taking Israel at its word. "We look at those assurances, and we look at them informed by the assessments that we have had ongoing," Miller added. "And as I said, we have not reached the conclusion with respect to Israel that they have violated international humanitarian law."

International humanitarian law is a set of rules meant to protect non-combatants in armed conflict. It consists of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and subsequent international treaties aimed at limiting civilian suffering during war. According to Whitson, apparent Israeli violations of international humanitarian law run the gamut: Israel has been accused of targeting civilians, indiscriminate bombing and disproportionate attacks. "What we've seen throughout Gaza, particularly in the north, is widespread destruction of residential areas, farms, schools, universities, churches, mosques, hospitals - highlighting the indiscriminate nature of Israeli bombardment," she told Al Jazeera. "Even if they were targeting something arguably with a military value to them, the fact that they are doing this in such a wanton, reckless, widespread, catastrophic manner is evidence of the indiscriminate nature of the bombing."

Moreover, witnesses and rights groups, including Amnesty International, have accused Israel of mistreating and torturing detainees during the war. Last month, United Nations experts also raised concern about reports that Palestinian women

in Israeli custody have been subjected to "multiple forms of sexual assault". There has been a growing number of reports about extrajudicial executions by Israeli forces in Gaza. Earlier this month, Al Jazeera obtained footage from an Israeli drone showing the targeting of four unarmed Palestinians on an open road in southern Gaza. While the US's assessment of Israeli attacks is continuing, Miller said "none" have been found to be in violation of international humanitarian law. Brian Finucane, a senior US programme adviser at the International Crisis Group think tank, said there is "abundant reason for concern" that the Biden administration is not doing more to address violations of humanitarian law that are impeding its own efforts in Gaza.

He pointed out that, because of Israel's blockade, the US has already resorted to "desperate workarounds" to get food into Gaza, including air drops and building a temporary pier. The US has even acknowledged Israeli efforts to block aid. Earlier this year, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich publicly stated that he is blocking US-provided flour for Gaza, prompting a White House response. "I wish I could tell you that that flour was moving in, but I can't do that right now," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on February 15. At State Department news briefing, Miller also reassessed that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are "inconsistent with international humanitarian law". His comment was in response to Israel's seizure of 800 hectares (1,977 acres) in the West Bank last week. Speaking to Al Jazeera, Finucane expressed befuddlement that the US is accepting Israel's assurances that it is abiding by international humanitarian law. "The US has already concluded that Israel is violating international humanitarian law, so to turn around and accept the Israeli assurances is head-scratching to say the least," he said. — Aljazeera

7 soldiers in Chad killed in explosion

N'DJAMENA, Chad (AP): An explosive device detonated and killed seven soldiers in Chad during a patrol in the country's west near Lake Chad, the government says. The interim president, Mahamat Deby Itno, announced the deaths on social media. Chadian authorities said they suspected Boko Haram extremists from Nigeria were behind the attack, renewing concerns about an escalation of violence near the border.

Boko Haram launched an insurgency more than a decade ago against Western education and seeks to establish Islamic law in Nigeria's northeast. The insurgency has spread to West African neighbors including Cameroon, Niger and Chad. More than 36,000 people have been killed, mainly in Nigeria, according to the United Nations. Violence has returned to the Lake Chad area after a period of peace following a successful operation launched in 2020 by the Chadian army to destroy the extremist group's bases there. Schools, mosques and churches have reopened and humanitarian organizations have returned. But there are concerns that a Boko Haram resurgence in Chad could affect the presidential election in May. Deby Itno seized power after his father, who ran the country for more than three decades, was killed fighting rebels in 2021. The election is part of the country's political transition.

Russia strikes Kharkiv with aerial bombs

KYIV (AP): Russia struck the northeastern city of Kharkiv with aerial bombs for the first time since 2022, killing at least one civilian and wounding 16 others, local officials said. The airstrikes caused widespread damage, hitting several residential buildings and damaging the city's institute for emergency surgery.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukraine in recent days, launching several missile barrages on the capital Kyiv and hitting energy infrastructure across the country in apparent retaliation for recent Ukrainian aerial attacks on the Russian border region of Belgorod. Such sporadic attacks, however, have been common throughout the war. The Kharkiv region cuts across the front line where Ukrainian and Russian forces have been locked in battles for over two years since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The region is frequently attacked with missiles and drones. Sergey Bolvinov, head of the investigative police department in Kharkiv, said in a Telegram post that attack marked the first time aerial bombs were used since 2022. Regional governor Oleh Syniehubov also reported the use of aerial bombs.

The recent escalation comes as exhausted Ukrainian troops struggle with a shortage of personnel and ammunition and face growing Russian pressure along the front line that stretches over 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sacked one of his top security officials, replacing him with the head of Ukraine's foreign spy agency in a new reshuffle. Zelenskyy dismissed Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, thanking him for his service in a video address. The president gave no reason and said, without providing details, that Danilov will be "reassigned to another area." Zelenskyy replaced him with Oleksandr Lytvynenko, who served as head of Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service.

The National Security Council is a policy coordination body that is chaired by Zelenskyy. Danilov had held his position since October 2019, a few months after Zelenskyy took office. The dismissal follows Zelenskyy's decision in February to fire Ukraine's chief military officer, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, and replace him with Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi.

Myanmar's military makes its annual parade of strength

BANGKOK (AP): The head of Myanmar's ruling military council marked Armed Forces Day with a speech claiming that the nation's youth were being tricked into supporting the resistance against army rule, and that ethnic armed groups allied with the resistance engage in drug trafficking, natural resources smuggling and illegal gambling.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing spoke in the capital, Naypyitaw, where thousands of military personnel paraded in an annual show of strength, even as the army has suffered a series of unprecedented battlefield defeats that have tarnished their once invincible reputation. Min Aung Hlaing touched on familiar themes, urging the international community not to support the resistance forces, whom he blamed for disturbing the process for planned but not yet scheduled elections. Earlier this month, he told Russia's ITAR-TASS news agency that elections might be held in parts of the country that are peaceful and stable.

Many Western nations have applied sanctions against Myanmar's ruling generals because of their 2021 seizure of power and brutal suppression of opposition. Military offensives since then have displaced more than 2 million people, according to the United Nations. Min Aung Hlaing

said it is "disheartening to witness youths becoming scapegoats of insurgents, misled by false narrative propaganda through media sabotage." He also accused unnamed ethnic armed groups of "destroying the path towards forming a union based on democratic values and federalism." The army in 2021 overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, whom it accused of winning the 2020 election through massive voter fraud, presenting what it said was evidence disputed by independent poll watching groups.

The military's suppression of protests against its takeover triggered nationwide armed resistance. Thousands of young people fled to jungles and mountains in remote border areas and made common cause with ethnic guerrilla forces battle-hardened by decades of combat with the army in pursuit of autonomy. Over the past five months, Min Aung Hlaing's army has been routed in northern Shan state, is conceding swathes of territory in Rakhine state in the west and is under growing attack in other regions. As losses have risen and morale has plummeted, authorities activated a conscription law in a bid to strengthen their position. Both the military and some of the ethnic minority groups with strongholds in border

regions have been accused of having links to illegal activities such as drug production and offering protection to casino complexes that have served as centers for carrying out illegal scams online.

The parade marking this year's 79th Armed Forces Day was held in the sunset hours for the first time since Naypyitaw became the capital in 2006. Previously, it was held at sunrise. Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the ruling military council, explained that the change was due to the unusually hot weather caused by the El Nino phenomenon. Armed Forces Day marks the day in 1945 when the army of Myanmar, then known as Burma, began its fight against occupying Japanese forces who had taken over after driving out the British. Statements by the British and Canadian embassies marking Armed Forces Day, noted that civilians across the country are being targeted in attacks by the military that include airstrikes on homes, schools, health care facilities and places of worship. Canada in its statement urged all countries to "immediately stop the sale or transfer of arms, military equipment, dual-use equipment, aviation fuel and technical military assistance to Myanmar."

Clashes in Brussels as states agree policy review

BRUSSELS (AFP): EU member states agreed to unpick more eco-friendly requirements under the bloc's common agricultural policy (CAP) in a new bid to pacify months-long protests by farmers -- who faced off with riot police in Brussels for the third time in two months. Police said they used tear gas and water cannon against farmers who targeted them with eggs and Molotov cocktails, with two officers injured in the standoff and one arrest.

The CAP review was approved by a special committee as agriculture ministers met under tight security in the city's European quarter, which farmers thronged with 250 tractors, setting fire to tyres and bales of hay. "We have listened to our farmers and we have taken swift action to address their concerns at a time when they are confronted with numerous challenges," said David Clarinval, deputy prime minister of Belgium, which holds the rotating EU presidency. He said the revision sought to slash red tape and give farmers more flexibility in complying with green regulations while "maintaining a high level of environmental ambition" -- a claim rejected by environmental groups who see it as a big step backwards.

Farmers have been mounting rolling protests in countries across the EU, from Belgium to France, Spain, Italy and Poland, over a long list of burdens they say are depressing revenue. The latest in a string of concessions on agriculture come less than three months before bloc-wide elections for the European Parliament. Surveys predict the vote will result in a surge of support for far-right parties that are using farmers' discontent as part of their campaigning. The proposal now goes before EU lawmakers for approval. The CAP review, first proposed by the European Commission in mid-March, changes a set of environmental and climate standards that determine whether farmers can receive subsidies under the policy. A key change involves granting leeway to farmers who fail to meet CAP requirements because of extreme weather.

The revision does away entirely with the obligation to leave a share of arable land fallow -- a measure aimed at protecting soils and promoting biodiversity but a major gripe for farmers. But they would still be incentivised to do so. Member states would have more flexibility to decide which soils to protect and in which season, and would be

allowed to diversify crops as well as rotate them. And the revision exempts small farms under 10 hectares (25 acres) from inspections and penalties related to CAP compliance. France's Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau welcomed it as a step "in the right direction."

And the powerful European farmers association Copa-Cogeca said its adoption by member states sent a "positive signal", calling on EU lawmakers to follow suit. But a coalition of 16 environmental groups including WWF and Greenpeace declared themselves "extremely concerned", saying the proposal was made without proper impact assessment and urging the Commission to reverse course. The review was approved with backing from a qualified majority of EU states -- overriding opposition from Germany in particular. Though a frequent critic of red tape under existing CAP rules, Germany's Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir said the changes signalled a step backwards -- to the time before the EU made defending the environment a priority. "We won't obtain better results by using old recipes," Ozdemir warned. "This was a policy that considerably harmed the little guys, and that just made the big guys bigger."

Ireland to intervene in S Africa genocide case

DUBLIN: Ireland has said it will intervene in South Africa's genocide case against Israel, in the strongest signal yet of Dublin's concern about the war in Gaza. Announcing the move, Foreign Minister Micheal Martin said that while it was for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to decide whether genocide was being committed, he wanted to be clear that Hamas's October 7 attack and current events in Gaza represent the "blatant violation of international humanitarian law on a mass scale".

"The taking of hostages. The purposeful withholding of humanitarian assistance to civilians. The targeting of civilians and of civilian infrastructure. The indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The use of civilian objects for military purposes. The collective punishment of an entire population," Martin said in a statement. "The list goes on. It has to stop. The view of the international community is clear. Enough is enough." Martin also said the sit-

uation "could not be more stark". "Half the population of Gaza face imminent famine and 100 percent of the population face acute food insecurity. As the UN Secretary-General said as he inspected long lines of blocked relief trucks waiting to enter Gaza during his visit to Rafah at the weekend, 'It is time to truly flood Gaza with life-saving aid. The choice is clear: surge or starvation.' I echo his words today," he added. In January, the ICJ, also known as the World Court, ordered Israel to refrain from any acts that could fall under the Genocide Convention and to ensure its troops committed no genocidal acts against Palestinians after South Africa accused Israel of state-led genocide in Gaza. But Israel's bombardment and blockade have continued. "The Israeli government is starving Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, putting them in even more peril than before the World Court's binding order," Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights

Watch, said on February 26.

Israel has been criticised for targeting civilians, with more than 80 percent of those killed being women and children. At least 32,490 Palestinians have been killed since Israel launched its assault on October 7 in the wake of a surprise attack by Hamas, in which more than 1,000 people were killed and dozens taken captive. This week, the UN Security Council finally passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, as well as the release of the captives still held by Hamas. Israel and its Western allies have said the allegation of genocide against Palestinians is baseless. The ICJ could take years to reach a final ruling. Martin did not say what form Ireland's intervention might take or outline any argument Ireland plans to advance, but he added that the country decided to make the move following legal and policy analysis and consultation with several partners, including South Africa. — Aljazeera

Kenya starts to hand over to relatives bodies of 429 members

NAIROBI (AP): Kenya's government began handing over to relatives the bodies of 429 members of a doomsday cult at the center of a legal case that has shocked the country.

Exhumed bodies from a vast rural area in coastal Kenya have shown signs of starvation and strangulation. Cult leader Paul Mackenzie is accused of asking his followers to starve themselves to death to meet Jesus and now faces charges that include murder. Authorities are using DNA testing to

help identify bodies and their families. The first bodies were handed over to relatives. Emotions ran high at the Malindi mortuary as families collected loved ones for reburial. Some wailed, overwhelmed.

Francis Wanje, a father who lost his daughter and seven other family members, pointed at a hearse carrying four bodies. "We lost eight members of our family," Wanje said. "We were supposed to get five, but were told that one of the children did not match the

DNA. "So now we have been given only four (bodies). So we are still hoping that perhaps in the future, we are going to get the other four." Mackenzie and dozens of his associates were charged in February with the torture and murder of 191 children. The trial begins on April 23. Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki has declared Mackenzie's Good News International Ministries a criminal organized group. Mackenzie is serving a separate one-year prison sentence after being

found guilty of operating a film studio and producing films without a valid license.

Some outraged Kenyans have asked how authorities didn't notice any sign of the mass deaths much earlier. The Kenya Human Rights Commission last week said police failed to act on reports that could have prevented the deaths in the remote Shakahola area. Several reports had been filed at police stations by people whose relatives had entered the forested area.

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State's interference in judicial affairs

THE Supreme Court of Pakistan convened a full court session to deliberate on the letter authored by the six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), complaining interference of spy agencies in judicial functioning and internal affairs of the courts. The letter stated that a judicial convention be called to consider the matter of interference of intelligence operatives with judicial functions and intimidation of judges in a manner that undermines the independence of the judiciary. Bar associations across Pakistan have demanded the Supreme Court's (SC) intervention over the letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges and urged the top judicial body to protect and defend the independence and sovereignty of judicial system in the country.

The honorable judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) have opened a new Pandora box and exposed the bitter reality regarding the so-called independence of the judiciary and merit-based justice of our courts wherein countless verdicts are delivered in pursuit of appeasement of political leadership, military bureaucracy, colleagues and judicial High ups in clear contrast to the merit, justice and professional honesty. In fact, it is no secret, former IHC judge Justice retired Shoukat Siddiqui and former Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa categorically mentioned interference and nepotism in courts' decisions at all levels, whilst Justice retired Qayyum's case and numerous audio leaks further exposed complicity of our adjudicators in that regard. In fact, agencies' interference in judicial, political, administrative, Electoral and other state affairs is a long held problem since Independence, wherein the wish-list of top military bureaucrats fulfilled in the name of national interest under vague interpretation of national security and country's sovereignty. The judges from the Islamabad High Court have displayed extraordinary courage and professional honesty by penning down a bitter reality that no other dared to confess in the past. The letter detailed numerous incidents of alleged harassment, abduction, torture, and blackmail, which are allegedly a part of the powerful spy service's efforts to interfere in politically consequential cases. After the eye-opening revelation of the top judges, the troika of the country's legal establishment including Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Awan, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar and Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Qazi Faez Isa held an in-depth discussion to deal with the matter.

In fact, judicial independence is of utmost importance for a modern nation. An independent judiciary acts as a check on the other organs of the government and maintains a balance of power. An independent judiciary is essential to resist undue influence, ensure equality, and provide remedies for justice problems. An impartial judiciary upholds the rule of law and safeguards human rights and civil freedoms. It ensures that laws are applied fairly and consistently, regardless of political pressure or personal interests. Faithful judges strike down unconstitutional laws and protect citizens from abuse of power. As social stability progresses, the public trusts the judiciary, and does not resort to violence or take justice into their own hands. Such conditions are fundamentals of a civilized society and the cornerstone of a developed and progressed nation in this modern era.

Historically, weak justice system, institutional corruption and a lack of accountability has always had an important role in institutional, moral and economic degradation of our nation. The sitting rulers and powerful bureaucrats violated oath, modified constitution and steer the country in accordance with their desire and political agenda, wherein dishonest judges issued decrees and safeguarded unconstitutional actions of civilian and military dictators in defiance to national interest and professional obligation throughout the past. The stunning letter written by six high court justices illustrates not only the extent of interference in the legal process, at the highest levels but also the willingness of public servants to go public about issue despite the risks involved in such outspoken and upright behaviour that could have worst consequences for the individuals and their families afterward.

The current situation is unique and Merits utmost courage, rationality, uprightness and professionalism from the top judicial forum. There is dire need for establishment of the writ of the law, and an institutional mechanisms to safeguard the independence of the judiciary, including measures to protect judges from threats and external influence and strengthen accountability mechanisms. No individual or institution is above the law and enjoys impunity in any pretext wherein no unlawful action and extra constitutional measures can ever strengthen the government, institution, national security, democracy etc. Constitutionally, the spy agencies have no authority/ mandate to meddle or intervene in political, legal and constitutional affairs in the country. Rather, the spy agencies must focus on their primary task and chase the terrorists, who freely roam on the roads and involved in killing innocent soldiers and civilians every other day. Pushing politicians, press, or the judiciary is wrong, counterproductive and is bound to have consequences. Meanwhile, judges should neither seek undue favour from parliament and bureaucracy nor accept unlawful demands of bureaucrats. The judiciary must resist undue pressure from all quarters and maintain its professional ego and respect through transparent, unbiased and merit-based justice delivery to the public.

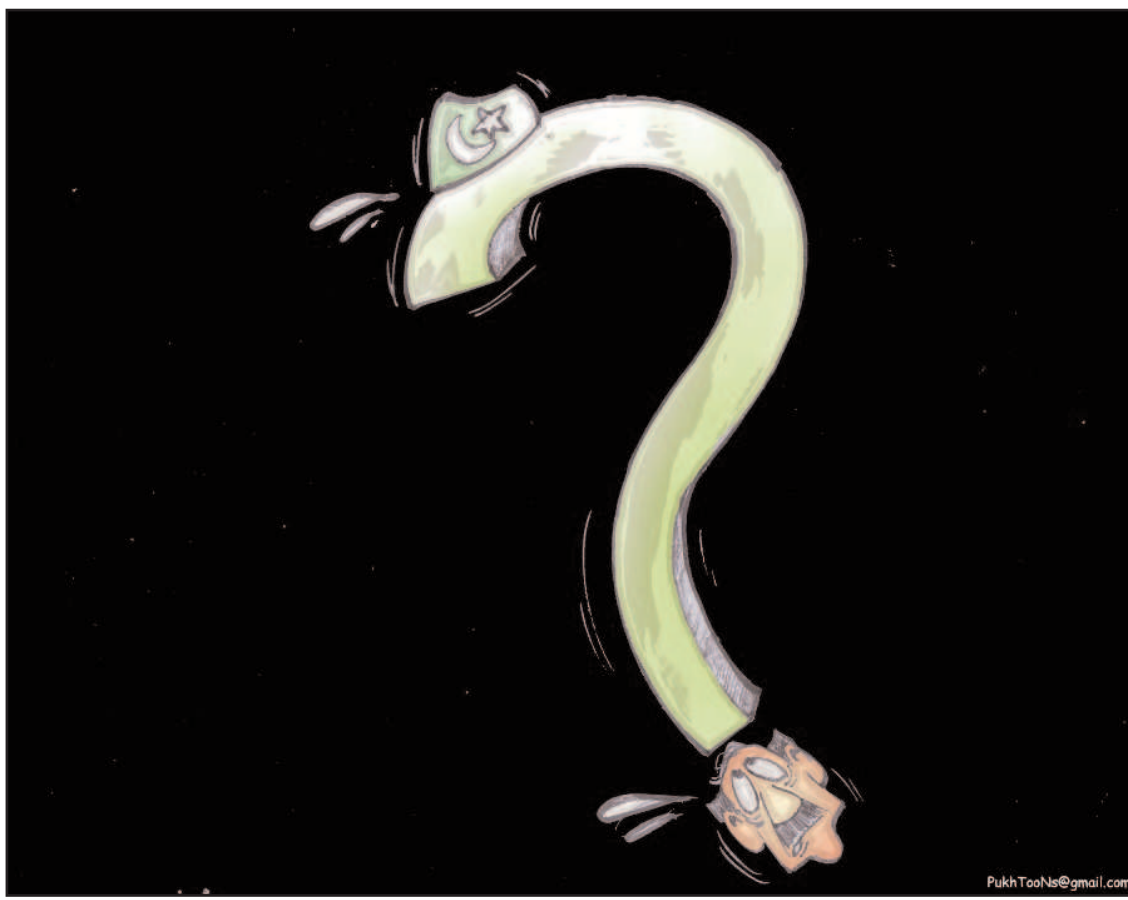
Sanctions saga and Pak-Iran project

THE US State Department Spokesperson, Matthew Miller has recently told the media that the United States does not support the Pakistan Iran gas pipeline project. According to the American diplomat, the US always advises those who do business with Iran about the risk of getting close to and in touch with the US sanctions and would advise everyone to consider this very carefully.

The Pak-Iran gas pipeline project has faced severe setbacks from US sanctions against Tehran since the beginning about over a decade ago. After a long delay and haphazard policy, the Pakistani authorities recently decided to construct a nearly 80 km long gas pipeline from Pak-Iran border to the Strategic city of Gawadar to satisfy its growing energy needs. Meanwhile, the newly elected Shehbaz government was preparing to take up the case with the Biden administration to discuss Pakistan's worst energy crisis and forge consensus regarding exemption from the US sanctions. The United States has expressed its opposition to Pakistan's proposal for constructing a gas pipeline and signals about the possibility of US sanctions are very clear that would not only affect US political and economic relations with Pakistan but significantly obstruct IMF's cooperation with the country whose policies are highly influenced by the US decisions/policies.

Iran, on the other hand, has completed its portion of the pipeline more than a decade ago, and Tehran has threatened to take Pakistan to court over its failure to complete the pipeline project, which could result in a \$ 18 billion penalty for Pakistan. Pakistan has been struck into a very complex situation, despite an acute shortfall of energy resources the country faces economic sanctions on one hand and a bulk of penalty on the other. In response to this situation, Federal Minister for Petroleum and Power, Musadik Malik announced the government's decision to seek a waiver from US sanctions specifically for the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. The Pakistani side aims to present political and technical reasons to secure the waiver and avoid penalties while constructing its share of the pipeline inside Pakistan.

Historically, Pakistan's case is genuine and this is an ideal way forward to tackle the energy crisis and avoid backlash from the west. If Pakistani authorities would be able to present their case in a logical manner, this puzzle can be solved and Pakistan interest can be rescued diligently.



Beit Daras and Gaza: An intergenerational tale of struggle against erasure

Zarefah Baroud

ON this day 76 years ago, my ancestral village Beit Daras, located in the northern Gaza district of Palestine, then under the British mandate, was attacked by Jewish militias. The Nakba, or the Zionist ethnic cleansing of Palestine, had already begun. The systematic torment, brutalisation and killing of Palestinians by Zionist militias, aimed at establishing a Jewish ethno-state in historical Palestine, would result in the expulsion of at least 750,000 Palestinians.

As I watch the genocide unfold in Gaza today, I cannot help but reflect on the fate of my village and my ancestors. Just as my grandparents were expelled from their village as children, their descendants are experiencing the same trauma, as they face displacement, injury and death at the hands of the same genocidal Zionist project.

Much of what I know about Beit Daras comes from my father, Ramzy Baroud, who dedicated many years to researching and chronicling the history of our family and of Beit Daras. The grounds of our village had been populated for centuries and had witnessed the rise and fall of various empires and the rule of various conquerors - from the Romans to the Crusaders, to the Mamluks, and the Ottomans. Its long history was imprinted on this quaint community, which in 1948 had a population of 3,190 indigenous Palestinians.

Beit Daras was home to my great grandparents, Zainab and Mohammed, my grandfather Mohammed's parents. It was also home to Mariam and Mohammed, my grandmother Zarefah's parents. Zainab and Mohammed lived off their farm, where they grew fruits and grains. Mohammed was also a skilled basket weaver and would often travel to the Palestinian port city of Yaffa to sell his baskets at the bustling old markets.

Mariam and Mohammed were also farmers and made a living from their land. Both of these families had their roots in Beit Daras. On March 27, the Haganah Zionist militia attacked the village with mortar fire from the neighbouring

Zionist colony Tabiyya, killing nine villagers and burning crops. The horror stories of the Nakba had already reached Beit Daras and residents were mobilising to protect their community. They raised money to buy rifles, with many women selling their gold to support the resistance efforts. The small Beit Daras force was no match for the well-equipped, British-trained Jewish militia, but they nevertheless held their ground for almost two months. "The men fought like lions," Um Adel, who was just a young girl during the Nakba, told my father.

In mid-May, the Haganah surrounded the village, bombarding it indiscriminately. This was the final battle for Beit Daras. Um Mohammed, who survived the onslaught described the scene to my father: "The town was under bombardment, and it was surrounded from all directions. There was no way out. They surrounded it all, from the direction of Isdud, al-Sawafir and everywhere. We wanted to pursue a way out. The armed men [the Beit Daras fighters] said they were going to check on the road to Isdud, to see if it was open." The fighters came back from scouting the road and said a passage had opened for women and children to escape. But that passage was a trap.

"The Jews let the people get out, and then they whipped them with bombs and machine guns. More people fell than those who were able to run. My sister and I ... started running through the fields; we'd fall and get up. My sister and I escaped together holding each other's hand. The people who took the main road were either killed or injured, and those who went through the fields. The firing was falling on the people like sand," Um Mohammed recalled. David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency at that time, wrote in his diary that Zionist forces had massacred at least 50 Palestinians that day. The villagers who were not killed, were expelled. On the eve of their expulsion, Zainab and Mohammed collected a few necessities,

preparing their family donkey for the trek. They bid what they did not know would be a final farewell to their precious house which they had built themselves.

Mariam and Mohammed also prepared to leave. Mohammed had taken up arms to defend the village and Mariam had refused to leave without him. The pain of failing to stop the Zionist militias weighed heavy on Mohammed, who gradually fell ill, as he and his family made their way out of Beit Daras - he and Mariam walking and his children, including two-year-old Zarefah, riding atop the donkey. Dodging Zionist militias' mortar and sniper fire, the two families made it to what is now called the Gaza Strip, their feet bloodied from the long walk. They were no longer residents of Beit Daras; they had become refugees in Gaza's Bureij and Nuseirat camps, with nothing to their name. On top of their irreplaceable loss, upon pitching their tent in Gaza, Mohammed, Zarefah's father fell into a coma, dying shortly after. He left my great-grandmother Mariam, who refused to remarry and took care of her children by herself.

While my grandparents, Zarefah and Mohammed, were laid to rest many years ago, much of the Baroud family remained in Gaza, being forbidden by the Zionist entity from returning to their ancestral village, but spending their lives dreaming of the day Palestine would be liberated, and they would return home. This piece of paradise that they were forced to leave behind, adorned with green rolling hills and pastures, vineyards and fragrant citrus groves and almond orchards, would become but a fantasy for the us, the young generation. Seven decades after Beit Daras's Nakba, the descendants of its original residents are facing another one. For nearly six months now, Israel has been waging a genocidal campaign intended to "finish the job" it had started in 1948.

Since October 7, many of these descendants have been slaughtered in Israeli bombardment and ground invasions. As we solemnly remember the attacks that

ethnically cleansed Beit Daras 76 years ago, we mourn the members of our family who have been recently killed, from young children, to mothers and fathers, to treasured members of the Nakba generation who held to the hope of their return until the end. Amid brutal Israeli bombardments and invasions, Zarefah's own daughter, my aunt, has lived through her mother's experience, being forced to flee from her home in Qarrara along with her children with little more than their clothes on their backs. The story of the Baroud family is not unique. Approximately 80 percent of Gaza's population consists of refugees from the Nakba, the majority of them made refugees once again by the US-backed Israeli-executed genocide.

The Nuseirat and Bureij camps where my grandparents had spent their childhoods, fell in love, and raised their families, were largely decimated. And just as the people of Beit Daras resisted, the people of Gaza today have also risen up against this attempted Zionist settler conquest. As we witness the genocide unfolding in Gaza, our ancestors' lived experiences of the Nakba feel that much closer. Seventy-six years later, we face the imminent threat of colonial erasure just as they did all those years ago. While we mourn the loss of many members of our family, our commitment and dedication to our grandparents' dream of returning home grows infinitely stronger. Though Beit Daras has remained uninhabited since our last Palestinian warrior fell, the remnants of its homes, and two lone pillars of the Grand Mosque where my grandfather used to pray as a boy remain, eagerly awaiting our return.

When that sweet reunion finally takes place, we will rebuild Beit Daras's masjid with its original white pillars, resurrect its houses, and replant its orchards and fields with its native trees and crops. Though the lives of so many Beit Daras villagers and their children and grandchildren were violently taken, we will embed their spirit in every mud brick that is laid, as we rebuild the village.

Aljazeera

Implications of Moscow theater attack for Russia

Dr. Diana Galeeva

IT was a peaceful Friday evening. After iftar, we intended to watch a Turkish TV series, "Destan," with my mother. Instead, we found ourselves watching a horror movie - but this was no fiction. My sister called, telling is to turn on the TV, and we saw images of people dressed in camouflage outfits, armed with machine guns, attacking the Crocus City Hall music venue shortly before the band Picnic were due to take the stage.

The events we saw were especially terrifying because that evening, my sister had intended to go to Crocus City Hall after work, around the time the attack began. Through great fortune of fate, she decided to go home and change the shoes she was wearing for something more comfortable first and arrive at the venue later. Just 15 minutes here or there can indeed sometimes change everything. Others were not so lucky. Of those in the hall that night, 137 died, the victims of terrorism. The latest death toll was published by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation on March 24, which was designated by Russian authorities as an official national day of mourning. Modern Russia has experienced many terrorist attacks but this one shocked the country on a particularly large scale. No one has forgotten the horror of the siege at the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow in October 2002, when terrorists took almost 1,000 people hostage during a performance of the musical "Nord-Ost." Nor have memories faded of the terrible Beslan school siege in September 2004.

Nonetheless, the latest attack resonated in its awfulness. One of the people caught up in it, called Sergey, said: "We were at a concert at Crocus City Hall. Shooting started there, a bunch of people ran, everyone was screaming. Some people set the hall on fire and fired from machine guns." You can imagine the shock felt by all those involved. The attack has united Russian society. Almost 5,000 people in Moscow and the surrounding areas donated blood to help the victims in the immediate aftermath. The Investigative Committee of Russia gave a reward to one man who showed unparalleled courage when he saved others by tackling one of the terrorists. Russian society had, arguably, already displayed a similar sense of unity, or at least a yearning for it, a week earlier when citizens displayed their highest-ever level of support for their leader, Vladimir Putin, in the presidential election.

He won in a record, post-Soviet landslide victory, receiving 88 percent of the votes. It gives him six more years in power, with most people expecting the current course of his leadership to continue during that time. As Putin put it: "We have many tasks ahead. But when we are united, no matter who wants to intimidate us, suppress us, nobody has ever succeeded in history, they have not succeeded now, and they will not succeed ever in the future". The attack has clearly further consolidated the sense of unity in Russian society.

Daesh's Afghan branch, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, claimed responsibility for it. The rationalization behind it seems at odds

with current realities, at least in terms of Muslims in Russia and Russian ties with Muslim countries. Internal and external relations between Russia and Islam have, especially recently, been working toward coexistence and collaboration. The international reactions to the attack reflected the wider geopolitical landscape in terms of the narratives and degrees of sympathy. The leaders of friendly nations offered unconditional support to the Russian government and its people. Chinese President Xi Jinping, for example, sent a telegram to Putin in which he strongly condemned the attack and expressed his condolences. The president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, highlighted the uncertainty it might create in the international community.

"I believe that every day, we are approaching a great world conflict, the largest in history, and I fear that it will claim more lives than the Second World War," he said. The tone of the statements from some were noticeably qualified. The Russian ambassador to Vienna, Dmitry Luybinsky, thanked Austrian authorities for their words of sympathy following the terrorist attack but noted they had not condemned it. Lithuania's Foreign Ministry expressed its condolences to the victims of terrorism, wit out specifically mentioning the events at Crocus City Hall. Predictably, the US reaction also raised questions in Moscow. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Washington strongly condemned the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall and expressed its deepest condolences to the families and loves ones of those killed and injured in this heinous crime. He added that US authorities condemn terrorism in all its forms.

However, his statement came on Saturday. On Friday, White House spokesperson John Kirby was more ambiguous in his comments. He extended condolences to the victims but then immediately stated that there was no indication that Ukraine or Ukrainians were involved in the attack. This was despite the fact that, in his own words, the US was still studying what happened. The spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, said many countries had expressed "unconditional condemnation" of the actions of the terrorists, and had offered words of support for Russia. Among them were neighboring countries and ones on other continents, she added. The reactions had come from "literally all over the planet," Zakharova continued, including words of support at the official level. "Against, this background, the reaction from the United States makes a strange impression," she added. It is clear that while the terrorist attack has brought Russian society together in a new way, it is already a new point of friction in relations between Moscow and Washington, which is the main donor of military and other aid to Ukraine during the current conflict in the country. The warning from Vucic about the danger of the greatest conflict since the Second World war has its basis in logic; hopefully, the international community will find greater wisdom to help avoid any further escalation of the present, ever so fragile, global security situation.

Extreme heat is the silent assassin of climate change

Jagan Chapagain

TWENTY million people dead in a heatwave, some poached alive in a lake they hoped to cool off in. It is, for now, science fiction. Kim Stanley Robinson's apocalyptic novel, *Ministry for the Future*, starts in an Indian town where many have not survived a summer night. By day, the survivors are choked with the fumes of generators powering air conditioners. The air is "like breathing through the exhaust pipe of an old bus", he writes.

We're not there, yet. But extreme heat, far less visually dramatic than hurricanes or floods, is claiming lives and livelihoods with a stealth that belies its impact. Climate change is dramatically increasing the probability that we will see a mass fatality extreme heat disaster soon. Extreme heat is not only an issue in the Northern Hemisphere from June to September. As I write, in March, there's an unprece-

dented closure of schools across South Sudan. It's due not to conflict or economic woes but an extraordinary surge in temperatures to more than 42 degrees Celsius (108 degrees Fahrenheit). Parts of South America and Australia are just emerging from their two hottest summers ever. Worldwide, 2023 was the hottest on record - by a huge margin. Half the world's people - 3.8 billion in fact - simmered under extreme heat for at least one day last year.

Heatwaves across Europe killed more than 60,000 people in 2022. In the United Kingdom, roads melted and almost 3,000 people died. India sees at least 1,000 deaths a year attributable to extreme heat. In the United States, the number is similar. Extreme heat there kills more people than floods and tornadoes combined. According to The Lancet medical journal, China is on track to see from 20,000 to 80,000 heatwave deaths a year. And all these

figures are, in fact, probably gross underestimates. Unlike deaths in floods, most of those during heatwaves are recorded as something medical. Extreme heat is the silent assassin of climate change.

It's to expose this and propose solutions that the inaugural Global Summit on Extreme Heat is convening this week. Jointly hosted by my organisation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and by the US Agency for International Development, the online forum will bring together thinkers and doers. Because there's a lot to think about. And even more to do. Climate change, of course, exacerbates extreme heat. World Weather Attribution reports like a recent one about heat in southern West Africa show - near unequivocally - that heatwaves are much more frequent and hotter because of a generally

warmer world. This underscores the need to mitigate emissions. But no amount of action now will stop heatwaves in our lifetimes. What we can do is cope better when they hit by preparing before they do.

Second, by prioritising early warnings and early actions. Turning science and forecasts into accessible information saves lives. People warned in advance make better decisions and take better actions. That can be through media but also through telephone calls to people registered as vulnerable months ahead of time - Australia's Telecross RED is one example. Anticipatory action - moving those who can move, for example, or putting temporary cooling infrastructure in place - also saves lives. In Hanoi, before a recent heatwave, volunteers with Vietnam's Red Cross positioned mobile cooling centres near areas

where street vendors and motorcycle riders gathered. Spain rosters more lifeguards on beaches on days projected to be the hottest, knowing that it's on them that the least experienced swimmers venture into the sea. Third, by putting power in the hands of those on the ground.

Local people know their communities best. Fellow residents trust them. Skills and resources can be shared quickly and efficiently. Faema Khatun and Sayma Khatun Bithi are two of many Red Crescent volunteers in Bangladesh who teach first-aid skills, including how to help someone who falls unconscious due to overheating.

Above all, though, addressing extreme heat starts with highlighting the problem. At this week's global summit, we'll be announcing a two-month campaign of action on extreme heat ahead of Heat Action Day itself on June 2. We'll be launching an online toolkit to help guide people with what they can do to spread knowledge and prepare for the Northern Hemisphere's summer, which for many has already begun. Science fiction is deliberately scary. Reality need not be. With the right anticipation and action, the worst scenarios can remain in the realm of the imagination.

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Can Egypt succeed in Sudan where others have failed?

Dr. Abdel Latif El-Menawy

IN efforts to address the Sudanese crisis, there is a consensus that the only viable solution lies in an immediate ceasefire, a return to the negotiating table and the initiation of a political process.

This call for action resonates among Sudanese citizens, the African Union, which previously has intervened to mediate negotiations, and Egypt, the key neighboring country most affected by the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan. This conflict not only exacerbates the refugee crisis but also raises concerns about the cross-border security threats posed by armed groups, arms smugglers and human traffickers, along with the implications for the security of the Nile River waters.

As the focus of conflicting powers is increasingly diverted to the internal turmoil in Sudan, particularly recent movements of forces from Darfur toward Khartoum, there is an increased risk that border security with Egypt will be neglected. Despite Egypt's strict control measures along its 1,276-kilometer border with Sudan, palpable concerns remain about the potential exploitation of security vacuums by armed groups seeking to infiltrate Egyptian territory.

Given these pressing concerns, Cairo has been compelled to intensify its efforts to quell the conflict in Sudan, as evidenced by the recent flurry of diplomatic activity surrounding the crisis, including the visit of Abdullah Hamdok, Sudan's former prime minister, to Cairo on March 8. Hamdok's delegation from the Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces, or Taqaddum, attracted a significant level of attention during its visit,

reflecting a shared interest in addressing the post-transitional period of the Sudanese crisis. The Addis Ababa Declaration, signed by Taqaddum and the Rapid Support Forces in early January, notably outlined provisions designed to protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The Sudanese delegation's visit to Egypt provided an opportunity for both parties to engage in dialogue and exchange perspectives. For Cairo, it presented a chance to incorporate Taqaddum's insights into the formulation of a new initiative. For Taqaddum, it served as an opportunity to clarify its road map for navigating the crisis and assure Egypt of its commitment to fostering positive bilateral relations. During a press conference in Cairo, Hamdok emphasized the alignment of Taqaddum's vision with that of Egyptian authorities, along with the necessity of a political dialogue process and the establishment of a unified army to preserve Sudan's stability and territorial integrity. Furthermore, he hinted at the possibility of Cairo hosting a meeting between Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, the leaders of the rival Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces respectively, to explore avenues for ending the conflict between them.

Some Egyptian politicians interpret Cairo's reception of Hamdok as a potential signal of openness to engaging with the Rapid Support Forces. They assert that Egypt remains receptive to dialogue with all of those involved in the crisis,

while remaining committed to upholding the legitimacy of recognized military institutions and preventing the imposition of militia control. As Egypt navigates its role in addressing the crisis, diplomatic engagement and strategic initiatives offer hope for progress toward a peaceful resolution. By leveraging its regional influence and fostering dialogue among stakeholders, Egypt aims to contribute to stability and security in Sudan. Through its recent diplomatic initiatives, Egypt has emerged as a key player in addressing the complex crisis in Sudan, as it intensifies its efforts to broker peace there.

Ahead of a pivotal meeting in Cairo in late February between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Al-Burhan, who in addition to commanding the Sudanese Armed Forces is head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, the discussions centered on the latter's vision for ending the conflict and fostering sustainable peace in Sudan. On March 6, the Egyptian capital hosted a crucial gathering of the African Union High-Level Panel on Sudan, which met representatives of the country's former ruling Congress Party to strategize ways to resolve the conflict, the first anniversary of which is approaching on April 15.

Cairo also convened the Sudan Humanitarian Crisis Conference in November 2023, focusing on relief efforts. Diplomatic engagements such as these underscore Egypt's commitment to addressing the deteriorating situation in Sudan, and navigating its relations with key stakeholders. Its approach to

resolving the crisis prioritizes ending the armed conflict, respecting Sudan's sovereignty and unity, and curbing external interference while safeguarding the integrity of the Sudanese state. The recent resurgence of Egyptian diplomatic activity coincides with a perceived lull in international efforts to resolve the Sudanese crisis. Alongside efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, an eight-country trade bloc in Eastern Africa, and an initiative by neighboring countries, which have made limited progress toward halting the conflict, Egypt has also stepped up its unilateral attempts to find a resolution.

Despite these efforts, numerous barriers remain that hinder the realization of a comprehensive political settlement in Sudan. The persistence of armed conflict, exacerbated by external interventions and the fragmented nature of Sudanese political forces, presents formidable challenges to mediation efforts. The entrenched positions of key actors, including Al-Burhan and Hemedti, coupled with the external support for both sides, further complicate the prospects for an immediate end to hostilities. As the protracted conflict continues to unfold, Egypt finds itself grappling with mounting economic, political and security pressures. The path to Sudan's post-conflict future hinges on the emergence of a cohesive, pro-democracy civil front, yet the road ahead remains fraught with uncertainty.

Against this backdrop, Egypt's diplomatic endeavors serve as a crucial linchpin in efforts to navigate the complexities of the crisis and chart a course toward lasting peace and stability in the region.

Arab News

Watch carefully what Putin does next

Frida Ghitis

FROM the moment Vladimir Putin started topping their headlines some 25 years ago, Russians were told that their new leader was tough, that they could trust him to keep them safe. That's why one might expect that a massive security failure on his watch - Friday's catastrophic attack at the Crocus City Hall, in which a handful of terrorists massacred at least 139 people in a concert venue just outside Moscow - would erode the president's image and weaken his hold on power.

History, however, tells us that that will not happen. In fact, history has much to tell us about what comes next. That's because Putin's unlikely rise to power and to autocratic rule can almost be told as a tale of terrorist atrocities exploited to carry out political and military maneuvers aimed at strengthening his grip.

When a declining President Boris Yeltsin plucked Putin from near-obscure in 1999, in a time of turbulence and insecurity, setting him on course to become Russia's president and, as we now know, the seemingly-permanent 21st century czar, Putin very deliberately set out to flex his muscles before the cameras, displaying his judo skills or donning boxing gloves. Literally and figuratively, Putin was telling Russians - who would soon vote in a presidential election - that he was the man to protect them.

One can make a credible case, as some have, that without terrorism Putin would not have become president in the first place. Once in office, attack after attack gave him the pretext to dismantle democracy brick by brick. Now, all power flows from him, not from the people, and no alternative or counterbalance to his one-man rule is allowed to survive.

That's why even though ISIS has already claimed responsibility for the Crocus slaughter, releasing videos as evidence, there is every reason to expect it is Ukraine that will end up paying the price, along with the Russian people, whose freedoms are systematically restricted more with every successful terrorist attack. Terrorism, to put it bluntly, has paid off for Putin. So much that people with inside knowledge have accused his security apparatus of orchestrating some of the attacks. Putin denies any involvement.

As Russians grieve the latest, horrific loss of life, you'd expect it to take a significant toll on Putin's standing, given that the US embassy in Moscow had publicly warned of extremists with "imminent plans to target large gatherings," including "concerts." The US has a commendable practice of publicizing alerts about terrorist attacks even when they target its adversaries. Amid tense relations with Washington, Putin rejected the warning,

blasting the US for seeking to "intimidate and destabilize our society." Had he listened, perhaps scores of Russian civilians killed by the attackers would be alive today. The slow response by security services makes the negligence even more shocking.

When the images of flames shooting into the sky first emerged on Friday, followed by videos of gunmen shooting into the crowd, social media exploded with conspiracy theories. That's routine these days, but in Russia's case it has a unique track record. Consider the earliest days of Putin's rule.

When Yeltsin named him prime minister in August 1999, Russian television showed Putin slamming opponents on the judo mat and vowing to smash the Muslim separatists wreaking havoc in Chechnya and elsewhere. One month later, apartment blocks started blowing up, killing hundreds. Russians were terrified. But Putin, who had served as head of the FSB, the KGB's successor, before becoming prime minister, vowed he would end the carnage.

The government immediately blamed Chechens, and Putin vowed to go after the terrorists, ordering thousands of troops into Chechnya. In a now-famous line, he vowed, "We'll capture them in the toilet. We will waste them in the outhouse." In 2000 Putin won a landslide presidential election.

Two days after that crude statement, police had arrested a group of men carrying bags into an apartment block in the western Russian city of Ryazan. The bags, tested, contained high explosives and a detonator. The men were FSB agents. The government promptly dismissed the shocking news that security agents had apparently been caught in the process of blowing up a residential building. The FSB head, Nikolai Patrushev, claimed the bags were full of sugar and the men were conducting an exercise. Patrushev, incidentally, now heads the national security council, and as I recently wrote, is a possible successor to Putin.

Alexander Litvinenko, the former FSB spy, blamed Putin for the apartment bombings before he was killed by a dose of radioactive polonium, an assassination that the European Court for Human Rights pinned on the Russian government and which a UK government inquiry concluded had "probably" been directed by the FSB. Many others have made the same accusation about the bombings, claiming Putin would not have won the presidency without them and that Putin's FSB carries out terrorist acts rather than solving them. The Kremlin dismisses the accusations. Terrorist attacks continued, and each time - despite the evidence that Putin was

failing to protect the Russian people - he managed to emerge stronger.

The entire world held its breath in 2002 when Chechen radicals seized Moscow's Dubrovka theater with 850 people inside. On the fourth day, security forces pumped a gas into the building, leading to the death of at least 130 hostages, and stormed the building and killed the terrorists. Afterwards, Russia enacted anti-terrorism laws that sharply restricted media freedoms, helping Putin more effectively control the information Russians receive. The most wrenching of all terrorist attacks came two years later in Beslan, near Chechnya, when Chechen terrorists seized a school full of children and parents, more than 1,000 people. It was an excruciating scene that gripped an anguished world. It's unclear what or who ultimately caused the explosions that ended the siege killing more than 330 civilians, most of them children. In the aftermath, Putin introduced reforms that ended local elections of regional governors, claiming it would help fight terror. What it did was make the regional governments beholden to Putin, not to their citizens.

There's little surprise that after Friday's Crocus massacre Putin tried to link the disaster to Ukraine, or that when the four detained suspects appeared in court they were muscled in by masked men, the suspects' faces bruised and swollen, one of them in a wheelchair, following videos that appear to show the torture of the suspects. Speaking to the Russian people, without mentioning ISIS, Putin claimed without evidence that the suspects were planning to escape to Ukraine where "a window was prepared for them."

Ukraine angrily rejected the accusation, maintaining it had nothing to do with the attack. The US reiterated that "ISIS bears sole responsibility," and the UK warned that Russia was "creating a smokescreen of propaganda" and using the attack to defend its "utterly evil invasion of Ukraine." Three days after the disaster, Putin finally declared that "radical Islamists" carried out the attack, but he still implicated Ukraine without evidence.

What likely comes next is Putin's leveraging of the tragedy for his benefit. We can expect a continuing, draconian crackdown on internal dissent, tougher controls on the media and private speech, and an intensifying campaign against Ukraine; perhaps a new national mobilization. The terrorist attack was a glaring failure by the president and his regime. It reveals his weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and many Russians know that. But at least in the short term, it is likely to make him stronger by spurring even more repression and intensifying the country's war footing.

CNN

Kate's cancer saga exposes our addiction to sensational, regulation-free social media

Mohamed Chebaro

THE British royal family is again in the spotlight. King Charles, after undergoing a medical procedure for an enlarged prostate in January, is having treatment for an unspecified form of cancer. Last week, his daughter-in-law, Kate, the wife of William, Prince of Wales, announced that she is receiving preventative chemotherapy, following major abdominal surgery early in the new year.

The royal family in the UK is used to setbacks and controversies but the media circus surrounding Kate over the past two weeks, and in particular the social media frenzy, reflects badly on all of us given the failure of so many to respect the rights and feelings of someone dealing with an illness, even if that someone is a public figure, at a time when they need their privacy most.

As a journalist in London, my phone has been ringing regularly with inquiries from Arabic-language media across the Middle East about some of the most fantastical allegations, rumors, conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns containing the grimmest of details about what has befallen the Princess of Wales, King Charles and the royal family as a whole. The justification offered by such callers is that, well, this is surely an important story because it is trending on social media.

The rumors and speculation about the royals, and whatever pain they might cause the subjects of the stories, are a clear example of the potent power of an unregulated digital realm. Yes, Kate's decision to edit a family photo personally

before sharing it did not help the situation, and her video message to reassure people about her health might have had the opposite effect. They further exposed the power of a weaponized social media, and the false illusion that it facilitates healthy public debate and the free flow of information. In reality, such tools for unregulated, free-for-all exchanges of information are proving to be harmful, especially in democratic societies. They expose to the risk of misinformation very serious conversations about important matters, including the rule of law, elections, healthcare and the climate crisis. This permits disruptors, whether they be simple "useful idiots" or malicious state propaganda machines, to meddle, disrupt and even manufacture dissent in ways that twist and warp reality, perception and public opinion.

Simple human decency dictates that in times of serious illness or loss of life, even that of an enemy, we should show some respect. When I was growing up in the Middle East, cancer was often referred to as "that medical condition." Thanks to medical advances, we have come a long way in making "that illness" treatable or even curable in some cases. But this is in no way carte blanche for anyone to ridicule a person dealing with any form of cancer, or for their absence from the public stage to become a tool for competing clickbait stories, attempts to gain followers, setting trends or making money by deluding curious people and trading in obscenities. The revelation that Catherine, Princess of Wales,

has cancer should have prompted all of us to stop, take a breath and think about all of those around us in similar situations, rather than swiftly fueling a backlash and endless social media speculation.

This included publicly stated and shared theories that suggested this mother of three young children had died and her death was being kept secret, that she had divorced William, and whatever other fantasies "citizen journalists" thought would be useful to proffer in the form of lurid insights, with social media providing the means to easily disseminate all of it. Yes, the princess's decision to digitally manipulate a photograph subsequently released by the palace to the media did not stand up to close scrutiny, and the British monarchy's traditional culture of secrecy no doubt fueled the online speculation. In any case, suddenly everyone became a digital expert.

Some people on X and TikTok suggested Kate's subsequent video message was an AI-enabled deepfake. Conspiracy theorists posted slowed-down versions of the footage to raise doubts, highlighting the stillness of the background image. Other went to great lengths to search for a missing dimple. Last but not least, the anti-vaccine campaigners jumped on the opportunity provided by the conspiracy bandwagon to claim, baselessly, that Kate's illness was linked to a type of so-called "turbo cancer" linked to COVID-19 vaccines, a myth repeatedly debunked by scientists. My intent here is not to repeat these clear examples of fake news, or even to criticize those

who post, like or share them. It is to highlight the need for regulation of the information superhighway in this age of proliferation of wild theories, when clear, basic facts and simple truths are increasingly questioned in a misinformation-filled internet landscape.

Many surveys and studies across the Western world have found that the internet and social media have affected societies in both negative and positive ways. But perhaps the most dangerous constant they reveal is that tech connectivity has made it much easier to manipulate people through false information and rumors. Many of those who now feel so empowered and believe they possess "a voice," thanks to social media and other online platforms, simply click to share "facts" and information they often have barely had time to digest themselves, let alone fact-check or apply their own judgment based on propriety or critical thinking to test the merit of a post before forwarding it.

In the realm of politics, social media and tech tools have been deployed to lethal effect, sowing the seeds of disruption and dividing public opinion. The Kate saga is similarly a reflection of all the worst aspects of our unregulated, free-for-all tech realm. We only have ourselves to blame for the excesses, as society increasingly relinquishes its collective duty to check and test the "facts" we are presented with. At a time when our attention spans have been reduced to less than 46 seconds, this is leaving us all less-informed and more prone to invitations to "like" cruel stories in our wrong-minded drive to make an impact in the world.

Environmental cooperation in South China Sea requires joint efforts

Ding Duo

MARINE environmental protection is an important part of marine governance. International treaties, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, contain a number of provisions on the protection of the marine environment, and there are many relevant rules in general international law, including customary international law.

The South China Sea is the common home of China and ASEAN countries. According to Article 6 of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, the parties concerned may explore or carry out cooperation in the field of marine environment protection before the dispute over territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction in the South China Sea is fully and permanently resolved. Over the past 20 years, China and ASEAN countries have built platforms and mechanisms to achieve results in environmental protection and conservation of biological resources in the South China Sea.

This cooperation has played an important role in avoiding the continuous and rapid deterioration of the ecosystem and biodiversity in the South China Sea, which is conducive to the regional marine environmental governance of the coastal countries in the semi-enclosed sea and has created favorable conditions for the countries concerned to dilute the negative effects of the disputes and enhance mutual trust. Through these cooperation practices, we can not only hear the voices and echoes of the

coastal countries in the South China Sea for deepening cooperation in regional marine environmental protection and fishery resource conservation, but also feel that China and ASEAN countries still have a relatively deep civil foundation and increasingly urgent practical needs in translating consensus into practical actions.

However, environmental cooperation in the South China Sea under the declaration framework has not always been smooth - the complex and difficult disputes over territory and maritime jurisdiction, the intensification of maritime frictions due to US interference and provocations by individual parties, and the continuous influence of zero-sum games and Cold War ideology on the South China Sea issue - are all reasons why the stability of maritime cooperation in low-sensitive areas is not high enough. Policy is only one side of the problem, and the shortcomings of some countries in their ability to protect the marine environment also constrain their willingness to deepen regional cooperation in the South China Sea.

In terms of conservation, a report released by the Asia Foundation has pointed out that about 64 percent of Southeast Asia's fishery resources are at medium to high risk of overfishing, and the Philippines is one of the most problematic countries: in addition to overfishing, destructive fishing practices such as using sodium cyanide to stun fish, using explosives or grenades to create

explosions in the sea to kill fish, and using bottom trawling nets to drag seagrass beds or coral reefs have also exacerbated the marine biodiversity crisis in the Philippines.

In terms of dumping, according to a recent report by Asia News, the Philippines has few competitors in dumping plastic waste into the sea, and it is difficult to find a remedy, with more than 20,000 square kilometers of the Coral Triangle alone directly polluted. A report from the University of Oxford also shows that the Philippines contributes one-third to the world's 80 percent of ocean plastic from Asian rivers. Interpol's "30 Days at Sea" report on marine pollution crimes also mentioned that the Philippines has seriously polluted the marine environment by dumping farm waste in its coastal waters.

In terms of oil pollution prevention and control, countries in the region are facing common challenges, and emergency response capabilities also need to be improved urgently. In February last year, a Philippine oil tanker sank off the coast of Mindoro Island, leaking about 800,000 liters of industrial oil.

Pollutants have been detected in the coastal waters of more than 60 nearby villages, and the coast is also covered with black sludge. Marine scientists at the University of the Philippines say about 360 square kilometers of coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds are contaminated with oil, and the damage caused will take a long

time to recover. There are a large number of merchant ships and fishing vessels sailing through the South China Sea every year, but countries in the region have not yet formed a scientific, smooth and efficient cooperation or coordination mechanism for oil pollution prevention and control, and there is no corresponding emergency plan. If a similar incident were to occur in the South China Sea, the impact on the marine environment and the damage to ecosystems could be equally devastating.

In the face of changes in the international and regional situation, China has made unremitting efforts to promote cooperation in low-sensitivity areas while safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests in the South China Sea. Despite the provocative nature of the Philippines' policy in the South China Sea, China has remained patient, shown goodwill, and persuaded with good words, and has put forward cooperation initiatives on fisheries, marine environmental protection, and marine plastic waste management, which are highly in line with the Philippines' practical needs to improve its own marine governance capabilities.

The plastic waste in Manila Bay, the oil-water mixture in Mindoro Island, and the coral that died due to cyanide in the Calamian Islands many years ago are in fact a reminder to the coastal countries of the South China Sea that only a clean and beautiful South China Sea can truly benefit all parties and future generations.

The China Daily

EU's net zero retreat gathering steam

Ross Clark

BUILDING new gas power plants will, of course, "only make the transition to renewables-based power unnecessarily costly". How do I know? Because I heard it from a bunch of climate activists calling themselves Beyond Fossil Fuels. What's more, building new gas plants runs contrary to the "emerging consensus" that Europe must phase out all fossil fuel-generation of power by 2035.

I'm used to activists making sweeping assertions and talking in generalities rather than addressing the boring old details like how we keep the lights on when there is little in the way of wind and solar energy on offer, but this really does take the biscuit.

Only a "consensus" of climate activists with their heads in the clouds - plus Ed Miliband - thinks we could save consumers money by closing down all our gas power plants in the near future. Judge European governments by their actions rather than their words and the clear consensus is that we are very much going to need gas power in the future. As Beyond Fossil Fuels itself reveals, Britain is not the only country that is building new gas plants. Across Europe, 72 gigawatts-worth of them are being planned.

This may well be contrary to the targets governments have set themselves to decarbonise their power sectors, but when forced to make a choice between virtue-signalling and keeping the lights on they are invariably choosing the latter.

It ought to be obvious that you cannot construct a national grid on solar and wind power alone. Renewables are great on a sunny, windy day like today when wind and solar farms between them are generating 21 gigawatts of power. It is rather less good on calm winter evenings when they can struggle to generate 1 gigawatt. What makes it possible to incorporate so much wind and solar power in our energy mix is gas power plants, which can be turned up or down at short notice to balance variable and unpredictable renewable power.

Take gas away and you have a serious problem. We could store energy in lithium batteries or pumped storage reservoirs - but at a very high cost. We could theoretically use surplus power to generate hydrogen via electrolysis of water, store the hydrogen in underground caverns and burn it to generate power on windless and sunless days - except that the tech-

nology doesn't yet exist on a commercial scale and when it does it is likely to be as expensive, if not more so, than lithium batteries. It certainly won't be saving consumers money.

Rather than seeing gas a great evil, green lobbyists should see it for what it is: part of a system which has allowed us hugely to reduce carbon emissions from power generation over the past three decades. It has enabled us to all-but banish coal power plants - a form of energy which, gigawatt for gigawatt, produces around twice as many carbon emissions. And it has enabled the rollout of wind and solar by providing reliable back-up. Moreover, it may be possible in future to fit gas plants with carbon capture technology - although that won't be cheap, either.

Green lobbyists are making themselves an irrelevance by turning against all fossil fuels in all circumstances. Governments may have nodded along with their demands up until now, by setting net zero targets. But clearly, when ideology collides with reality, governments are not going to sacrifice the well-being of their citizens. The move to build new gas plants is yet one more sign of Europe's retreat from unrealistic net zero targets.

The Telegraph



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain chairing a meeting at Ministry Industries and Production.

Banks to remain open on 30th and 31st March

F.P. Report

KARACHI: To facilitate the taxpayers in payment of Government duties/taxes, it has been decided that branches of all banks that are open on Saturday shall observe extended banking hours till 4:00 p.m. on Saturday the 30th March, 2024 and Sunday the 31st March, 2024 for collection of taxes through Alternate Delivery Channels (ADC's) Over-the-Counter facilities.

Further, to ensure same day clearing / settlement of payment instruments, NIFT has been advised to arrange special clearings at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday the 30th March, 2024 and Sunday the 31st March, 2024. To eliminate the issue of spillover of tax receipts, banks shall ensure that no instrument concerning government receipts, lodged during the aforementioned office hours, remain unattended at branch counters and must be lodged in the aforesaid special clearing in the value date of 31st March, 2024.

Moreover, banks are advised to keep their concerned branches open on 30th and 31st March, 2024 till such time that is necessary to facilitate the special clearings for government transactions by the NIFT.

Gold rates up by Rs.1,500 to Rs.231,000

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold witnessed an increase of Rs.1,500 and was sold at Rs.231,000 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs..229,500 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.1,285 to Rs.198,045 from Rs.196,760 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.181,541 from Rs. 180,363, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs.2,580 and Rs.2,211.93 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$14 to \$2,214 from \$2,200, the Association reported.

Jam initiates push for E-commerce growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan on Thursday convened an in-house briefing to address the burgeoning potential of E-commerce, emphasizing its elevation and soliciting proposals for mass awareness.

Acknowledging its significant potential, particularly at the village level, the minister applauded the increasing adoption of E-commerce among rural communities, said a press release issued here.

During the session, discussions also focused on facilitating cross-border exporters, encouraging freelancers, ensuring financial inclusion and digital payments, and enhancing global connectivity. Challenges facing the E-commerce sector were thoroughly examined.

As a way forward, strategies were outlined, including the training of masses on digital tools to support E-exporters, establishing linkages with international payment gateways

and online marketplaces, and exploring digital trade agreements to bolster E-commerce exporters.

Additionally, the integration of Artificial Intelligence in E-commerce operations was deliberated to enhance efficiency and competitiveness.

The discussions underscored the government's commitment to fostering a conducive environment for E-commerce growth, leveraging digital technologies to drive economic prosperity and global connectivity.

SNGPL's stance on gas price determination

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Reference news items published in the media regarding inclusion of inflated HR cost in the gas pricing and increase in gas price three times in the current year.

In this respect it is highlighted that the Operating Cost including the HR cost is only 4% of the total gas price. 94% is cost of gas alone, while rest is return on CAPEX.

Key Reasons for Increase in Price:

- i. Our indigenous gas resources are continuously depleting which has necessitated the diversion of RLNG to domestic sector consumers particularly during the winter period. Average cost of RLNG is about Rs. 3,500 / MMBTU while Domestic Sector Average Sale Price is around Rs. 1,100 / MMBTU. This differential amounting to Rs. 231

Billion has also necessitated the current price increase since cost of diverted RLNG has to be recovered to keep the LNG supply chain functional.

ii. Cost of indigenous gas has also increased by Rs. 69 Billion.

iii. Pak Rupee has devalued by 55% during the last two years alone while all Gas Purchase contracts are US\$ denominated and linked with Crude Oil / Furnace Oil prices.

It is to point out that despite recent increases in gas prices, average rate of gas for protected class of domestic consumers is Rs. 513 per MMBTU which is much lesser than cost price of Rs. 1,674/MMBTU. 4.4 million consumers of SNGPL network fall in the protected category which is 60% of the total consumers and whose bills during winter month of

February remained less than Rs. 2,000 (inclusive of taxes).

It is pertinent to mention here that despite the recent price increases, a subsidy amounting of Rs. 128 Billion is projected to be provided to the domestic consumers of SNGPL during FY 2023-24.

It is further highlighted that gas business in Pakistan is highly regulated and is governed under OGRA Ordinance, 2002. OGRA, in order to determine revenue requirements of gas companies has been holding public hearings since 2002.

OGRA hold public hearings twice a year for determining the gas prices. The current public hearings being conducted by OGRA are for FY 2024-25 which will become effective from July 1, 2024 and is not going to lead to any changes in gas price at this time.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Three ships, Marathopolis, Anna-M and Chemroad Rose carrying Containers, Coal and Chemicals, berthed at Container Terminal, Bulk Terminal and Engro Terminal respectively during last 24 hours.

Meanwhile five more ships, Silver Heba, As Emerald Gree, Yun Ding 19, AL-Bidda and UOG Sparta carrying Palm oil, LNG and Mogas also arrived at outer anchorage of the port during the same

period.

A total of eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them six ships, Port Imabari, Solar Roma, Malha Ras Laffan, Epicurus, Pindos and Marathopolis are expected to sail on today afternoon.

A cargo volume of 171,279 tonnes, comprising 143,245 tonnes imports cargo and 28,034 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 2,506 Containers (1,444 TEUs

Imports and 1,062 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 09 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them four ships, Taxi Diara, Kerala, AL-Bidda and Sky Runner scheduled to load/offload Cement, Furnace oil, Pam oil and LNG are expected to take berths at MW-2, FOTCO, LCT and EETL on Thursday, and another ship Kosan Adam carrying 52,500 tonnes of wheat is due to arrive at Port Qasim on same day.

'Uplift of SMEs govt's top priority'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Industry and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain reaffirmed on Thursday that the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the government's top priority.

While presiding over a high-level meeting, the minister received a detailed briefing about SMEDA's working from its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), said a news release.

The minister said that small and medium industries were playing an important role in the country's economic development.

The government will facilitate SMEs to achieve economic development. SAMEDA should focus on human resource development to work effectively, he added.

Rana Tanveer said that women play an important role in the economic development of the country and urged SMEDA to focus on women's entrepreneurship. Women's workforce can be better utilized in the economic development of the country, he added.

Foreign reserves reach \$13.42b

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan inched up to US\$ 13,427.6 million in the week ended on March 22, 2024, while foreign reserves held by State Bank stood at \$ 8,021.9 million.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank increased by \$ 4 million to reach \$ 8,021.9 million during the week under review.

Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks also increased by \$ 32.9 million to \$ 5,405.7 million, it added.

Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country, in the previous week ended on March 15, 2024, were \$ 13,390.7 million.

Among them, foreign reserves held by the central bank were \$ 8,017.9 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were \$ 5,372.8 million.

Stocks drop on ex-dividend day

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo shares ended lower on Thursday after investors locked in dividend rights during the previous session.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index dropped 1.46 percent, or 594.66 points, to close at 40,168.07, while the broader Topix index lost 1.73 percent, or 48.47 points, to 2,750.81.

"Although the major indices rose across the board in the United States (US) and European markets, a wide range of stocks were sold in Tokyo due to the impact of the ex-dividends of major companies," IwaiCosmo Securities said.

The Nikkei surged on Wednesday, the final day for investors to secure the rights to dividends for various shares before the Japanese fiscal year ends this week. The headline index on Thursday was expected to drop as investors adjust their positions, even as a sense of optimism about Japanese shares endures.

PSX closed at historic high level of over 67,000 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 594.34 points, a positive change of 0.89 percent, closing at historic level of 67,142.12 points against 66,547.79 points the previous trading day.

A total of 421,118,268 shares valuing Rs.16.159 billion were traded during the day as compared to 354,597,630 shares valuing Rs.11.884 billion the last day.

Some 352 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 212 of them recorded gains and 111 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 29 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were PTCL with 55,715,919 shares at Rs.18.42 per share, Lotte

Chemical with 27,228,578 shares with Rs.19.56 per share and Telecard Limited with 25,547,322 shares at Rs.9.29 per share.

Rafhan Maize Products Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.125.00 per share price, closing at Rs.8,175.00, whereas the runner-up was Bata Pakistan Limited with a Rs.58.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.1,739.00.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.600.00 per share closing at Rs.21,000.00, followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs.34.67 decline to close at Rs.7,600.33.

Rupee gains 01 paisa against dollar

Pakistani Rupee on Thursday gained 01 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and

closed at Rs278.03 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.04.

However, according to the FAP, the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.2 and Rs280.9, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 98 paisa to close at Rs299.99 against the last-day closing of Rs300.97, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.83, whereas a decrease of 41 paisa was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs350.58 compared to the last closing of Rs350.99. The Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged to close at Rs 75.71 and Rs 74.13 respectively.

Fauji Fertilizer Company organizes 46th AGM



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Fauji Fertilizer Company (FFC) held its 46th Annual General Meeting having a quorum of 57.20 percent with representation either in person or through Video Conferencing and proxies.

Individual shareholders as well as all major equity holders including Fauji Foundation, State Life Insurance Corporation, Citi Bank, Deutsche Bank, Standard Chartered Bank,

NAFA, NIT, APF, Atlas and representatives from various other Corporate bodies and institutions attended the meeting.

Brig Zulfiqar Ali Haider, SI(M) (Retd), Company Secretary FFC, opened the house. The Chairman FFC Board of Directors, Mr.

Waqar Ahmed Malik welcomed the participants of the meeting. Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer FFC, Sarfaraz Ahmed Rehman apprised the shareholders

about performance of the Company during the year 2023.

Sarfaraz Ahmed Rehman while responding to various queries from shareholders, informed the house about goals and future strategy of the Company.

He further assured FFC's commitment to achieve higher standards of performance and to provide sustained earnings to the valued shareholders, despite the challenging economic circumstances.

Envoy promises all efforts to enhance direct trade

FAISALABAD (APP): Korean Ambassador Park Kijun said on Thursday that serious efforts would be made to enhance direct trade between Faisalabad and Korea.

Addressing the business community at the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), he said Faisalabad was the textile hub of Pakistan. He said bilateral cooperation in the sector would be further improved in the coming years. He particularly identified agriculture, textile, energy and IT and said that these sectors had potential to increase cooperation for benefit of the two countries.

He said that Korean businesspeople fully understand the potential and

hopefully they would exploit it by enhancing investment and technical cooperation. He was optimistic that Pakistan would soon emerge as a major player in South-West Asia because of its economic growth and social development. He said that the FCCI should play a key role in enhancing bilateral trade between Faisalabad and Korea, while the Korean embassy would also complement these efforts. He said that relations between the Korean embassy and the FCCI would be further strengthened to give a quantum jump to bilateral trade.

About the short stay period on multiple visas, he promised resolving the issue in consultation with the FCCI president. He also

assured to share Korean experience of SMEs with Faisalabad so that this sector could make tremendous progress in this field. He said that empowerment of women was a general global issue; however, "we would also look into it to involve Pakistani women in the national mainstream".

He said Pakistani mangoes were being exported to Korea and Pakistani exporters would get more orders for export of the specific Pakistani delicacy. About import of Korean dyes and chemicals, he said "our quality products are comparatively costly as compared to the Chinese products". However, he hoped that Korean companies would again take interest in the Pakistani market and regain it with innovative marketing steps.

Earlier, Dr Khurram Tariq President FCCI welcomed the Korean ambassador and his team. He also introduced Faisalabad and FCCI and quoted his first meeting with his Excellency in which particular stress was laid on exchange of cultural delegations.

He said that 25 major Korean companies were working in Pakistan, while a hydroelectric power project was also undertaken in KP with an estimated cost of \$1 billion.

Document Lost

I Ihsan Ali son of Abdul Nawaz Khan have lost by passport bearing No. SL1791981 somewhere in Nowshera district. If anyone found please contact Ihsan Ali son of Abdul Nawaz Khan resident of Azakhel Bala, Nowshera district. Contact No. 0341-2696576.

IBA Karachi confers awards to promote journalistic expertise



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Centre for Excellence in Journalism (CEJ) at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi conferred awards upon four journalists for their outstanding contributions to the field of climate reporting at the 'Climate Reporting Awards'. This measure is

funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

The Awards, held for the first time, were organized to highlight and promote journalistic expertise in the areas of environment and

climate change after 24 journalists across the country attended five-day Green Media Initiative boot camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and South Punjab.

Dr. Rüdiger Lotz, Consul General, Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany, gave welcome remarks at the event. He stated, "To the journalists we honor today,

my heartfelt congratulations and deepest gratitude. I encourage you to continue your invaluable contributions to the climate change discourse, knowing your voices enable climate action. Your stories have not just informed the public, they have demonstrably made a difference."

The awards were conferred to four journalists - two from each province - for news stories written or produced after the successful completion of the Swat boot camp in November and the Rahim Yar Khan boot camp in December.

The winners and runners-up are as follows: Rahim Yar Khan Winner: Irfan Ulhaq, Correspondent, Dawn Media Group

Story title: Salinity control plan reclaims 1.3 acres farmland

Runner-up: Mahjabeen

Abid, Producer/ Anchor, PTV National Multan

Story title: Air pollution: A big reason of complications during pregnancy

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Winner: Arif Ahmad, Reporter, Zama Swat

Story title: An entire village in Swat flooded due to climate change

Runner-up: Laiba Hussain, Reporter, Aaj News

Story title: Solar energy's unintended impact: Peshawar's silent drought crisis

Winners and runners-up were selected by two senior journalists from a total of 20 entries from the alumni of Green Media Initiative boot camps. The jury included Shahzeb Jillani, Senior Journalist and Host of Zara Hut Kay at Dawn News and Afia Salam, Freelance Journalist.

During the occasion, a resource book titled 'Pakistan: On the Frontline of Climate Change' authored by Rina Saeed Khan and edited by Farahnaz Zahidi was launched. The book provides journalists with an overview of the impact, governance and legal structures, and tips to improve climate change journalism in an easy-to-understand format.

Amber Rahim Shamsi, Director CEJ, highlighted the Centre's efforts for providing opportunities to journalists to learn climate reporting on ground: "CEJ-IBA has been at the forefront of capacity-building for stimulating climate journalism".

"We are honored to partner with the like-minded GIZ, which shares our vision for high quality and high impact reporting," she said.

In his keynote speech,



In brief

Gareth to name England squad

LONDON (AFP): England manager Gareth Southgate says he will name an expanded initial Euro 2024 squad as Uefa says it will consider requests to reinstate 26-man squads. Southgate will name a provisional squad on 21 May, two days after the end of the Premier League season. Unlike the previous two tournaments that had a 26-man limit, Southgate must then reduce his squad to 23 on 7 June. "There are so many questions on injuries," said Southgate. "It's inevitable we're going to be naming a longer squad, which is what we did before the Euros here even though we were dealing with 26 then. "It seems to be [settled at 23]. There is one more Uefa meeting where there's been a little bit of talk amongst some of the coaches about possibly increasing that." Squad limits were increased from 23 to 26 for the European Championships in 2021 and the World Cup in 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic and the risk of multiple cases of infection within a squad forcing players to isolate. Ronald Koeman, the Netherlands manager, described Uefa's decision to reduce squad sizes for this summer's tournament as "absurd" this week. Uefa said it had "taken note" of comments expressed by some national team coaches on the squad size and would listen to the views of coaches at a workshop on 8 April. Southgate was without key personnel such as Trent Alexander-Arnold and Luke Shaw for friendlies against Brazil and Belgium this week, while Kyle Walker, Harry Maguire and Harry Kane all departed the camp early with injury concerns.

Ludlam & Sinckler to join Toulon

LONDON (AFP): England forwards Lewis Ludlam and Kyle Sinckler will join Toulon for next season, say the French Top 14 club. Bristol prop Sinckler, 31, and Northampton back-rower Ludlam, 28, are both to move across the English Channel on three-year deals. The switch to the three-time Champions Cup winners would effectively end the England aspirations of both players. Under existing rules, England head coach Steve Borthwick is unable to select players based with clubs abroad. Toulon, who won the last of their four French titles in 2014, currently sit fifth in the Top 14 with seven rounds of the regular season remaining. "They are two good signings who will complete our forward pack for many years," Toulon club president Bernard Lemaître told the AFP news agency. Ludlam will link up with former Northampton teammate Dave Ribbans, who made the same move last summer. "They respond to the profiles we're looking for in our recruitment," added Lemaître. "We're trying to have higher expectations on mentality, behaviour and lifestyle of players like their impressive compatriot Dave Ribbans." Sinckler, 31, won the most recent of his 68 England caps at the Rugby World Cup in France last autumn. Ludlam, 28, also played in the tournament, winning his 25th cap in the third-place play off against Argentina. But both missed out on selection for Borthwick's squad for this year's Six Nations. Former England great Jonny Wilkinson won the second of back-to-back European crowns with Toulon a decade ago.

Jannik Sinner beats Tomas Machac to reach semi-finals

MIAMI (BBC): Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner reached the Miami semi-finals by ending Tomas Machac's stunning run at the ATP Masters event. Second seed Sinner used his explosive power and precision to win 6-4 6-2 against his 60th-ranked Czech opponent. Machac beat Andy Murray and Andrey Rublev to play a first Masters quarter-final but Sinner's level was too good. The 22-year-old Italian will face third seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of January's Australian Open final. Sinner beat the Russian to win the first Grand Slam title of his career at Melbourne Park and he has continued his fine form since.

The world number three

won another title in Rotterdam before reaching the semi-finals in Indian Wells, where he lost to Carlos Alcaraz as his only defeat of the 2024 season.

Sinner and Alcaraz are forming a burgeoning rivalry and, with the 20-year-old Spaniard playing Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov in the last eight on Thursday, they remain on course to meet again in the Miami final.

After recovering an early break of serve against the 23-year-old Machac, Sinner found his rhythm to reach the last four without any further major problems. He converted four of 11 break points, without facing another himself, to reach the semis for the third time in his career.

"Physically I feel good,

I'm just happy to compete," said Sinner. "We practice very hard to be in these positions and I'm happy to be in the semis again." Medvedev, who beat Sinner in last year's Miami final, booked his last four spot with a 6-2 7-6 (9-7) victory over Chile's Nicolas Jarry.

The defending champion made just three unforced errors to Jarry's 14 in the first set and clawed his way back in the second-set tie-break to wrap up the win after just 68 minutes. "The first set I thought I was playing a good level, not doing anything extra, just enough to win," Medvedev said. "Then he started to play much better and it was tough rallies, tough points. He served better and it was just a matter of a few points in the tie-break."



Pak, NZ T20I series online ticket booking from today

LAHORE (APP): The online sale of tickets for the five-match T20I series between Pakistan and New Zealand will begin on Friday (tomorrow) at 5 p.m. The tickets may be booked at pcb.tcs.com.pk.

Three matches of the series will be played in Rawalpindi on April 18, 20 and 21 April respectively while the last two contests will take place in Lahore on April 25 and 27. The matches are set to begin at 730pm. The PCB will

announce sale of physical tickets along with outlet addresses in due course.

The tickets for Rawalpindi-leg will be available at a minimum cost of PKR 500 (Premium) and the maximum available at PKR 7,500 (VVIP Gallery). Additionally, the hospitality seats will be available at a maximum amount of PKR 15,000 except for the first T20I where the hospitality seats will be available for PKR 12,000. For the Lahore leg,

ticket prices start at PKR 300 for General seating and the maximum at PKR 6,000 for the fourth T20I while PKR 7,000 for the fifth T20I (VVIP Gallery).

The hospitality boxes at the Far-End building of the Gaddafi Stadium will be available for purchase in Lahore. The hospitality box for Thursday's (25 April) encounter will be available at PKR 600,000, while the box for Saturday's (27 April) match will be available at PKR 700,000.

Rodgers to sit out one game but can return for Rangers derby after ban

LONDON (BBC): Celtic's Brendan Rodgers has been given a one-match touchline ban with another suspended, which means he will not miss the forthcoming Old Firm derby.

The Celtic manager complained of "incompetence" and "really poor officiating" in a 2-0 loss away to Hearts earlier this month. Celtic said "we will accept the panel's decision" after Thursday's hearing and will not be appealing against the ban.

"Clearly, we are disappointed with the outcome," the club added.

"The manager appeared at the hearing today and his defence was presented robustly and thoroughly.

"Like many other clubs, we will continue to press for the highest standards in relation to the VAR process in Scottish football."

During his BBC interview at Tynecastle, Rodgers twice mentioned video assistant referee John Beaton by name, saying VAR interventions meant the game was "refereed outside the field".

VAR reviews during the Scottish Premiership match led to Yang Hyun-jun's yellow card being upgraded to red and Tomoki Iwata conceding a penalty.

Celtic later had their appeal against winger Yang's dismissal rejected.

The ruling over Rodgers' comments means the

Northern Irishman will be banned from the dugout for Sunday's trip to Livingston but will be able to return as the defending Scottish champions visit Ibrox for their 7 April city derby against title rivals Rangers.

As well as being missing from the dugout against the side sitting bottom of the Premiership, Rodgers will not be allowed access to the dressing room an hour prior to kick-off, or at half-time, and will only be given access 15 minutes after full-time. The further one-match ban will only come into play should he further breach Scottish FA rules on making comments about the performance of match officials during games.

Women's Six Nations 2024

England make seven changes for Wales game in Bristol

BRISTOL (Agencies): Megan Jones and Tatyana Heard are among seven changes for England who face Wales in the Women's Six Nations at Bristol's Ashton Gate on Saturday. Leicester's Jones and Gloucester-Hartpury's Heard form a new partnership at centre, while Emily Scarratt and the injured Helena Rowland are out.

Both played in last weekend's 48-0 victory over Italy in Parma.

The Red Roses will play in front of their largest home crowd for a fixture not played at Twickenham. "To have sold 18,000 tickets with two days to go until matchday shows the appetite for Red Roses rugby in this country," said head coach John Mitchell.

Prior to the tournament Mitchell said he would rotate his squad and the 60-year-old remains true to his word. "Tatyana [Heard] can win the gainline and that is one of her big strengths,"

added Mitchell.

"Meg [Jones] is a little dynamo, she is quick, a triple threat and a huge competitor. They've played together before which I think is a good combination." He has also picked a new half-back pairing in Natasha Hunt and Holly Aitchison. Lock Zoe Aldcroft retains her place in the starting XV and will win her 50th cap, while captain Marlie Packer, who made her 100th appearance in Italy, also starts.

Elsewhere in the pack, prop Maud Muir and second row Rosie Galligan start, with Alex Matthews promoted from the bench to number eight.

This comes after Sarah Beckett was given a three-week suspension following her red card against Italy for a dangerous clear-out.

The back three of Jess Breach, Abby Dow and Ellie Kildunne, who scored two tries in Parma, remain unchanged. "Some returning players [against Italy] had

difficult starts, but each of those players will get better and better," Mitchell added. Wales have made six changes after narrowly losing their opening game to Scotland in Cardiff last weekend, with scrum-half Sian Jones making her first start. England are seeking a third successive Grand Slam and a sixth successive Six Nations title.

Line-ups: England: Kildunne; Dow, Jones, Heard, Breach; Aitchison, Hunt; Botterman, Atkin-Davies, Muir, Aldcroft, Galligan, Kabeya, Packer (capt), Matthews.

Replacements: Powell, Carson, Clifford, Ward, Feaunati, Packer, Harrison, Gregson.

Wales: Hesketh; Joyce, Jones, Lake, Cox; George, Jones; Pyrs, Phillips, Rose, Fleming, Evans, Williams, Callender, Lewis.

Replacements: Jones, Constable, Tuipulotu, John, Butchers, Bevan, Powell, Metcalfe.

Victoria Azarenka sets up semi-final with Elena Rybakina, Danielle Collins through

MIAMI (APP): Victoria Azarenka continued her bid for a fourth Miami Open title with victory over Yulia Putintseva to set up a semi-final encounter with Elena Rybakina.

The Belarusian 27th seed, who won her last title at the event in 2016, needed almost three hours to claim a 7-6 (7-4) 1-6 6-3 win against Putintseva.

Fourth seed Rybakina beat Greek eighth seed Maria Sakkari 7-5 6-7 (4-7) 6-4. On the other side of the draw, American Danielle Collins beat French 23rd seed Caroline Garcia 6-3 6-2 on Wednesday.

Former Australian Open runner-up Collins, 30, is planning to retire from the WTA Tour at the end of the season. She is one more win away from reaching her first final since losing to Ashleigh Barty at Melbourne Park in 2022. Collins will face Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova, who backed up her win against world number one Iga Swiatek with a hard-fought victory against fifth seed Jessica Pegula.

Alexandrova, the 14th seed, claimed the decisive break to go 5-4 up in the third set before serving out the victory to reach just her second WTA 1,000 event semi-final.

"This one was incredible," Alexandrova said.

"It was so difficult to play this match to the end and win. It's the



biggest achievement for me on this court and semi-final is a great bonus."

Two-time major champion Azarenka reached the Miami semi-finals for a fifth time after overcoming Putintseva - and a 45-minute stoppage due to a power outage.

The delay in the first set was caused by the power going out on the electronic line-calling system and when the match resumed, 34-year-old Azarenka saved three set points before clinching the tie-break.

Unseeded Kazakh Putintseva dominated the second set, but dropped serve twice in the third to allow Azarenka, who defeated Britain's Katie Boulter in the fourth round, to

reach a first semi-final in Miami since 2018.

Rybakina, who is the highest ranked women's player remaining in the tournament, lost in last year's final to the Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova. The 2022 Wimbledon champion had two match points in the second set on Tuesday but Sakkari fought back and won the tiebreaker to force a decider.

A single break of serve in the third set was enough for Rybakina to wrap up the victory after a gruelling two hours and 48 minutes.

"I have no words because I'm so tired but I'm really happy with the win," Rybakina, 24, said.

Two more matches decided in Inter College Ramadan T-20 Cup

KARACHI (APP): Two more matches decided in the Inter College Ramadan T-20 Cup night matches at various cricket grounds.

Government College 36-B Landhi and Government Jinnah College won their 2nd Matches.

Ahad Ali and Rizwan Khan were declared players of the match. The tournament is being organized by Regional Cricket Association Karachi in collaboration with Pakistan Cricket Board.

Scores in Brief: Government College 36-B Landhi no.4 beat Government College Asifabad by 54 runs in their 2nd match at IBA Karachi

University Ground .Government College 36-B Landhi no.4 125/8 in 20 overs. Sufiyan 44 2x4 3x6, Abdullah 36.Kashan

Farhad 3/13, Abdul Kabeer 2/11. Government College Asifabad 71 all out in 18.1 overs. Uzair Shah 19.

Muhammad Ahad Ali (ob) 4/9, Hasan Ali Khan 2/5, Saif Ullah Khan 2/18. After the end of the Match Chief Guest Former Test Cricketer Azam Khan give the Player of the Match Cash award Rupees Five Thousand to Ahad Ali. Rahat Ali Shah Coordinator, Arif Waheed ,Afzal Qureshi and Aga Sabir also present on the occasion.

In the another Match played at

Eid Gah Ground Government Jinnah College beat Beacon House System by 9 wickets also in their 2nd match. Beacon House System 94 all out in 20 overs. Yafai Ali Khan 17. Ghous Ibrahim 2/11, Abdullah Ashfaq 2/17.

Government Jinnah College 95/1 in 12.1 overs. Rizwan Khan 51 7x4 not out, Syed Kashan Fahim 19 not out. After the end of the match chief guest ex international cricketer Mahmood Hamid gave the player of the match cash award of Rs. 5000 to Rizwan Khan.

On the occasion Coordinator Rahat Ali Shah, Rizwan Qureshi were also present.

Declan Rice: How England midfielder has improved title-chasing Arsenal

LONDON (BBC): When Arsenal spent £100m to sign West Ham midfielder Declan Rice last summer there was a suggestion in some camps that the Gunners had overpaid.

But those voices have quietened as the England international, with some brilliant performances in a more attacking position, has helped fire Arsenal to the top of the table with 10 games to go. Maybe his biggest test yet will come on Sunday when they visit title rivals Manchester City, who also tried to sign Rice last summer and had a bid of £90m rejected.

The Gunners may be top of the Premier League - but they were in the same position after 28 games last season and fell away - so will Rice help them get over the line? Arsenal, Liverpool and City are only separated by a point in a gripping three-way title tussle.

There have been two areas where Arsenal's personnel have changed this



season compared to last term - in goal, with David Raya replacing Aaron Ramsdale, and in midfield. Last season Arsenal's most common midfield trio was captain Martin Odegaard, Granit Xhaka and Thomas Partey. Rice and fellow summer signing Kai Havertz, a £65m recruit from Chelsea, are the most frequent central midfield combo with Odegaard this time.

Rice has started every

Premier League game since his move, with only centre-back William Saliba playing more minutes in the league than he has for the Gunners. The England international has the third best passing accuracy for midfielders in the league for teams currently in the top six of the table (including players with 1,000 or more minutes).

His 91% passing rate is

only behind Tottenham's Yves Bissouma and Manchester City's Rodri (92% each).

Current boss Mikel Arteta is the only Gunners midfielder to have a higher passing accuracy in a Premier League season (of players to play in at least 50% of the minutes).

Of central midfielders in the league to have played 1,000 or more minutes, only Rodri (14.2) has carried the ball more than five metres upfield more times than Rice (10.4) per 90 minutes. Arsenal are creating more chances and scoring more goals and conceding fewer chances and goals per game than last season. However, at this stage last season - after 28 games - Arsenal were on 69 points, eight points clear of City at the top, compared to 64 this season - above Liverpool on goal difference. Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher, in his Telegraph column earlier this month, said Rice has proved to be a "bargain".

Sandro Tonali charged by FA for alleged betting rules breaches after joining Newcastle

LONDON (BBC): Newcastle United midfielder Sandro Tonali has been charged with misconduct by the Football Association for alleged breaches of betting rules.

The 23-year-old is currently serving a 10-month ban issued by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) in October for breaking betting rules in Italy.

Tonali joined Newcastle from AC Milan in July for £55m. The FA alleges Tonali broke its rules by placing 50 bets on matches between 12 August and 12 October 2023. Tonali was banned by the FIGC for betting on matches involving his teams Brescia and Milan, and Fifa later granted the Italian federation's request to have the ban extended worldwide.

The FA charges relate to separate allegations during Tonali's time as a Newcastle player.

"Newcastle United acknowledges a misconduct charge received by Sandro Tonali in respect of alleged breaches of FA Betting Rules," the club said on Thursday.

"Sandro continues to fully comply with relevant investigations and he retains the club's full support." His current ban means Tonali is not eligible to play again until August and will not feature at Euro 2024. The Italy international, who was fined 20,000 euros (£17,380), was initially given an 18-month ban which was reduced after he agreed to take part in an eight-month "therapeutic plan" to help "recovery from gambling addiction".

That will include Tonali making at least 16 public appearances in Italy, where he will be expected to speak to young players about the dangers of gambling. Although he is



unable to play in any matches, Tonali can train alongside his Newcastle team-mates during his ban.

Tonali, who has until 5 April to respond to the FA's charges, had only made 12 appearances for Eddie Howe's side before his suspension was imposed.

Last year Brentford striker Ivan Toney was given an eight-month for 232 breaches of the FA's betting rules. He returned

in January. Former England and Arsenal midfielder Paul Merson, who says he was a "compulsive gambler" during his career, called Tonali and Toney's bans a "disgrace".

"To give people 10-month bans for an addiction that is ravaging football, with sponsorships all over the shirts... They needed help and I don't think 'help' is giving them 10-month bans," he said.



In brief

ANF recovers 20 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in its ongoing operation against drug traffickers conducted raids across the country and managed to recover 20 kg drugs, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that more than 20 kg drugs were recovered in 12 operations and seven accused were arrested. 755 grams weed was recovered from 6 parcels at Rawalpindi Courier Office. 740 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a Bangladeshi citizen, going to Dhaka at Karachi Airport. 12 kg Ice was recovered from three suspects netted in two different areas of Quetta. 4.5 kg opium was recovered from an accused arrested in Jamshoro Hyderabad. 2 kg Ice was recovered from an accused rounded up in Sakhi Sarwar Road, Dera Ghazi Khan. 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused arrested in Faisalabad. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

Police bust dacoit gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a dacoit gang by arresting three of its active members allegedly involved in dacoities and other crimes and seized a snatched Mehran car, six stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Morgah police managed to bust a dacoit gang and arrested three members of 'Shaka' gang namely Bilal, Zohaib and Zahid. He informed that police recovered a stolen car, six motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. The spokesman said that the arrested accused were being shifted to jail for identification parade, adding, police were trying to arrest other members of the gangs. Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nisar Nawaz directed police teams to accelerate operations against gangs and other law-breakers, he added.

32 drug peddlers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other law-breakers here on Thursday arrested 32 accused besides recovering drugs, liquor, kites, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Taxila police netted two thieves namely Waris and Bahadar Ali and recovered cash Rs 12,000, stolen AC and other items. Taxila police in their police managed to net four gamblers namely Mazhar, Muhammad Abbas, Qamar Shehzad and Arshad and recovered Rs 23,660, six mobile phones and other items from their possession. Sadiqabad police netted two proclaimed offenders identified as Robin and Mohsin Raza wanted in two different cases. Kalar Syedan and Naseerabad police arrested four, namely Nisar, Habib, Sajid and Ilyas for operating illegal LPG and petrol agencies. The spokesman further informed that Rattaamral, Westridge, Naseerabad, R.A.Bazar and Saddar Wah police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and arrested six kite flying ban violators. Police also recovered 240 kites and kite flying string rolls from their possession. New Town, City, Rattaamral, Sadiqabad, Chakri, and Kahuta police rounded up nine accused and recovered over 4.5 kg charras.



ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Albert Khorev, engages in discussions with Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, aiming to enhance trade connectivity and tap into the true potential of bilateral trade.

Victory at Ghazwa-e-Badr Muslims triumph over overwhelming odds on 17th Ramazan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Muslims, in a historic display of faith and resilience, commemorated the decisive Battle of Badr on the 17th of Ramazan, marking a pivotal moment in Islamic history.

Occurring in the 2nd Hijri, on Friday, this battle symbolizes the unwavering commitment of 313 companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) towards their faith. Among the companions, 60 were immigrants (Muhajirin) who had left their homes and belongings behind to follow the Prophet Peace Be Upon Him, while the rest were

native residents (Ansar) of Medina. Despite being vastly outnumbered and under-equipped, their resolve remained unshaken.

During the battle, 14 Muslims, including 6 immigrants and 8 locals, sacrificed their lives defending the nascent Muslim community. However, their valor was not in vain as 70 non-Muslim adversaries fell, despite their superior numbers and weaponry. Remarkably, the Muslim forces faced staggering odds with only 2 horses, 70 camels, 6 protective shields, and 8 swords at their disposal. Yet, their unwavering faith in the

Almighty propelled them forward.

In a divine intervention that believers attribute to Allah's mercy, victory ultimately favored the Muslims. This triumph not only secured the survival of the Muslim community but also marked a turning point in the spread of Islam. The Battle of Badr stands as a testament to the power of faith, unity, and divine intervention. Muslims worldwide commemorate this event annually, drawing inspiration from the courage and conviction of those who stood firm in the face of adversity, ensuring the continued existence and propagation of Islam.

Mustafa expressed dismay over negligence to cleanliness of Parliament lodges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Speaker National Assembly Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah has stressed to ensure austerity and quality during the maintenance of Parliament lodges and hostel of Members of the National Assembly (MNAs).

Ghulam Mustafa also said that every possible

measure should be ensured to utilize the public money keeping in view the long term utility and durability.

He expressed these views during his meeting with senior officers of the Capital Development Authority (CDA).

He also expressed his dismay over the negligence of cleanliness and

poor quality maintenance in Parliament Lodges and MNAs hostel.

While taking notice of the issues of allotments Ghulam Mustafa directed to prepare a uniform and smooth policy for smooth allotments and maintenance of Parliament Lodges.

He also said that ensuring the same parameters

in maintaining Parliament lodges would save the public money.

Mustafa Shah directed CDA to follow quality standards in terms of durability and best use of public money.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of the CDA and National Assembly Secretariat.

ICT admin intensifies efforts against social evils, inspects 648 areas, arrests 29

ISLAMABAD (APP): All magistrates have launched rigorous campaign targeting inflation, illegal occupation and panhandling across the Federal Capital's bustling markets and arrested 29 accused during the inspections of 648 areas while imposing a fine of Rs 84,000 to violators.

Talking to APP here Thursday, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said this proactive approach aimed at to ensure fair pricing, maintain public spaces, and curb the nuisance of professional beggars during the holy month of Ramazan and beyond.

During the inspections of all three Ramazan

bazaars, which were set up by the district administration, magistrates accompanied by the district administration teams, apprehended thirteen individuals for flouting price regulations, while a fine of Rs 84,000 was also imposed to the violators. Similarly, district administration teams intensified efforts against alms-seeking and arrested 14 professional beggars from different areas of the city and handed over to different police stations, he said. Furthermore, anti-encroachment operation were also conducted in the Federal Capital and cleared illegal encroachments from different paths, roads and markets,

he added.

Additionally, stringent measures were taken to regulate petrol stations, leading to the closure of two illegal filling agencies and the arrest of two individuals involved in malpractice.

The spokesman emphasized the paramount importance of ensuring the consistent availability of essential commodities at government-mandated rates. This multi-faceted operation underscored a sustained commitment to upholding public welfare and civic order, with daily efforts underway to tackle inflation, illegal occupation, and begging across Islamabad's bustling landscape, he added.

CWAs to boost overseas employment opportunities for Pakistanis abroad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) has given the task to the Community Welfare Attaches (CWAs) stationed abroad to strategically enhance job opportunities for Pakistanis in the international market.

An official source told APP here on Thursday that currently, there were 21 CWAs posted abroad by the Government of Pakistan.

The main aim of this task was to evaluate and improve the progress of CWAs in identifying and exploring targeted demand for employment prospects for Pakistani nationals through engagements with foreign employers.

This involved the formulation, signing, and execution of Letters of Intent (LOIs) and agreements with foreign companies, critical in amplifying the export of Pakistani manpower.

It has emphasized the crucial need for close collaboration between CWAs and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, particularly in sharing information related to employment demands abroad and the nec-

essary skills required for those jobs. This step will facilitate the design of training programs specifically tailored to the skills demanded by foreign companies, ensuring that Pakistani workers are well-equipped and aligned with global standards.

While underscoring the significance of this initiative, highlighted its dual impact, not only in enhancing employment opportunities for Pakistanis abroad but also in contributing to the economic growth of the nation. Furthermore, he stressed the essential role of CWAs in catering to the needs and resolving issues faced by overseas Pakistanis during their stay abroad.

This comprehensive approach is designed to ensure the well-being and seamless integration of Pakistani expatriates in their respective host countries.

The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development reiterates its commitment to spearheading initiatives that fortify global employment prospects for Pakistanis. This strategic meeting signifies a significant stride towards realizing this vision and underscores the Ministry's dedication to the welfare and prosperity of overseas Pakistanis.

Govt. taking every possible step to increase IT exports, FDI: Shaza

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Thursday said that the present government was diligently pursuing measures to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and boost IT exports.

During a discussion with a high-level delegation from the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), led by its Chairman, Muhammad Zohaib Khan, Shaza Fatima highlighted the critical role of the IT industry, particularly in providing international-level training to youth and creating employment opportunities for them.

The Chairman P@SHA extended congratulations to Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima Khawaja for assuming the office.

The minister said that Pakistan's IT professionals can serve as the premier choice for international companies and urged P@SHA to assist in bridging the demand-supply gap of IT professionals. Zohaib Khan reaffirmed P@SHA's commitment to collaborating with the Ministry of IT for the economic stability of the country.

He commended Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima, for her dedicated efforts in promoting the IT industry.

Digital transformation can lead country towards progress: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, and GSMA country lead for Digital Transformation, Saira Faisal on Thursday discussed matters pertinent to digital transformation, innovation, and the startup ecosystem.

During the meeting, Saira Faisal extended congratulations to Minister of State Shaza Fatima for assuming charge of the Ministry, said a news release.

Saira Faisal provided an overview of GSMA's operations, upcoming programs, and their coordination with the Ministry of IT to Minister Shaza Fatima.

State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja highlighted the ongoing digitalization efforts in Pakistan, and said that digital transformation is crucial for the country's progress.

Meanwhile, Umair Nizam, Group Vice President of E-commerce Gateway Pakistan (Pvt) Ltd, also met with Minister Shaza Fatima.

Nizam briefed her about the forthcoming tech event, the 24th ITCN Asia 2024, during the meeting.

All-out efforts being made to control kite flying: CPO

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani has said that Rawalpindi district police were making all-out efforts to control kite flying. He informed that over 1000 kite flying ban violators were sent behind the bars this year.

The ongoing crackdown against kite flying and aerial firing would be accelerated as per the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, the CPO said.

Police spokesman said that over 80,000 kites and more than 1400 string rolls were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused.

This year, 21 suspects allegedly involved in aerial firing were also arrested and weapons were recovered

from their possession. Under the supervision of the senior officers, safety wires were being installed on motorcycles to avoid the damage of kite flying and strings, he said adding, senior officers were also giving awareness lectures to students in schools and colleges to discourage kite flying. Police were taking actions against those who sell kites online, he informed.

Senior police officers were personally monitoring the ongoing crackdown on kite flying and aerial firing. Rawalpindi district police were taking action in accordance with the law against Kite flyers and sellers on the directives of Chief Minister Punjab, he added.

NHA mobilizes efforts to clear landslide

ISLAMABAD (APP): The spokesperson for the National Highway Authority (NHA) announced on Thursday that the Zhob-Dhanasar section of Dera Ismail Khan- Quetta Highway (N- 50) was currently blocked for all traffic which was affected after landslides at Dhanasar. According to a private news channel, the spokesperson stated that NHA teams have been deployed to the site to clear the road and repair the damaged section. However, it was estimated to take approximately 72 hours to make the road accessible for all traffic. Given the situation, the district administrations of Killa Saifullah, Zhob, and Sherani have been urged to divert traffic to an alternate route via Killa Saifullah - Loralai - DG Khan N-70.

Constitution of Pakistan upholds principle of equality prohibiting gender discrimination: Ombudsman

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has said that the Constitution of Pakistan upheld the principle of equality and dignity along with explicitly prohibiting gender discrimination in all spheres of national life.

This he said while inaugurating a 'Webinar on Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace', organized under the aegis of Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) here, said a press release issued Thursday.

The webinar was attended by the members of the AOA besides the human rights practitioners and activists in addition to the members of the OIC Ombudsman Association (OICOA) and the Forum of Pakistan's Ombudsman (FPO).

He said that the Parliament adopted an Act for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace in 2010 with a view to implementing the relevant provisions in the Constitution and ensuring equal opportunity for men and women and the right to earn a livelihood without fear or any discrimination.

Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, who is also

the current President of the 47-member strong Asian Ombudsman Association further stated that the enactment of the relevant law against harassment in 2010 was followed by two more Acts of the Parliament in 2020 and 2022 respectively, expanding the scope of its legal provision to include men, women and transgenders alike. Enforcement of the Women's Property Rights was also brought within the purview of these legislative provisions, he added. He said that the Webinar is intended to share Pakistan's experiences, best practices and the exchange of information with a view to promoting gender equality and the right to work with dignity for all. Later Ms. Fauzia Viqar, Federal Ombudsperson Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (FOSPAH) also made a presentation on the scope of work and operational framework of the FOSPAH, which was established in 2011. She said that FOSPAH was playing a vital role in upholding the constitutional provision of equality and dignity alongwith striving to create an environment free of harassment and discrimination. She further added that

Pakistan has the distinction as being the only country with a dedicated Ombudsperson Institution to deal with the challenges of women empowerment and denial of rights, thereby emphasizing the need for support to over 49 percent of the population. The presentation was followed by a lively Q/A session, wherein international participants asked searching questions about Pakistan's experiences in these fields and requested for sharing of best practices to move forward.

Organized in the backdrop of the International Women's Day, the webinar held special significance for the member states as these are striving to overcome identical challenges particularly with regard to women empowerment and protection. So far, the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat has received nearly 75 confirmations to attend the Webinar online. The nominations received from the AOA members included, the People's Republic of China, Thailand, Japan, Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Korea, Türkiye and Indonesia, apart from the Provincial Ombudsmen in Pakistan and representatives from the regional offices of the Wafaqi Mohtasib.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja in a meeting with delegation of Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA).

Earthquake jolts Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): An earthquake measuring a magnitude of 5.2 on the Richter Scale jolted Afghanistan on Thursday afternoon, the National Center for Seismology reported. The quake was at a depth of 70km and epicentered in the mountainous north-eastern area of Ashkasham. The jolt was felt across the region including in Kabul, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. There were no immediate reports of any casualties.

CEO satisfied with progress

KABUL (Ariana News): The minister of mines and petroleum, Shahabuddin Delawar met with the executive director of the TAPI project and the ambassador of Turkmenistan in Kabul on Thursday to discuss progress around the key project. Murad Amanov, head of the TAPI Gas Pipeline project, expressed his satisfaction with the recent progress of the project and talked about the practical roll out of the project.

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

IEA denies ISIS-K leader’s presence

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Emirate says that Sanaullah Ghafari, the leader of ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan, is not present and the territory of this country is not being used against any country. The attacks by Daesh in the past two weeks in Afghanistan and some other countries have raised concerns in the region and the world. Following Daesh attacks in Kandahar and Moscow, Russia, Reuters reported, quoting two sources among Afghan and foreign Taliban, that it was initially reported that Ghafari was killed in Afghanistan in June 2023, but he fled to neighbor country while injured and is believed to be residing in parts of Balochistan. “Two sources among the Afghan and foreign Taliban told Reuters that it was initially reported that Ghafari was killed in Afghanistan in June of the last year, but he fled across the border to foreign country while injured and is believed to be living in the border province of Balochistan,” Reads part of the Reuters report. “The regional and beyond regional intelligence are behind attacks in Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Russian,” said Muhammad Matin Muhammad Khail, a political analyst. On the other hand, the Ministry of Interior denies the presence of the ISIS-Khorasan leader in Afghanistan and says that the soil of Afghanistan will not be used against any country. “We reject this claim, and it is not true that an individual named Sanaullah living in Afghanistan,” said Abdul Matin Qane, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior. Previously, some United States officials such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Senator Lindsey Graham had spoken about Daesh activities in Afghanistan and emphasized its suppression in the country, a matter that the Islamic Emirate called an exaggeration of the group by America.

Universities still closed to girls after 450 days



KABUL (TOLONews): More than 450 days have passed, yet there is still no news of universities reopening for girls. Some female students said that they are nearly fifteen months behind in their studies and request the Islamic Emirate to reopen universities for them this year. Khadijah, a student, said, “If girls are educated

and literate, it means the whole family is literate. If girls are uneducated and illiterate, it means the entire family is uneducated and illiterate.” Another student, Narow, said, “Our request is that they please open the doors of schools and universities to girls so they can study and we can have a strong and advanced society.” Some university professors also believe that the continued closure of university to girls will cause the country to fall behind. Zakiullah Mohammadi, a university professor, said, “When we want to govern as a ruling government and as a responsible government in society, we must grant all our citizens their basic rights.” Former President Hamid Karzai, in a meeting with the Norwegian chargé d’affaires, also regarded the reopening of schools and universities for girls as a necessity. The Islamic Emirate has said nothing new about reopening schools and universities for girls; however, it has previously stated that the caretaker government has not denied girls’ right to education. After the Islamic Emirate’s return to power, the gates of schools were closed to girls above the sixth grade, and more than a year later, the gates of universities were also closed to female students.

Public library opens in Paktia

PAKTIA (TOLONews): A public library has been inaugurated by the Directorate of Information and Culture in Paktia province. The Directorate of Information and Culture in Paktia states that the library contains thousands of books and aims to foster a culture of reading among the residents, especially the youth of the province. Sawab Jan Islamyar, the Head of Information and Culture in Paktia, mentioned that active libraries currently exist in the districts of Zormat, Samkani, and Sayed Karam within the province, and efforts are underway to expand the number of libraries in other areas. Islamyar stated, “Our future plan is to include religious, Islamic, and

intellectual books in this library. Similarly, we aim to have books in various fields of modern sciences.” Inamullah Salahuddin, the Deputy Governor of Paktia, said, “In the future, we plan to bring religious, intellectual, and various other types of books to the libraries.” Residents of Paktia note that the culture of reading has diminished in recent



Ministry claims polio eradication in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): With concerns rising over the spread of infectious diseases and viruses in Afghanistan, the Taliban government officials have claimed that they have eradicated polio in the country. Abdul Salam Hanafi, the administrative deputy of the Acting Prime Minister’s office, asserted in a virtual meeting with the head of the World Health Organization that polio has been eradicated in Afghanistan. He made this claim despite several positive cases of polio being recorded in the past year. The latest confirmed polio case approved by health officials in Nangarhar province was the fifth recorded case of the disease in the last solar year, confirmed by Dr. Nik Mohammad, the head of the polio eradication campaign in Nangarhar in October 2023. This comes as, in the 1401 solar year, only one positive case of polio was reported in Afghanistan. The increase in positive disease cases in 1402 has heightened concerns about ineffective strategies to overcome polio. The official virtual session between the regional health organization representatives, Qalandar Ebad, the acting Minister of Public Health of the Taliban, and Abdul Salam Hanafi, was announced on the ministry website on Wednesday, March 27th. In the announcement, it was claimed, “Following repeated vaccinations by technical teams, childhood paralysis has been eradicated from all parts of Afghanistan.” Polio is an acute viral disease caused by the poliovirus, which typically affects the person’s gastrointestinal system and rarely attacks the central nervous system. It’s worth noting that in addition to polio, there has been a recurring increase in positive cases of other infectious and viral diseases, including tuberculosis, in recent years.

years and request the authorities to establish public libraries in the more remote areas of the province. A number of educated people and writers are pleased with the opening of this library; however, they emphasize the importance of enriching its collection. Khozhman Zazai, a poet and writer from Paktia, said, “Books are very essential in life. One can progress, and if one wants to have a happy and advanced life, one should turn to books.” Mohammad Qasem, a resident of Paktia, expressed, “Our request from the government is to create such libraries in the future for students in remote districts who have the desire to study.” According to information from the Directorate of Information and Culture in Paktia, the foundation stone of this library was laid in the solar year 1345 (solar year), but it was destroyed and has now been reopened with a new building and an increased number of books.

Over 12,000 individuals arrested in last six months

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Interior reports that more than 12,000 individuals have been arrested in connection with criminal activities in the past six months of last solar year (1402). The spokesperson for the ministry, while sharing the six-month achievement report with media, stated that these individuals were involved in nearly 9,000 criminal events across the country, during which some light and heavy weaponry and explosives were also seized. “Police have arrested 12,540 suspected individuals and 733 other have escaped which are searched for by police,” said Abdul Matin Qane, the spokesperson for interior ministry. According to Qane, during the six months, more than twenty of them were killed or wounded, and more than one hundred and seventy kidnappers have been arrested. He said that eighteen kidnapped individuals were also freed from the kidnappers. Qane added that in the



fight against corruption, eight hundred individuals have been arrested by the internal intelligence of this ministry, most of whom were military personnel. “As a result of police operations on kidnappers, 21 kidnappers have been killed and three other wounded. 19 cases of kidnapping have been recorded in the past six months which demonstrates decline compared to past,” he added.

The spokesperson further added that nearly 19,000 security forces have received professional trainings in the last six months, and nearly 30,000 are currently undergoing training in various institutions related to the Ministry of Interior. He also emphasizes that more than 170 women have also obtained their graduation certificates from the capacity building program. “1,671 police officers

among them 171 women have been graduated from the police command of higher education after completing capacity building programs,” Qane said. The Ministry of Interior affairs also reports that in the last six months of the year 1402, more than 13 billion Afghanis have been collected in revenues from traffic services, passport services, the National Public Protection Force, and other sectors.

Working women in Ghazni amid restrictive policies

GHAZNI (Khaama Press): Women have always faced challenges in the realm of work and economic activities. Despite significant efforts to enter major financial sectors in traditional societies like Afghanistan, they are usually confined to sectors like tailoring, embroidery, and other

handicrafts. In this report, you will read about the situation of women entrepreneurs in Ghazni province who, despite challenges, continue their economic activities. Some female entrepreneurs in Ghazni province say recent political changes have impacted their businesses, with some even experiencing closures of their workplaces. Working women also report being deprived of job opportunities, despite many

being the sole breadwinners for their families, lamenting the lack of attention from the Taliban administration to improve this situation. Nilab Nadim, one of the established women in Ghazni province, told Khaama Press that before the arrival of the Taliban, she managed a women’s beauty salon and made a living from it, but after beauty salons were banned, she faced severe economic hardships.

According to her, many of her colleagues have left Afghanistan and transferred their capital abroad after recent events. Nilab now buys and sells beauty products online, but the income is minimal, and she struggles to provide for her family’s needs. Observers believe that the prohibition of women’s work and the imposition of restrictions on women and girls have dealt an irreparable blow to Afghanistan’s economy.

949 killed in 6 months in road incidents

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Interior of the Taliban administration recently announced in a press conference that in the past six months, 949 people have lost their lives due to traffic accidents across the country. Abdul Matin Qaneh, spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, stated in a press conference in Kabul on Thursday, March 28th, that 1978 traffic incidents have been recorded in the country over the past six months. The ministry’s spokesperson added that as a result of these traffic incidents across the country, 949 individuals lost their lives. This comes as the Taliban administration cabinet recently instructed relevant departments in its latest session to prepare a plan to prevent traffic incidents in the country. In this session, the Taliban cabinet tasked the Ministry of Interior to coordinate with the Supreme Court and the Ministries of Transportation, Civil Aviation, and Public Benefits to prepare a plan and necessary traffic measures to determine the speed limits of vehicles on highways, in collaboration with the Prime Minister’s Office. Traffic incidents are considered one of the main causes of death in Afghanistan, with at least one or several incidents being recorded daily in various parts of the country.

‘Qosh Tapa’ tournament to be held in Kandahar



KANDAHAR CITY (TOLONews): Officials at the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said on Thursday in a press conference that the T20 cricket cup named “Qosh Tapa” is scheduled to begin on the 16th of April this year, hosted by Kandahar. This cup is organized to elevate the level of players’ experience and prepare them more extensively for international competitions. Teams such as Spin Ghar, Band-e-Amir, Boost, Amu, and Mes Aynak will compete in this tournament. “One of the reasons for

holding this tournament is that many people thought there was a gap between the national players and the domestic players, and secondly, it starts to prepare the national team players more for participation in this year’s World Cup matches,” Nazeem Jar Abdul Rahimzai, a domestic cricket official, said about the tournament. The cricket board selection committee officials also said that top players will also be selected at the end of these matches. “At the end of these matches, top players will be

identified and selected for this year’s World Cup matches,” said Ahmad Shah Sulimankhil, the acting chief selector of the cricket board. “National team players are divided equally into five teams, and the balance of the teams has been considered,” said Mir Mobariz, a member of the cricket board selection committee. The participating teams will compete in a league format in this tournament, where each team plays eight games against each other.

Mother of five pursues lifelong dream of literacy in Kabul outskirts

KABUL (Khaama Press): Farzana, a 48-year-old woman living on the outskirts of Kabul, pursues her lifelong wish by going to the literacy center, where she hopes to learn reading and writing. Farzana wants to read and write. She hasn’t forgotten this lifelong wish, and even now, as a mother of five children, she eagerly walks the path from her home to the literacy center every day. According to Farzana, humans need to read and write until the end of their lives, which are now considered basic and essential skills for everyone, and there is no age-based criterion for learning. In her

opinion, only opportunity may deprive someone of the chance to learn or circumstances, but neither has anything to do with age. However, she has sometimes fallen victim to circumstances, and sometimes the lack of sufficient opportunity has deprived her of learning. According to her, the family circumstances and mindset prevalent in her family consider learning a “shame”: “In the area where we lived (the first district of the Kapisa province), even my uncles and their sons were illiterate due to opposition to education.” When Farzana was young, she attended school with her sister Madina, the

only local school that allowed girls to attend. But going to school also had challenges, from convincing family members to enduring the unusual behaviors of the local people. Farzana and Madina were not alone on this journey. With the help of her brother, they attended school for a while, where the dream of learning flourished within these two sisters. This dream now compels Farzana to disregard the prohibition on educating girls and women and eagerly walk the path from her home to the literacy center daily. Farzana’s older sister managed to study until the

seventh grade. She learned the skills of reading and writing, but she fell behind after the third grade. These two sisters studied at the Eshtergram Girls’ High School, where, until 1979, only boys were allowed to attend. She says, “I remember I was in the third grade when they set fire to the school I attended and shot the school principal. Our school principal was named Mastura Kohistani, and I still remember that after her death, other girls and I personally did not dare to go to school and continue our education.” What Farzana recalls dates back to 1979 when a

woman named “Mastura Kohistani” was serving as the principal of the Eshtergram Girls’ High School. The school was set on fire by unknown individuals in the same year, and Mastura was also murdered. In addition to the family and social constraints that limited Farzana’s education, there were also political circumstances. According to her, her mother became a victim of political upheavals during the rule of Babrak Karmal and, as a result of the former Soviet bombings, lost her life. Following this event, Farzana was forced into marriage, resulting in five children. Many years have passed

since then, and the circumstances of the family and the new family situation required Farzana to raise her children and care for their health. However, this long hiatus hasn’t deterred her from her dream of learning: “Some people think that our time for learning has passed, but that’s not true. Learning has no specific time. Knowledge has no specific time. I found the opportunity and enrolled myself in the nearest literacy course.” She is currently studying in a class primarily consisting of children. Initially, it was challenging for her, but now that her reading and writing skills are improving

daily, it doesn’t matter much to her whether she studies with children or adults. She only sees the end goal of learning, where, according to her, she can pick up a book and read it without any difficulty. Negin, Farzana’s instructor at the literacy center, said in a phone conversation with Khaama Press, “I have had many students, but Mrs. Farzana, despite being older, makes a lot of effort for her education and acquisition of knowledge, and no one can understand this better than me. It’s delightful here that her efforts have yielded very good results.” She says, “Every morn-



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms Jane Marriott, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

ECP likely to ‘postpone’ Senate election in KP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a seven-page verdict issued on Thursday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has signalled to postpone Senate election — which is scheduled to be held on April 2 — in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amid ongoing issue regarding oath-taking of the lawmakers on reserved seats in the province.

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) on Thursday issued the seven-page verdict on application regarding issuance of orders for administering of oaths to the lawmakers and suspension of the Senate poll till the administration of oaths to the extent of KP province.

Right to vote is a fundamental right and no voter cannot be deprived of this fundamental right, read the verdict, adding that the commission has ample power to issue such directions and make such consequential orders to ensure that election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law.

“Therefore, in case of non compliance of directions and order issued under Article 218(3) read with Section 4(1) and Section 8(c) of the Act, the Commission may in addition to any other action may extend the time for completion of the Senate election to the extent of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa till the administration of oath to members of the Provincial Assembly against the including the applicants,” it added. Earlier, opposition parties

Balochistan’s 7 senators return unopposed on general seats

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Seven Senate candidates from Balochistan on general seats returned unopposed after retirement of 8th candidate, officials said on Thursday.

A Senate candidate on general seats Aijaz Ahmed retired thus seven candidates returned uncontested, provincial election commissioner has said. Former caretaker prime minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar has been elected unopposed on Senate as an Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam’s Ahmed Khan and ANP’s Aimal Wali Khan, National Party’s Jan Buledi, People’s Party’s Umar Gorgej, PML-N’s Shahzeb Durrani and Syedal Khan Nasir have also been elected unopposed as members of the Senate. Now the elections will only be held on five seats from Balochistan including two technocrat seats, two women-reserved seats and one minority seat. It is to be mentioned here that seven candidates for Senate’s general seats from Punjab have also been elected unopposed on Wednesday.

PML-N’s Ahad Cheema, Pervaiz Rashid, Nasir Mehmood, Talal Chaudhry, and Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi of the ruling coalition were elected unopposed. Sunni Ittehad Council’s Hamid Khan and Raja Nasir Abbas were also elected on the Senate’s general seats. Senate candidates Waleed Iqbal, Shahzad Waseem, Ejaz Hussain Minhas, Musadik Masood Malik and Omar Sarfraz Cheema had withdrawn their nomination papers for the election. The polling for Senate elections on vacant seats of the house will be held on April 02 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm in the National Assembly and four provincial legislatures.

in the KP Assembly moved the Peshawar High Court (PHC) seeking the court’s intervention on the issue of oath-taking of members on the reserved seats.

The petition, filed by members of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), urges the court to see that the members elected on the reserved seats are sworn in to be able to cast their votes in the upcoming Senate elections. “Failure to administer the oath to

members elected on the KP reserved reflects ‘mal-intent’,” the plea reads further praying the court to postpone the Senate polls if the elected members are not sworn in.

The development comes as the issue of oath-taking of members on the reserved seats is facing uncertainty owing to the deadlock between the KP government and opposition parties, wherein the former has objected to the KP governor’s decision to summon the assembly session upon the opposition’s request.

Pakistan seeks stronger economic ties with Britain

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari during a meeting with British High Commissioner Jane Marriott on Thursday emphasized the importance of strengthening trade and economic ties between the two nations. He highlighted creating employment opportunities and eradicating poverty as key priorities for Pakistan.

While acknowledging the cordial relations bolstered by high-level interactions and people-to-people ties, President Zardari stressed the need to focus on economic development. He pointed out the challenges of climate change, with Pakistan being particularly vulnerable, but also highlighted the country’s significant solar and wind energy potential that could contribute to addressing energy needs.

The meeting concluded with an exchange of pleasantries. President Zardari expressed good wishes for King Charles III and Princess Catherine, while High Commissioner Marriott offered congratulations on his assumption of the presidency.

Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari has called for focusing on the development of the Gems and Jewellery sector of the country, saying that exporting value-added products can help Pakistan earn valuable foreign exchange.

He also urged the need for better marketing and projection of gemstone products from Pakistan to tap into the global gem and jewellery market. The President expressed these views during a meeting regarding the development of the Gems and Jewellery sector in Pakistan, here at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Thursday.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Pakistan Gems and Jewellery Development Company (PGJDC), Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhry, and senior government officials attended the meeting. The CEO of PGJDC apprised the meeting about the strategic plan for the development of the Gems and Jewellery sector, besides highlighting various challenges and opportunities in this regard.

Speaking on the occasion, the President said that Pakistan’s Gems and Jewellery sector had huge potential which needed to be fully exploited for the country’s development. He underlined the need to encourage foreign companies to invest in this sector which would not only help improve the country’s economy but would also open up opportunities for the local population through employment generation.

May 9 case: SC allows mily courts to pronounce reserved verdicts

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday authorised military courts to pronounce reserved verdicts of those May 9 violence cases in which the accused could be released before the Eid-ul-Fitr.

The apex court’s orders came after the Attorney General for Pakistan, Mansoor Usman Awan, requested permission to pronounce the reserved verdicts during the hearing of the intra-court appeals filed against its decision declaring the military trial of civilians “null and void”.

Towards the end of the hearing on Thursday, the court said that the AGP has assured that statutory concessions would be granted to those with lesser sentences, while permission to pronounce judgment shall be subject to a final decision on appeals. The court also directed the AGP to submit an

implementation report regarding the case to the registrar as well as sought details of those who were sentenced to less than three years.

It then adjourned the hearing till the fourth week of April. During the hearing of the case, Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar addressed the AGP and said: “Try to release them three to four days before Eid.” “Yes, we will try,” Awan said, responding to the SC judge.

Faisal Siddiqui, a lawyer representing one of the clients challenging military trial feared the released could get arrested again under the 3 MPO after coming out. The AGP said 20 people could be released before Eid. “There are three steps to be followed for the release of 20 persons.” The first step, he stated, was to pronounce the reserved judgement; the second to confirm it; and the third step would be to grant leniency to

those with lesser sentences by the chief of army staff.

He added that the acquitted and those with reduced sentences would be released with concessions. “A total of 105 accused are in the custody of the army,” the AGP told the court, requesting permission for pronouncement of reserved verdicts. “Even if permission is granted, it will be subject to the final decision of the appeals,” Justice Aminuddin Khan remarked.

Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi asked the AGP to name the accused who are to be released. The AGP responded saying that he couldn’t say the names until the verdict came from the military courts. “Those whose punishment is one year will be given a discount,” Awan said. Meanwhile, one of the petitioners and senior lawyer, Aitzaz Ahsan shared his disappointment upon hearing the AGP.

Enlisting of PTI leaders in ECL PHC orders Federal govt and FIA to submit reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered federal government, Federal Investigation Agency along with other respondents for submission of reply in plea against enlisting of nine PTI leaders including provincial minister Fazal Shakoore in Exit Control List, on Thursday.

Provincial Minister Fazal Shakoore, Arif Ahmadzai, Khalid Khan, Fazal Muhammad Khan, Atif Khan, Shahram Tarakai, Arbab Jahan Dad, Idress Khattak, Anwar Taj, Muhammad Ali Tarakai, Irshad Ahmad advocate, Asad Durrani Advocate and Director Legal FIA Abdur Rehman Afridi appeared before PHC during hearing.

The counsel argued that the petitioners are going for performing Umrah but can’t leave the country as they are enlisted in ECL or Stop list by federal government.

Justice SM Attique Shah observed that are they all going for Umrah and added remarked that it looks like the petitioners would create videos during the performance of Umrah to portray that it is done for one particular person/ politician (Imran Khan who is kept behind bars for corrupt practices).

In the meantime, Justice Shakeel Ahmad remarked that the petitioners should also brought Asad Qaiser aboard because he is also interested in performing Umrah. However, Director Legal FIA Abdur Rehman Afridi informed that petitioners are enlisted in ECL on recommendation of concerned District Police Officers as PTI leaders are nominated in different offenses.

Price hike of edible items: Court orders to submit progress report till April 3

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A two members bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprised Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Sahibzada ordered submission of progress report of actions against illegal profiteers till 3rd April, on Thursday.

The counsel Abbas Sangeen advocate, Special Secretary Home Zubair, Additional Advocate General Rauf Afridi, Secretary Food Zareef-ul-Mani and Food Authority officials appeared before PHC. The provincial government has provided free hand to hoarders and illegal profiteers for looting public in the holy of Ramzan because prices of edible items up twice which has led common men for starvation, the lawyer argued. The counsel Abbas Sangeen advocate added that unfortunately we are living in a country in which inflation ups twice in the holy month despite rest of the world decreases prices of edible items in Ramzan. PHC informed that as many as 1941 inspections were conducted and five thousand shops were sealed during Ramzan across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However, PHC observes that data has been collecting as well as cases are registered but to no veil and directed for establishment of proper mechanism for the welfare of public while Justice Ijaz Anwar observed that Officers may go to market to obtain beef on Rs750 per kg and muton on Rs1500 as it isn’t available on official prices in the bazaars. The hike in prices of edible items especially meat, onion, sugar and etc., due to highest demand and lower supply which ultimately cost with inflation, PHC informed. The recommendation has been forwarded to the federal government for collective efforts to control market prices of food items in the country especially in KP.

The counsel argued that petitioners had obtained bails from concerned courts but they are still didn’t allowed to for going aboard. PHC’s divisional bench comprised of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered

Federal Government, FIA along with other respondents for submission of reply within seven days while adjourned further hearing.

PHC stops IG Revenue from transfers, postings: Similar, bench stopped Inspector General Revenue from transfers and postings on writ plea of 10 Sub-Registrars including Habib

ur Rehman. The counsel Danyal Asad Chamkani advocate argued that the petitioner is serving as Sub-Registrar Revenue at DI Khan while he along with 9 other sub registrars were transferred by Senior Member Board of Revenue on directive Inspector General.

The counsel added that non-cadre officials granted additional charges of Additional Sub-Registrar which is unfair. PHC’s divisional bench issued notice to Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and stopped Inspector General Revenue from further postings and transfers.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Attorney General of Pakistan, Mansoor Awan, addressing a press conference.

24 individuals including Imran Riaz added to ECL

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Cabinet has approved the inclusion of 24 individuals, including journalists Imran Riaz and Sami Ibrahim, in the Exit Control List (ECL).

According to media reports, the Federal Cabinet has given approval for the inclusion of the names of 24 significant individuals in the ECL. In this regard, the Ministry of Interior’s summary was circulated for approval from the Federal Cabinet, which granted permission to include the names of journalists Sami Ibrahim and Imran Riaz in the ECL. Their names were included in the ECL due to ongoing inquiries.

It has been reported that the approval to remove Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Babar Awan’s name from the ECL has

been granted. Babar Awan’s name was included in the ECL in December 2023 due to the Al-Qadir Trust case. Additionally, the Federal Cabinet has approved the removal of names of 22 different personalities from the ECL. In light of recommendations from the sub-committee for ECL, the Federal Cabinet gave its consent.

Furthermore, former Prime Minister and founder chairman of PTI, Imran Khan, and his spouse Bushra Bibi’s names have already been included in the ECL. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had recommended the inclusion of Bushra Bibi’s name in the ECL, upon which the Ministry of Interior’s sub-committee included her name in the ECL, while the sub-committee also

included the names of PTI Chairman Imran Khan and other leaders in the ECL.

It is worth mentioning that the sub-committee of the Federal Cabinet had recommended including the names of Chairman PTI Imran Khan and 28 other individuals in the Exit Control List (ECL) in the Al-Qadir Trust case. The sub-committee recommended including the names of 41 individuals from various departments and organizations in the ECL, as well as recommended removing 13 different types of cases from the ECL. The sub-committee also recommended removing the names of 7 individuals from the ECL based on judicial orders and recommended removing the names of 3 individuals from the ECL among the appeals presented for review.

Restaurants, wedding halls to pay fixed sale tax on services: Advisor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government will charge a fixed amount of sales tax on services from restaurants and wedding halls across the province, as all the restaurants and wedding halls will be registered and brought into the tax net.

This was stated by the Advisor to KP chief minister on Finance Muzammil Aslam at a consultative session on subordinate legislation under the KP Sales Tax Act 2022 arranged by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) here on Thursday. He was the chief guest in the session which was funded by the Sub National Governance Program and was attended by lawyers, tax experts, government officials, withholding agents, businessmen, and representatives of the chambers of commerce.

The advisor to CM in his speech and during the question-answer session said that the 23 percent property tax, charged in the province is very high which is why people have opted for stamp papers and only 6 percent of the property tax collected in the province is paid to the province and the rest goes to the federal government. To encourage women entrepreneurs, the Advisor directed DG KPRA to establish a women’s desk in KPRA for their facilitation. He added that 93 percent of the province budget is dependent on federal transfers which is overly reliant on the federal government and the fiscal space with the provincial government is shrinking.

He stressed on increasing the province’s own tax revenue and said that 45 million of pollution is giving only Rs42 sales tax on services. He said he believes in reducing tax rates and increasing the tax base. In her

opening remarks the Director General of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority Miss Fouzia Iqbal thanked the participants of the session, the representatives of SNG, and the Chief Guest for taking out time to attend the session. She shed light on the need for the subordinate legislation and its importance.

“After the enactment of KP Sales Tax Act 2022, we desperately needed to draft and formulate rules and regulations under the Act for smooth and efficient imposition and functioning of Act,” she said adding that the subordinate legislation will bring accountability in the working of the enforcement officers and will shelter the taxpayers from harassment at the hands of the enforcement officers. “We needed the rules and regulations for the effective administration of sales tax in the province and to smoothly plead our cases in the

courts,” she said, adding that the gathering aimed to incorporate the suggestions of all stakeholders and to make the legislation effective and beneficial for both KPRA and the stakeholders.

Muzammil Aslam thanked the participants for attending the session and giving their input in improving the rules and regulations. Your commitment to engaging in constructive dialogue underscores the collective determination to foster a business-friendly environment that is both fair and conducive to growth, he said adding that Subordinate legislation, often referred to as delegated legislation, forms the operational framework that breathes life into the broader principles outlined in primary legislation.

We recognize that revenue from taxation is the lifeblood of nations, underpinning their ability to serve

their people and foster prosperity. We want to see KP financially self-reliant and the journey toward self-sufficiency demands a long-term strategy, and effective legislation. The subordinate legislation we discuss today serves as the operational backbone of the Sales Tax on services Act, 2022, translating its principles into actionable guidelines for taxpayers and tax authorities alike.

Speaking about KPRA, he said KPRA is lauded as the premier revenue-collecting agency of the province, significantly contributing to its financial independence since its establishment in 2013. “Through diligent revenue collection efforts, KPRA empowers the government to fund crucial infrastructure projects and social services,” he said citing the examples of developmental projects aimed at improving the lives of its citizens.

The Sehat Insaf Card has been resumed by our government as our commitment to provide free healthcare to everyone in the province. The Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), revolutionizing urban transportation, stands as a shining example of progressive governance. These initiatives, among others, are essential pillars of societal progress and prosperity. “However, the successful implementation of these projects necessitates adequate funding, which requires collective efforts from both the government and the people,” he said. Detailed presentations were given by advisor KPRA on tax Enforcement Fazal Amin Shah and experts from SNG who were behind the drafted rules and regulations. Questions from the participants were taken and answered while their suggestions were noted for incorporation in the legislation.