

MQM to get Governorship
F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistan's political landscape is taking shape as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) reportedly plans to include the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in its government formation. Sources suggest MQM might secure the governorship of Sindh province alongside two to three ministries in the federal cabinet.

PPP names candidates
F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has nominated Saifullah Dharejo from Ghotki and Jacobabad's Aslam Abro as its candidates for two vacant seats of Senate from Sindh. The party has announced nominations on two seats vacated after Nisar Khuhro and Jam Mehtab Dahar elected as the members of Sindh Assembly.

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PESHAWAR: Newly elected Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being presenting guard of honour on his arrival at CM's Secretariat.

Rates of food items to be controlled in Ramazan: KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The newly elected Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur issued first order after becoming the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, by ensuring controlling and availability of food items should be ensured during the Holy month of Ramazan.

All commissioners and deputy commissioners have been ordered to strictly follow the instructions. Department of Interior and Tribal Affairs, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has sent a detailed letter to the Deputy Commissioners. The Deputy Commissioner should ensure the availability of quality essential food items, the Chief Minister.

He directed the officials by conducting regular inspection in the market and arrest of violators. The directive to convene the meeting of District Price Review Committees on March 4. The fixed prices should be released on official social media platforms, FM radios, Chief Minister KP Ali Amin Gandapur said.

All out-of-order machinery should be activated to check food and adulteration and the focus should be on inspection of shops selling dishes during Sehri and Iftar times. He also issued instructions to set up special check posts to prevent hoarding, black marketing and smuggling. He issued orders to fully activate the price control and complaint system by March 8 otherwise action would be taken against all those officials who commit negligence in their duties.

The Chief Minister said that people would be provided all food items on control rates and on the rates issued by the respective district administration. He said stern action would be taken against all those who violate the rates of food items during the Holy month of Ramazan.

Meanwhile, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) cabinet is set to be finalised after the approval of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) incar-

KP Assembly session summoned

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly session has been summoned on March 4, at 11am. The Governor in exercise his power conferred by clause (a) of article 109 of the Constitution of Pakistan has summoned the session of the provincial assembly, said a notification issued here on Saturday. KP CM takes oath.

PESHAWAR: The newly elected Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur here Saturday took oath of his office at Governor House. Governor Haji Ghulam Ali administered the oath to the newly elected Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during an impressive ceremony attended by people from cross section of society including Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Chief Secretary and IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Governor expressed best wishes to the Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and congratulated him.

cerated founder Imran Khan, sources said quoting newly-elected KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Saturday.

"I would meet the PTI founder over [matters pertaining to the formation of the] KP cabinet on Monday (March 4)," Gandapur said. Sources say that the list of prospective cabinet members, which is to be tabled before Khan in the coming days, provisions more than 15 names including Mushtaq Ghani, Khaleeq ur Rehman, Aqib Ullah Khan. The development comes days after newly-elected members of the provincial legislature were sworn in by now-former speaker Mushtaq Ghani in a ruckus-hit inaugural assembly session.

The assembly then went on to elect Babar Saleem Khan Swati and Suriya Bibi as the House's speaker and deputy speaker, respectively, which was followed by the election of the province's chief minister.

A day earlier, after being elected as chief minister by 90 votes against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate Dr Ibadullah Khan's 16 votes, Gandapur delivered a fiery victory speech wherein he demanded the Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja to resign alleging his role in the stealing of his party's mandate in the February 8 general elections.

The CM also promised that he would not do corruption and would not let anyone else do it. Talking about the economic situation of KP, Gandapur said that he will focus on increasing the revenue of the province. He added that they will not burden the poor anymore. "We will give property, right to inheritance, free legal assistance to women," he promised, adding that they will invest in trade and business development to create employment.

The CM also said that the people will get a health card from the first day of Ramazan, adding that they will form a commission for overseas Pakistanis. Following the February 8 polls, the PTI-backed independent candidates, who have since joined the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), emerged as the largest party with around 90 seats — out of the 115 general seats in the 145-member house — allowing the party to form its government in the province for the third consecutive time.

Meanwhile, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) has managed to secure seven seats, followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) five, and Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) four seats. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Parliamentarians (PTI-P) and Awami National Party (ANP) have won two and one seats, respectively.

Security forces gun down three terrorists

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Three terrorists were gunned down and four others injured during an exchange of fire with Pakistani security forces, who conducted an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district, the military's media wing said.

In a brief statement released on Saturday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that the security forces conducted the "IBO on the reported presence of terrorists". It said that weapons, ammunition, and explosives were also recovered from the slain terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against law enforcement agencies and civilians.

"Sanitisation operation is being conducted to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area," the ISPR stated. Locals of the area appreciated the operation and expressed their full support to eliminate the menace of terrorism.

Pakistan witnessed a spike in terrorist attacks in Balochistan and KP provinces in a few months which also marred the pre-election phase in some provincial pockets. In response, the security forces also intensified actions against the terrorism-hit areas and achieved success by restoring peace in the affected parts, especially in areas bordering Afghanistan. Last week, the security forces neutralised six terrorists in another IBO in KP's North Waziristan district.

Homes sank in Gwadar

F.P. Report

GWADAR: Residents of the Mohalla Band area in Gwadar — a port city in Balochistan on the shores of the Arabian Sea — are still awaiting government assistance, where homes sank, and the graveyard of Mohalla Banda is also submerged due to floods.

Habib, a resident of the affected area, has lost his home and his father's grave. The old Gwadar City is now populated inward from the coastal area. After recent floods, the Mohallah Band area of the old city is no longer suitable for living. Water from drains and waste has entered homes, affecting many people. In such circumstances, residents are saving their lives, and Habib from Mohalla Band has stepped out of his house to restore his father's grave.

"This flood destroys my father's grave which needs to be restored. My house is drowned too but we are still alive and will somehow find a solution, however, the deceased ones cannot," the citizen said emotionally. "If I don't repair his grave then this last memory [of my father] will be completely vanished."

Habib is among several residents of the area who suffered the disastrous rainfall this winter season, and waiting for an effective response from the higher authorities which declared the entire port city calamity-hit. The residents who are desperately seeking assistance say their area was affected due to the flow of rainwater from three spots together but not a single step was taken to stop the drainage into the populated spots. "We can neither leave our homes nor wait for the authorities any longer," they told media as several people came out of their houses to tell their miseries which exposes extreme administrative negligence adding to their troubles. Slamming the government's insufficient response to disasters, the residents said: "Gwadar is doomed but a deputy commission is telling everyone that disasters were nominal. They are all telling lies."

Gwadar — a deep water seaport that could change Pakistan's fate after being used for global trade — is picturing a very different angle after recent floods which left several populated areas vacant and inundated with floodwater and waste, and requires an immediate response and rehabilitation.

Election for Prime minister slot Shehbaz, Omar in one-to-one contest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The nomination papers of Shehbaz Sharif and Omar Ayub for the elections of the prime minister or leader of the house in the National Assembly — slated for Sunday at 11am — have been approved.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) on Saturday submitted nomination papers for Shehbaz and Ayub, respectively. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party, and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have all backed the PML-N's candidate, ensuring that he will be smoothly elected for the prime minister's slot once again. Ayub, on the other hand, does not have the numbers.

PML-N leaders Ishaq Dar, Hanif Abbasi, and PPP leader Khursheed Shah submitted the documents on behalf of Shehbaz. Seven MNAs are proposers and seven others are seconders for the former PM's nomination papers. Attaullah Tarar, Anusha Rehman, Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Romina Khursheed Alam, Kheal Das Kohistani, Ahsan Iqbal, Sardar Yousuf, Khawaja Asif, Awais Laghari, Awn Chaudry and many other MNAs also



reached the NA secretary office with them.

On the other hand, the SIC has also submitted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ayub's nomination papers to the secretary of the lower house. On February 29, the National Assembly Secretariat issued the schedule of the election for prime minister's office according to which the election will take place on March 3 (today). The time for submission of nomination papers ended at 2pm on Saturday (today) while the time for scrutiny of the nomination papers ended at 3pm.

Later in the day, Ayub filed an application with NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, raising objections over the acceptance of Shehbaz's nomination papers. "Shehbaz was 'gifted' the seat as a result of manipulation in Form 47. As per Form 45, Shehbaz had lost," the PTI-backed candidate for the PM's slot said in his application.

He said that Shehbaz was ineligible to become the prime minister. Both major parties — PPP and PML-N — got their speaker and deputy speaker elected with ease in Friday's session, with the SIC and PTI-backed candidates suffering defeat.

Following the prime minister's election, the newly-elected lawmakers will also elect a new head of the state on March 9, marking an end to the tenure of PTI-backed President Arif Alvi. However, PML-N and PPP's estranged ally Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, whose party has eight seats in the National Assembly, raised reservations over the polls and said that they would not vote for the president and prime minister. Although the PML-N had Friday expressed hope for a breakthrough after the party's top brass met the JUI-F leadership, no positive news has come out yet.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Ishaq Dar along with others Parliamentary leaders submitting nomination papers of Shahbaz Sharif for Prime Minister's slot to secretary National Assembly.

Heavy rain, snowfall claim 13 lives in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan has been hit by heavy rain and snowfall, leading to widespread disruption and tragic loss of life. Landslides triggered by the weather conditions have claimed the lives of 13 people, including children, across various locations.

The provincial capital, Peshawar, experienced intermittent rain, causing flooding in low-lying areas and hindering daily life. Meanwhile, snowfall in the upper regions has led to road closures, further isolating these areas.

According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (DMA), efforts are underway to clear the blocked roads, but continuous snowfall is hampering progress. Several heartbreaking incidents of landslides were reported. In Deir Lower, a landslide struck a house, killing three people: 25-year-old Zahid, his wife, and their 5-year-old daughter. Their 3-year-old child sustained injuries and is receiving treatment at the hospital.

Similarly, heavy rain caused the roof of a house to collapse in Bajaur Gakhi Kundu Mamond, tragically killing three children. Rescue teams responded swiftly and managed to pull the children from the debris,

but unfortunately, all three were pronounced dead.

Another incident occurred near Bathkela Khatke graveyard, where a house roof collapsed due to heavy rain. Five people were trapped under the debris, and although rescue teams managed to evacuate them to the hospital, two individuals, a woman and her 5-year-old daughter, succumbed to their injuries.

More cases of roof collapses were reported in Ala Dhand Dheri Saro Koto and Takhtbhai, resulting in the deaths of three women and one child, respectively. Several other individuals sustained injuries in separate incidents.

In addition to these tragic events, heavy rain and snowfall have caused significant disruptions and damage across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The situation highlights the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters and emphasizes the need for robust disaster preparedness and response mechanisms.

Meanwhile, rain emergency has been declared in Karachi as several parts of the country are in the grip of unpredictable weather. The situation is dire at many places.

In Lahore, light rain was reported in Gulberg, Lahore Cantonment, Lakshmi Chowk, and on Mall Road, Johar Town, Defence, Canal Road, Thokar Niaz Baig,

Wahdat Road and surrounding areas also witnessed rainfall. The cascade of rain extends beyond Lahore, with cities in Punjab such as Kasur, Muridke, Phoolnagar, Sharaapur, and Jhang experiencing downpour.

Tragically, the heavy rains proved fatal for three people in Kamalia where a dilapidated house collapsed. Another incident in Kharan resulted in the loss of three lives, two children among them. Anticipating a spell of heavy rains in the afternoon, Karachi's metropolitan city is on high alert. Malir, Airport, Gulshan Hadeed, and Gadap are expected to experience hailstorms, leading the city administration to impose a rain emergency.

Consequently, scheduled examinations at the Karachi University have been postponed, and evening shift schools are closed. Government and private offices will observe a half-day of duty. To manage the crisis, a rain emergency cell has been established at the Chief Minister's house which will be operational 24/7.

Gwadar, already grappling with a dire situation, is now experiencing another spell of heavy rain accompanied by winds and thunder. The drainage system and rescue infrastructure have been severely affected, forcing residents to relocate to safe places.

Bilawal flays Achakzai

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto turned his guns towards Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai after PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) nominated the latter as their presidential nominee.

Addressing a press conference alongside newly elected Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, Bilawal Bhutto said that Mahmood Khan Achakzai cannot call himself a "nationalist" as he becomes PTI candidate for president's slot. However, the PPP chairman said, he would continue to hold dialogue with nationalist parties.

Speaking of PPP's government in Balochistan, he said that the new provincial regime will be run according to (late) Benazir Bhutto's last book that spoke about reconciliation. He reiterated that no single political party could alone resolve all the issues of the country's largest province. "We should all work together," he added.

Bilawal expressed hope that CM Bugti will visit Gwadar on his first trip because of the devastation caused by heavy rainfall there. He added that the new Balochistan government will fight terrorists and extremists according to the National Action Plan.

Achakzai as presidential candidate against Zardari

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) Saturday nominated the Pashtun-khwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai as their presidential nominee.

The SIC announced its decision today, nominating Achakzai to contest for the top constitutional post against Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, who is a joint candidate of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and other political parties part of the coalition set to form a government in the Centre. Achakzai won the National Assembly seat from the NA-266 constituency in Balochistan's Kila Abdullah-cum-Chaman.

PTI founder Imran Khan, who is incarcerated in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, has urged his party's lawmakers to vote for the veteran politician. PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan has confirmed the nomination of Achakzai for the presidential poll.

It should be noted that a PTI delegation, led by party leader Asad Qaiser, met with Achakzai and Balochistan National Party (Mengal) chief Akhtar Mengal earlier this week to seek their support in raising the voice against "rigging" in the gen-



eral elections held last month. During the meeting, Achakzai extended his party's support for every political party that works towards the Constitution's supremacy and empowering the Parliament.

According to a notification issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday, the presidential election is set to take place on March 9. According to the schedule, the nomination papers for the presidential election can be submitted by noon today (Saturday), while the scrutiny of nomination papers will be completed by March 4.

Candidates who wish to withdraw their nomination papers can do so by March 5. Whereas, the final list of candidates will be published on March 6 after which the polling will take place. At least five candidates have

submitted their nomination papers for the presidential election.

Zardari's nomination papers were submitted by PPP leader Farooq H Naek, while PTI-backed SIC leader Latif Khosa submitted Achakzai's papers. Meanwhile, Advocate Asghar Ali Mubarak, an independent candidate Waheed Kamal and a citizen Abdul Qudus also submitted their nomination papers to run for the presidential polls.

On September 8, 2023, Dr Arif Alvi became the fourth democratically elected president to complete a five-year term. However, in the absence of the electoral college required to elect the president, he is still in office. Under the law, the president is elected by members of the National Assembly, Senate and four provincial assemblies.



Maryam prioritises healthcare overhaul in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has emphasised her government's commitment to providing top-notch healthcare facilities to people.

Chairing a comprehensive three-hour session here on Saturday, she focused on restructuring the health system and outlined plans for a robust five-year strategy aimed at upgrading the health department and enhancing services at rural health centres (RHCs) and dispensaries.

One of the key highlights

of the meeting was the announcement of a specialised hospital dedicated to offering advanced cancer treatment to underprivileged patients. Maryam stressed the importance of public awareness campaigns and health screenings, particularly targeting maternal and child health at the basic health unit (BHU) level.

Approving phased reforms and stringent oversight measures, she mandated the availability of doctors, paramedical staff, medicines, and essential medical

equipment in all provincial hospitals. To ensure transparency, she ordered for formation of a health advisory council comprising government officials, healthcare professionals, and public representatives.

The CM also emphasised standardising the design and functionality of BHUs and RHCs and ordered for immediate provision of free medicines to patients. Plans were set in motion in the meeting to deploy mobile health units to rural areas and suburban

communities, with a pilot project slated to kick off in Lahore.

Maryam underscored her commitment to merit-based appointments to the management of public sector hospitals, vowing zero tolerance for corruption and nepotism. The meeting, attended by key officials including Secretary Health Ali Jan and former senator Pervez Rasheed, reflected a concerted effort to revamp Punjab's healthcare landscape for betterment of its citizens.

Makli, A treasure of Sindh's history



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Secretary Sindh Information Department Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon has said that the culture of Sindh is considered among the ancient cultures of the world and the efforts being made by the administration of Basant Hall Hyderabad to promote the culture of Sindh are commendable.

He was talking to the media on the occasion of inaugurating the exhibition entitled "Grandeur of Makli" at Basant Hall

Hyderabad today. Secretary Information said that Makli has a important position in the history of Sindh.

Makli Graveyard is the masterpiece of history and the purpose of today's exhibition is to make people understand about the glory of Makli. Secretary Information Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon has also visited the pictorial gallery of Basant Hall.

In the inauguration ceremony, Director Basant Hall Miss Sobia and other concerned officers also accompanied him.



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SEHWAN: Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah laying wreath on the grave of Hazrat Lala Shahbaz Qalandar on the occasion of 772nd Urs celebration on last day. —APP Photo

Lahore police continue crackdown on kite flying

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana has emphasized the ongoing vigilance of Lahore Police against individuals engaging in the perilous activity of kite flying.

In a statement issued today, he disclosed that this year alone, 348 instances of kite flying have been recorded, leading to the arrest of 359 individuals.

According to him, 11931 kites and 314 spools were confiscated from the apprehended suspects. Among the reported cases, 103 were registered in the Cantt division, with 29 in the Civil Lines Division, 85 in the City division, 35 in Saddar Division, 46 in the Iqbal Town Division, and 50 in the Model Town Division. Kamiana stressed that the loss of human lives due to kite flying is unacceptable, underscoring that individuals involved in the production, distribution, and use of hazardous materials like metal strings and kites should face severe consequences.



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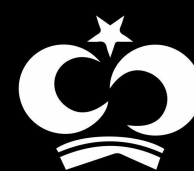
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Human Resources Department

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre

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KP new cabinet near completion

PESHAWAR (INP): The formation of the new Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet is nearing completion, with a list of potential members reportedly being prepared. According to sources, the list includes over 15 names, some of whom previously held positions in the provincial government.

Among the potential candidates, Mushtaq Ghani brings experience as the former Minister for Information and Public Relations in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. Khaleequr Rehman, with a background as the former Minister for Local Government, Elections,

and Rural Development, offers valuable expertise. Aqibullah and Pakhtun Yar's were in prior government. Arshad Ayub and Meena Khan are potential newcomers to the cabinet, with their specific areas of expertise yet to be disclosed.

Taj Mohammad Tarand and Shakeel Khan bring experience, having served in various capacities such as Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Revenue and Estate, and Minister for Revenue and Estate, respectively. Fazal Shakur Khan's experience lies in his past role as Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs.

It is important to note that these are just potential candidates, and the final list will be subject to approval by PTI Chairman Imran Khan. The newly elected Chief Minister, Ali Amin Gandapur, has confirmed that he will meet with Khan on Monday to discuss the cabinet formation.

The news of potential cabinet members has sparked public interest and speculation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

While the official list and final decisions remain with Khan, the emerging names provide a glimpse into the possible composition of the new provincial government.

Two injured as roof of house cave-in in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): The roof of the house of a person named Naeem collapsed in Railway Colony opposite Saeed Anwar Medical Center, Rescue 1122 officials said here Saturday.

Initially, a man and a woman were buried in the debris and Rescue 1122 teams reached the spot and started rescue operations. Rescue 1122 officials pulled out the two injured from under the debris, the Rescue 1122 officials said.

The Rescue 1122 medical team provided first aid to both of them and shifted them to the hospital as they are identified as Naeem age 35 years and his wife aged 30 years.



PESHAWAR: Provincial president of PML-N Engr. Ameer Muqam addressing a press conference.

CTP continues duties in rain F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar City Traffic Police officers remained at their points to keep the traffic flowing despite the heavy rains in Peshawar while the traffic officials also continued to visit different areas as usual.

According to the details issued by the spokesman of the traffic police, Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah had instructed City Traffic Police officers of Peshawar to use umbrellas and raincoats provided by City Traffic Police to protect themselves from the rain. The flow of traffic should be maintained so that citizens and especially motorcyclists do not face any problems, he added.

Spokesman added the Peshawar city traffic police officials also pulled out the vehicles that were stuck in the middle of the road due to heavy rains and advised the citizens and transporters who stopped at various signs to drive slowly so as to avoid any kind of accident due to slipping on the road during the rain.

He said the Chief Traffic Officer Dr. Zahidullah further had told that making the citizens travel facilities without any inconvenience and making their lives safe is our first priority, which we are not neglecting in any way and it is part of our duty that we do every day. They will understand the situation as their duty.

Irregularities in Education Dept: Inquiry committee constituted

PESHAWAR (APP): Musarat Hussain Khan, (PBS 19), District Education Officer (M) Dera Ismail Khan as a Chairman and Gul Faraz Khan, Deputy DEO (M) Lakki Marwat, as a member are hereby appointed as inquiry officers to conduct inquiry against DEO (M) Bannu and others regarding illegal PST/Class-IV appointment during ban of Election Commission of Pakistan.

The complaint letter received from Assistant Director (Complaint), Anti-Corruption Establishment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Hayatabad Phase-V Peshawar wherein the committee has directed to submit report within 10-days

of the issuing of the letter about forming of the inquiring committee.

It is worth mentioning here that disclosure of irregularities in the recruitment of teachers and class-IV officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Department.

The Education Department has decided to initiate an investigation against the officers responsible for the irregularities in illegal appointments despite a ban from the Election Commission of Pakistan.

An inquiry committee consisting of Grade-Iq9 officers was formed. Assistant Director (Complaints) Anti-Corruption Establishment Khyber Pakhtu-

nkhwa received complaints of irregularities, according to a letter issued by Director Elementary and Secondary Education. District Education Officer Bannu and other officers have illegally recruited PST and Class-IV despite the ban.

In view of which the Education Department was directed to conduct an inquiry. Department of Education District Education Officer Dera Musarat Hussain Khan and DEO Lakki Marwat Gul Faraz Khan constituted an inquiry Committee.

The committee will investigate the above allegations and submit its report on March 10, said the letter.

Flood hit families under emergency food project assisted

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: National Integrated Development Association (NIDA) Pakistan, in collaboration with Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM), is pleased to announce the successful conclusion of the Emergency Food and Non-Food Items Assistance Project for Flood-Affected Families in Chitral.

This project, which ran from October 2023 to February 2024, aimed to address the devastating effects of the natural disaster that struck Chitral in July 2023, triggered by heavy monsoon rains.

The project culminated with a Provincial Consultative Workshop on DiDRR, held at Peshawar. The workshop aimed to share the

project's progress with government stakeholders and disseminate the findings and recommendations of the situation analysis conducted in Chitral on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR).

The workshop was honored by the presence of Altaf Hussain, Additional Secretary of the RRSD Department, as the Chief Guest. Mr. Hussain commended the efforts of NIDA Pakistan in promoting Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR). The workshop was attended by distinguished guests including Mr. Syed Muhammad Ali Shah (Country Director - CBM), Dr. Zia Farooqi (Chief Executive - NIDA Pakistan), Atif Sheikh (Executive Director - STEP),

and several other government officials and representatives from humanitarian organizations.

This project's success underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations during emergencies.

NIDA Pakistan remains committed to promoting resilience and inclusivity in disaster management efforts.

While celebrating the success of this project, NIDA Pakistan recognizes the ongoing need for community-based inclusive development (CBID) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including districts like Chitral and Shangla. CBID is not just a concept but a commitment to ensuring that every member of our community, especially the most vulnerable,

has a voice and is included in the development process. By actively engaging communities and stakeholders in decision-making processes and promoting inclusivity in all aspects of development, we can create a more equitable and prosperous society for all. The success of our efforts in Chitral is a testament to the transformative power of CBID, and we must build on this momentum to drive positive change in other districts as well.

As we reflect on the achievements of the Emergency Assistance Project, let us renew our commitment to promoting CBID in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Together, we can build a future where no one is left behind, and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Charsadda's mota chawal attracts foodies to beat coldness

PESHAWAR (APP): Commonly known as Mota Chawal (large rice), the special variety of Charsadda district here Saturday attracted a substantial number of foodies to beat the cold wave that gripped Peshawar Valley since last two days.

The lovers of special variety thronged its outlets at Peshawar's Firdus area enjoying its delectable taste besides many are taking its parcels for loved ones at homes in the rainy weather.

"Charsadda mota chawal is my favorite dish due to grilled spicy meat full of energy and whenever I come to Peshawar I enjoyed the mouthwatering cuisine at Qissa Khwani besides taking its parcels amounting to Rs 300 for family," said Pir Muhammad, a retired PST teacher of Nowshera district while taking to APP.

Known as land of hospi-

ality, the KP's traditional cuisines including Mota Chawal, Chapli Kabab, Roush, Mutton Karahi, Pate Tikka and Chicken Painda outlets drew influx of foodies in Peshawar where torrential rains continued with intervals.

Besides its shops in Firdus, Board, Namak Mandi and Qissa Khwani, the vendors of Mota Chawal could be seen on both sides of GT between Peshawar-Charsadda-Mardan.

"I have inherited the art of preparation of Charsadda Chawal from father and today my son is also master of it" said Riaz Khan, a seller of Mota Chawal at Pabbi bazaar.

About its recipe, he said first meat was cut into big pieces and that ginger-garlic paste, salt, tomatoes, red chillies, black cardamom, turmeric powder, coriander, cumin, curry leaf and garam masala were

mixed and put on flame for nearly 30 minutes before including onion and oil.

He said when it's colour change to golden brown the flame was turned off and the delicious rice was ready that could be served with yogurt, raita or even pickle.

He said that today, the famous Charsadda Mota Chawal and Chapli Kabab are on the menu of KP restaurants.

Hazrat Ullah, the owner of Mohmand Toray Kabab at Firdos bazaar Peshawar told APP that people from across the country come here to eat Mota Chawal and Chapli Kabab especially during winter to enjoy purity of meat and freshness of components being used in its preparations.

Despite the introduction of many western foods and snacks' varieties, he said the popularity of Mota Chawal and Chapli Kababs have not decreased in the

province where its demand was increasing with each passing day especially during rainy days.

He said sale of 'Mutton Karahi' also known as Karhi Ghost, Dumba Karahi, Balti Ghost and Dumpukhat Karahi have also increased due to rainy weather.

"I frequented visited Charsadda with family members to eat Mota Chawal and lamb Karahi being cooked on medium flame of firewood", another food lover Kamal Khan of Nowshera said.

Charsadda Mota Chawal is affordable than Peshawari rice polao that is why the former was being preferred by low income groups in marriages, birthday parties and other functions.

They said Govt patronage and its proper projection through digital media could give boost to this traditional food of Charsadda.

Electricity restored

PESHAWAR (APP): Pesco teams have restored electricity from 122 feeders that are affected by heavy rain that lashed most parts of the province.

Workers are making hectic efforts to restore electricity from all the affected feeders despite heavy rain.

Pesco Chief Akhtar Hameed Khan has said that electricity from all the remaining feeders would restore very soon. He also urged consumers to cooperate with Pesco teams that are busy in relief work.

Civil Defense Day celebrated

PESHAWAR (APP): Like other countries, International Civil Defense Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the purpose of celebrating this day is to create awareness and awareness of civil defense as well as inviting people to join this organization.

In this regard a grand function was organized at Federal Civil Defense Training School Abbottabad. In this regard, a civil defense

rally was taken out in Jinnahabad, Abbottabad, after which a formal ceremony was started with the recitation of the Holy Quran, in which the participants of the course and other volunteers were also involved.

In the ceremony, the civil defense stall became the center of attention of the people. In the ceremony, Commandant Abdul Nasir addressed the volunteers and the students receiving training and said that at this

time the whole world including Pakistan is facing natural and man-made disasters such as Volunteers play a key role in combating them in situations where these volunteers are the first to attend emergency situations to protect more lives and property.

The speakers appealed to the people to get training from civil defense institutions so that they can play a positive role in the service of the country.

Autism, an overlooked neuro-developmental disorder among children on rise with scanty cure options

PESHAWAR (APP): Syed Arsalan Hashmi, an engineer by profession from Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtukhwa, had a blissful life on arrival of a cute baby boy, Azan as first child in the family.

Based in Bannu, the couple was extremely contented over blessings bestowed on them and were fully engrossed in care of their beautiful baby.

"Life was going smooth and our son was growing normal with expressing his liking for different things, but was unable to start talking," relates Arsalan. He used to say single words and we were hopeful that soon would start proper talking with passage of time.

Azan's inability to start speaking even on his third birthday, made parents deeply concerned and they decided to take the child to doctors for check-ups.

Medical practitioners diagnosed the baby (Azan) having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a complex neuro-developmental disorder that affects child's communication, socialization and cognition.

Diagnosis of a neurological disease as reason behind weak response of Azan was nothing more than a bomb shell for both

Arsalan and his spouse, turning their sentiments of contentment into feeling of deep gloom and worries.

Our distress exacerbated manifold when we came to know that no pediatrician in Bannu is able to treat autistic child and we have to take Azan to big cities for rehabilitation through 'Applied Behavior Analysts' (ABA), recalls Arsalan while talking with APP.

The desperate parents found an Autism center in Karachi and rushed there with the hope of getting him cured.

Arsalan used to take Azan four times a month to Karachi from Bannu for therapies, but after six months of extensive traveling, gave up the practice because of enormous physical exertion for both the father and son along with huge financial burden.

After a little pause, a privately run Talha Autism center in Peshawar grabbed attention of Arsalan and he started visiting provincial metropolis on weekly basis for a few months. Observing some improvement in the child, Arsalan and his spouse took a harsh step of leaving their spacious home in Bannu, and rented a house in Peshawar.

"Parents of autistic chil-

dren in Pakistan are caught between a rock and deep sea due to very high cost of treatment and mental stress they endure due to lack of proper cure facilities in their hometowns," Arsalan shared his inner sentiments.

"Life of parents with autistic child is very painful, filled with the emotions of melancholy, depression, anxiety and patience as well," comments Mrs. Imran, mother of a 12 years child, Muhammad Yousaf affected by autism and deafness.

Yousaf's father lives in Dubai for an employment and his mother has migrated to Peshawar from Swabi at her parents' home for proper treatment of her son at government run Autism Center. Dedicated efforts and strong devotion by mother brought improvement in severely autistic Yousaf who has an innate inclination towards painting and is engaged in expression of his thought through spreading colors on papers.

"The hard to earn parents are unable to take their kids to other cities for treatment and leave them on God's mercy," observed Bilawal, a goldsmith by profession and father of an autistic child from Akhora Khattak area of Nowshera

district.

Bilawal said in his hometown he found a lot of parents getting their kids treated through traditional healing by religious Pirs and taking them to shrines.

Bilawal visited different cities due to lack of autism treatment facility in his hometown and finally got his son Mohammad Momin admitted at an Autism Center in Peshawar.

I take my son three days a week to Peshawar from Akhoro Khattak in a privately hired transport service, shared Bilawal.

"Lack of cost-effective treatment service for disadvantaged families having children with autism is pushing the patients toward severity of the illness when one resort to aggression, head banging, self biting, yelling and confining in seclusion," observed Muhammad Bilal, Managing Director Talha Autism Center Peshawar.

According to a study published in September 2023 in International Journal of Surgery Global Health, no reliable data on the prevalence of ASD in Pakistan is available, as individuals with psychiatric disorders resist going to health professionals due to social stigma, leading to a

low number of case reports resulting in failure to receive proper care from professionals.

However, the Pakistan Autism Society while quoting some statistics from South Asia, estimated in 2020 that, about 350,000 children are suffering from ASD in Pakistan.

There are several factors that have been identified that cause a child more likely to have ASD, including environmental, biologic, and genetic factors, experiencing complications at birth or having certain genetic or chromosomal conditions and inter family marriages. Some experts blame screen watching through use of mobile also as cause of increase in autistic children.

According to estimates, there are around 150,000 number of autistic children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who are in dire need of treatment from qualified therapists, observed Dr. Maheen Khattak, an experienced therapist enjoying distinction of being the first ever and the only Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) in KP with additional qualification of Registered Behavior Therapist (RBT) from USA.

"Realizing increase in

number of children with ASD, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government through Social Welfare Department set up an Autism Center in Peshawar for providing cure on free of cost basis," informs Rizwan Ahmad, Project Director Center for Excellence for Special Children with Autism in KP.

The center has the capacity of providing rehabilitation services to 50 children, but we have admitted around 66 patients.

Children admitted at Autism Center are from Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan and even Swabi districts who visit daily, covered a long distance for treatment and therapies, Rizwan added. Dozens of patients are in lined and we receive more admission applications each day, but we cannot accommodate all the aspirants until complete rehabilitation of already enrolled children.

"Acute paucity of treatment of autism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through certified therapists could be gauged from the fact that the government run Center for Excellence for Special Children with Autism in Peshawar is the only rehabilitation center that is functioning under the observation of a qualified

BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)," disclosed Ms. Rutaba, Speech Therapist.

In the whole Khyber Pakhtunkhwa there is no such rehabilitation center for cure of adolescent with autism while majority of private centers are getting admitted grown up autistic patients and receiving treatment charges, claims, Maryam Jehangir, another psychologists who is also doing online course on International Behavior Analyst (IBA) from an American institute.

"Early diagnose and proper treatment could minimize adverse effects of the disease, but due to lack of awareness people realize neurological disorder in their children at later stages," pinpointed Madam Tahira, a psychologist at Autism Center Peshawar.

"Majority of private autism centers are established by parents of autistic children, but unfortunately, the treatment they offer is very expensive and beyond the reach of lower/ middle class. The minimum fees they demand is around 60,000 PKR for one month," laments Rizwan Ahmad, Project Director Center for Excellence for Special Children with

Autism in KP.

Government should announce a subsidy as a token of support for those parents who cannot afford fees at private autism center for rehabilitation of their child, he suggested.

The number of children affected by autism is rapidly increasing across the country and this is need of the hour to set up welfare oriented Autism Center at least at divisional level, he stressed.

Meanwhile a recent invention of a device 'EKKO Wave Therapeutic Device' by a team of biomedical researchers from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Pakistan, provided a ray of hope in treatment of developmental neuro disorder.

EKKO, winner of the 2023 Better World Project Award, is a non-invasive, mobile therapy that takes concepts used for treatment of muscles and applies them to the brain, informs Dr. Muhammad Usman Akram, Incharge of the project.

Taking to APP, Dr. Usman said around 150 parents are using EKKO device at homes and are sharing good results in rehabilitation of their autistic children.



In brief

Senior civil judge visits Jail F.P. Report

SWABI: Senior Civil Judge Swabi, Raja Badar Munir here on Saturday visited District Jail Swabi and inspected its various sections. He visited sections of jail including canteen, dispensary and inquired about the provision of facilities to inmates. He also met with prisoners and listened to their problems. He also directed to release twelve prisoners that were involved petty nature crimes. He directed to enhance standard of facilities in jail and vows to take steps for provision of speedy and inexpensive justice to people.

Footballer killed in road accident F.P. Report

SWABI: Famous footballer of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, former member of Pakistan Football U-19 team and Pakistan Air Force (Islamabad) football team player Farhan Khan died after being hit by an unknown vehicle on Swabi-Jehangira Road. Farhan Khan was seriously injured after being hit by an unknown motorcycle or vehicle, where he was transferred to District Hospital Swabi and later to CMH Hospital Rawalpindi, where he was later transferred to Combined Military Hospital in the early hours of Saturday, where he succumbed to head injuries in CMH Rawalpindi. Young footballer Farhan Khan had severe head injuries. Deceased was a great footballer and was selected in the National U19 team. He was the most talented and capable football player. He was the cousin of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's well-known footballer and coach Wasim Dada. Meanwhile, the people here have said that they will hold a peaceful protest against the crushing of footballer Farhan Khan in a road accident and the arrest of the unknown persons who escaped. On March 5th, a peaceful protest and walk will be held in Swabi Aman Chowk on the fourth day of mourning. All footballers and other sports players of Swabi district have been requested to bring Farhan's pictures and placards with them. The youth demanded of the Police to immediately trace out those who hit Farhan Khan and made their escape good.

Steps to control inflation F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Khalid Iqbal Saturday said that steps are being taken by the district administration to control inflation and provide food items to the citizens at reasonable rates as per the rate list. He expressed these views in his office while chairing the District Price Review Committee to determine the rate lists under the supervision of the district administration to ensure the supply of food items to the citizens at affordable rates. Price control magistrates, business representatives, district officers of food, livestock and other departments participated in it. In the meeting, there was a detailed discussion regarding the determination of prices of food items. Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad has issued instructions to the Food Department to fix the minimum rates of all food items while stressing on providing all possible relief to the citizens and providing better rates as compared to other cities. Citizens were assured of relief and enforcement of the law while ensuring cooperation with the administration on behalf of the traders.



GILGIT: Vehicles passing through stagnant rain water accumulated on road during heavy rain that experienced the city.

‘Suthra Punjab’ drive launched on CM’s orders

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: On the special directions of the chief minister of the Punjab, ‘Suthra Punjab’ Cleanliness Campaign has been launched in district Hafizabad. Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad inaugurated the ‘Suthra Punjab’ Cleanliness Campaign from heart of the city Darbar Road, on Thursday. Administration Municipal Committee/ADCR Intiaz Ali Baig, Chief Officer MC Ansar Sahi and other officers were also present on this occasion.

DC said on the occasion that on the direction of the Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif started special cleanliness has been started under ‘Suthra Punjab Cleanliness Campaign in the district Hafizabad which would be prove revolutionary and ideal campaign on its nature. She said that under a comprehensive plan, the city Hafizabad was divided into seven union council and all sanitary workers of MC would work for four days in each union council continuously besides their routine work.

She said that she herself would monitor pace of work on ‘Suthra Punjab’ Cleanliness Campaign on daily basis. She said that

this campaign had been started in Pindi Bhattian, Sukheki Mandi, Jalalpur Bhattian and other areas of the district. She warned the officers and sanitary workers of Municipal Committees that any negligence and lethargic attitude would not be tolerated and defaulters would be faced the strict action.

Meanwhile, police arranged a walk to create awareness among people specially the youth about hazard of kite-flying. DSP Rana Jamil Qaisar led the walk. Students and people belong to different segments of society participated the walk. Participants of the walk were crying banners inscribe with slogan regarding dangers of kite-flying.

DSP Rana Jamil Qaisar said that special teams have been constituted to overcome menace of this deadly game. He appealed the parents to keep away their children from kite-flying for saving them any untoward incident.

Consumer Protection Court Judge orders action against factories responsible environmental pollution: District and Sessions Judge Consumer Protection Court Haripur took notice of pollution in Hattar Industrial Estate, and ordered compulsory

action against the concerned institutions.

In the letter written to the Chairman Hattar Economic Zone, it is said that the steel and other factories located in Hattar Industrial Estate, in order to save money, use tire powders and oil instead of natural gas to create environmental pollution and cause it. There is no compromise on human life, health and environmental pollution through such savings, not only the nearby residents but also the birds and the people working in these industries are affected by such a move, Chairman Hattar said.

Economic Zones have been directed to appoint a Monitoring Officer from their organization who will liaise with the Acting Registrar Consumer Court, Director Environmental Protection Agency Abbottabad and Assistant Director Industries/Consumer Protection to jointly take steps to eliminate environmental pollution.

The judge has also directed the DFO Haripur to provide saplings and labor for planting in Hattar Industrial Estate while the Chairman Hattar Economic Zone has coordinated with the owners of all the factories under his jurisdiction to plant trees.

Tehsil Council Members to hold protests F.P. Report

PABB: Tehsil Council Pabbi members will arrange protest rallies in front of Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) Water and Power Development Authority Pabbi on Monday against their attitude towards public representative while argued public at large to ensure their participation at large scale, on Saturday.

This was announced during Tehsil Council Pabbi session chaired by speaker Essa Khan while Abdul Majeed, Malak Ajmeer Shah, Mufti Mohib Ullah Shah, Fazal Nabi, Dr. Zulfiqar, Taimor Kamal, Muhammad Ilyas and Arshad Shah along with others addressed the session.

The speakers urged that government's officials are public servant and answerable before public representatives. They claimed that law and order situation is worsened due to police incompetence. They added that Fakhar Alam appointed as Patwari at Amankot is receiving bribe in open daylight.

Labourer’s residence collapsed F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: A mud house of laborer collapsed last night due to heavy downpour at Gulshanabad area of Takhtbhai tehsil, Mardan district.

The laborer named Yousaf Khan was present along with wife and children in the residence when the house was collapsed but the family was safe and secure in the accident. The laborer had lost his lifetime savings in the mishap happened due to natural disaster.

The residents requested Chief Minister and National Disaster Management Authority along Provincial Disaster Management as well as district administration for provision of financial assistance to the laborer. Moreover, the laborer can be contacted on 0340-0264767 for financial assistance in private capacity.

Three dacoits killed

DAHARKI (INP): Three dacoits were killed allegedly in an encounter with the police in Daharki city of Sindh, police said on Saturday.

According to SHO Abdus Shakoor Lakho, the dacoits were standing on the CPEC Motorway (M5) in Ubauro when on seeing the cops, they opened fire at them. ‘The police retaliated, which resulted in the deaths of three of them,’ he said, adding, ‘Hunt for their accomplices, who had managed to flee, has been launched.’ The SHO informed that the police had seized their weapons and shifted the bodies to tehsil hospital, Ubauro.

In another incident in Daharki, a man strangulated his wife to death with the help of a rope in the limits of A-Section police station. Police said that Muhammad Ali Soomro killed his wife over a family dispute, and managed to flee from the spot.

Snowfall, rain continue at Chitral, all roads blocked

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: Snowfall and rain continue in Chitral and suburbs areas from the last 24-hours with no electricity and road access has been completely blocked as to three feet has fallen in Chitral city, while two 2.5 feet of snow has been recorded on Lowari Tunnel Road.

The road to Garam Chashma and all roads leading to other districts have completely been blocked due to overnight heavy snow. Till filling of this report on Saturday afternoon, the snowfall has continued without any break. The communication of Chitral to other districts has also been cut-off with roads closed for all kinds of traffic due to heavy snowfall as a result more than 40,000 people have been retrained and disconnected from other parts of Chitral.

After two days of continuous rain, snowfall in Lower and Upper Chitral districts since Thursday night, the intensity of the closure has also increased. There is no rush in the markets while the traffic on the roads is not visible. The

district administration has warned the public to avoid unnecessary travel to be saved from any inconvenience or mishap due to avalanches or land-sliding.

Snowfall is also continuing in the three areas of Kalash Valley, Bomburit, Barir, Rambur and Shekhanandeh, where two feet of snow has fallen. More than two feet of snow has fallen in Midgalshit and the road has also been damaged by avalanches at many places.

The people of Chitral burn firewood to protect themselves from the cold during snowfall, which increases the burden on the forests. Chitral has received snowfall for the second time in this season after a long drought, but local elders say that in March this is the first snowfall in 15 years.

According to local experts, when snowfall in November, December or January, it is long-lasting and freezes to a large extent, which is a major reservoir of water in summer, but the snow melts quickly during this season. While the people are happy with the recent snowfall, on the other hand, the peasants

and farmers are also very hopeful that it will irrigate their fields in those areas where canal water is not available and people used to irrigate their crops with rain or snow water.

The elders of Garam Chashma informed that the National Highway Authority has not yet started snow removing work from the road due to which the people of the entire valley are stranded and they are deprived of daily necessities, as well as fresh vegetables and chicken, meat, etc. are also unable to be supplied in this valley.

Children are very happy during snowfall and they enjoy making snowballs and throwing them at each other. As people in Chitral burn fire wood for cooking purposes and keeping themselves warm, it is causing heavy burden on the forests and indiscriminate deforestation also has a negative impact on the environment due to climate change where other areas are affected. Cold regions like Chitral also have adverse effects. This is the reason that there is neither rain nor snowfall for a long time in this season.

Baloch culture day celebrated across country

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, came alive on Saturday with festivities as the Baloch community celebrated its annual Culture Day with zeal and fervor. The day serves as a reminder of the region's rich history, unique language, and vibrant cultural tapestry.

Citizens across the province, including those residing outside Balochistan, participated in various cultural programs and events. The celebrations highlighted the Baloch nation's long and distinguished past, evident

in the numerous historical relics scattered across the province. From ancient forts and tombs to caves and remnants of settlements, Balochistan boasts a tangible connection to its past. Locations like Sibi, Bolan, Kech, Panjgur, Lasbela, Kalat, and Jhal Magsi serve as testaments to this enduring legacy.

Furthermore, the celebrations acknowledged the significance of the 7,000-year-old Mehrgarh Civilization, located in Balochistan. This archaeological marvel stands as a powerful symbol of the region's early human settlements and cultural development.

The day also served as an opportunity to recognize the global presence of the Baloch diaspora. Beyond the borders of Pakistan, Baloch communities thrive in Iran, Afghanistan, Oman, the Gulf States, and even some European countries. Despite geographical distance, these communities continue to cherish and preserve their unique heritage, language, and cultural identity.

Baloch Culture Day serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of cultural preservation and appreciation. It fosters a sense of unity and pride among the Baloch people, both within Pakistan and across the globe.



SARGODHA: Students visiting different stalls during the Research Arena exhibition held at the University of Sargodha.

Wealthy people urged to donate plants to farmers

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Following the directives of district administration and provincial government the Lower Dir elementary and secondary education department on Saturday launched the spring plantation drives at schools.

In this regard the district education officer male Mahboob Ilahi along with sub divisional educational officer (SDEO) Zahirud Din, ASDEO Tariq and Principal Muhammad Ayaz planted various saplings at government high school Adam Dherai in Adenzai sub division and kicked off the drive. Addressing a simple function on the occasion, the DEO highlighted the importance of forests and soil products. He said that Allah had gifted the district with a unique and pleasant weather condition favourable for plantation.

The DEO said that plants were rightly termed as lungs of soil as it provided fresh oxygen to all living organisms. He said that plants and greenery also added to the natural beauty of the area and provided

livelihood to many people. He said that plants were also important for biodiversity and the natural environment. The official asked schools' heads to take active part in the spring plantation drive and also direct the students to do so. He said that farmers, teachers and students should prefer fruit trees instead of fruitless plants. The DEO urged philanthropists and wealthy people to donate plants to the poor instead of cash because plantation was a continuous and lifelong charity.

JUI-F demand: Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl district chief Sirajud Din on Saturday said the Supreme Court of Pakistan should reverse its verdict regarding the award of post-arrest bail to an Ahmadi accused charged with blasphemy. Talking to local journalists at Timergara the JUI-F leader said that the finality of Prophethood was part of the Muslims' faith and none of the Muslims was ready to compromise on it.

He said that millions of the Muslims in Pakistan had been hurt by the recent judgment of the top judge

of the SCP. He said the Ahmadis had been declared non-Muslims under the constitution and they had no right to preach and propagate like other minorities. The JUI-F leader demanded of the SCP to reverse its decision.

Also on Thursday, prominent preacher Mufti Waheed Qurishi while addressing different functions of Khatam ul Quran at Khungi, Sarai Bala and Maidan, said that Muslims across the country would never tolerate the anti-Islamic activities of the Ahmadis. The functions were also addressed by Maulana Matuallah Qasami, Maulana Fawadullah, Pir Fayazul Karim and others.

Mufti Waheed said that religious seminars played a key role in reforming the society. He said that teachings of the Quran and its implication were the only way to progress for the Muslims. He said the main cause of the Muslims' downfall was giving up religious education. He asked the participants to equip their children with the teachings of Quran and sunnah.



SEHWAN: Devotees performing dhamaal at the shrine of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar on the occasion of 772nd urs celebration.



Kenya, Haiti sign ‘reciprocal’ accord on police deployment

NAIROBI (AFP): Kenya and Haiti signed a “reciprocal” agreement to deploy police from the East African country to lead a UN-backed law and order mission to the gang-plagued Caribbean nation, Kenyan President William Ruto said.

Ruto said he and Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry had “discussed the next steps to enable the fast-tracking of the deployment”, but it was not immediately clear whether the agreement would counter a court ruling in January that branded the deployment “illegal”.

Haiti’s government has pleaded for international help to confront violence that has cost thousands of lives, as armed gangs take over entire swathes of the country, leaving the economy and public health system in tatters. Kenya had previously said that it was ready to provide up to 1,000 personnel, an offer welcomed by the United States and other nations that had ruled out putting their own forces on the ground.

But a Nairobi court said the decision was unconstitutional, in part because the two countries had not signed a reciprocal agreement on the issue. Ruto said he and Henry had “witnessed the signing” of a reciprocal agreement in Kenya’s capital Nairobi. Details of the document have not been made public.

“I take this opportunity to reiterate Kenya’s commitment to contribute to the success of this multinational mission. We believe this is a historic duty because peace in Haiti is good for the world as a whole,” Ruto said in a statement. The UN Security Council had approved the multinational mission in early October but the Kenyan court ruling threw its future into doubt.

Opposition politician Ekuu Aukot, who had filed the petition



against the deployment, told AFP that he would lodge a case “for contempt of court”. “What is emerging is that William Ruto does not care about the rule of law or the constitution of this country,” he said. “We will question the validity of this secretive agreement.”

In the face of criticism, Ruto had described the Kenyan undertaking as a “mission for humanity”, in step with its long record of contributing to peacekeeping missions abroad. Haiti, the Western hemisphere’s poorest nation, has been in turmoil for years, and the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise plunged the country further into chaos. No elections have taken place since 2016 and the presidency remains vacant. Thousands of protesters have demanded Henry’s resignation in line with a political deal that required Haiti to hold polls and for him to cede power to newly elected officials by February 7 of this year.

The prime minister, who is on a visit to Nairobi, told an audience of university students he aimed to “have elections as soon as possible”. “We

need elections to stabilise the country,” he said, but offered no specific timeframe for the polls. The Caribbean Community bloc said Henry had agreed to hold elections by 31 August 2025 following a regional summit this week in Guyana.

In January alone, more than 1,100 people were killed, injured or kidnapped in Haiti, according to the UN. “In October 2022, we asked the world to give us a helping hand. President Ruto was the first one to agree to come to Haiti and we want to say thank you to him,” Henry said. “We thank Kenya for its active solidarity.”

The multinational mission -- initially approved for one year -- had envisioned Kenyan police on the offensive with their Haitian counterparts, who are outnumbered and outgunned by gang members. Five countries have agreed to join the Kenya-led multinational policing mission, including the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin and Chad. Last year saw nearly 5,000 homicides counted in Haiti, more than double the number in 2022, according to a UN report.

Fighting returns to capital of Ethiopia

NAIROBI (Reuters): Ethiopian government forces battled militiamen in the capital of the Amhara region, Bahir Dar, the regional administration and residents said, in the first fighting there since the early days of the conflict last year.

Ethiopia’s military has been fighting insurgents from the Fano militia since July in a conflict that left more than 200 people dead last year, according to United Nations reports. Government officials have said on several occasions in recent months that the violence in Amhara, the country’s second-largest region, is under control.

However, the state-appointed human rights commission has reported repeated outbreaks of violence, including drone attacks and house-to-house raids by government forces in areas outside the capital. The Amhara government said in a statement that the federal army and regional security forces were conducting “a joint operation and house-to-house surveillance around Bahir Dar to sweep out the extremist force that had infiltrated into the city”.

“These extremist groups could not resist the combined strength of the security forces, leaving behind their dead and wounded and abandoning their weapons,” it said. A Bahir Dar resident, who asked not to be named for security reasons, said he heard heavy weapons fire from early in the morning. “Now it is calm. The roads are closed and there is no transportation,” he said.

A resident of the town of Merawi, 36 km (22 miles) from Bahir Dar, said there had been fighting there too but it had also died down. Spokespeople for Ethiopia’s government and military did not immediately respond to requests for comment. It was not possible to contact Fano as it has no formal structure. The fighting in Amhara broke out less than a year after the government reached a peace deal in November 2022 to end a two-year civil war in the neighbouring Tigray region that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Fano militiamen fought alongside the army against Tigrayan forces, but relations between the two sides quickly deteriorated over accusations the federal government had left Amhara vulnerable to security threats. The government denied this.

SK police launch raid on doctors

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korean police launched a raid targeting officials of the Korean Medical Association, as authorities step up pressure to end a walkout by trainee doctors protesting against plans to reform the health system.

The raid comes ahead of a mass demonstration in Seoul planned for Sunday by doctors, after the walkout, which began on Feb. 20, disrupted major hospitals, forcing some to turn away patients and cancel surgeries and other medical procedures. “Doctors are enraged by the government’s absurd behavior,” the KMA, which represents private practitioners, said in a statement after the raid on the leaders of its emergency committee.

“The government has clearly shown that doctors in South Korea cannot enjoy freedom.” It denied having encouraged the trainee doctors to resign, saying they had left their posts of their own volition. Health ministry data showed more than two-thirds of the trainee doctors, or nearly 9,000, had ignored a government deadline to return to work or face punishment. They are protesting against a plan to increase medical school admissions by 2,000 starting from 2025, which the government says is vital to remedy a shortage of doctors in one of the world’s fastest-ageing societies. The young doctors say they are overworked and underpaid, however, and the priority should be to improve their pay and working conditions instead. Seoul police investigators raided the offices of five current and former KMA officials to collect evidence from their mobile telephones and computers, the Yonhap news agency said.

Macron raised prospect of Western troops in Ukraine

PARIS (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron appeared isolated on the European stage this week after saying the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine could not be ruled out, a comment that prompted an outcry from other leaders.

French officials later sought to clarify Macron’s remarks and tamp down the backlash, while insisting on the need to send a clear signal to Russia that it cannot win in Ukraine. The Kremlin warned that if NATO sends combat troops, a direct conflict between the alliance and Russia would be inevitable. Russian President Vladimir Putin said such a move would risk a global nuclear conflict.

Here’s a look into Macron’s comments, his strategy and what’s at stake. Macron floated the possibility of Western troops helping in Ukraine while speaking at a news conference after 20 European heads of state, and other Western officials, met in Paris. There was no consensus to send troops in an official, endorsed manner on the ground, Macron said, “but in terms of dynamics, nothing can be ruled out.” The exact signal Macron was trying to send remains unclear, but “it wasn’t said by accident,” said Phillips O’Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

“It could be a bit of a warning” to Russia or “it could be that this might happen, so people need to prepare for it,” O’Brien said. Macron was clearer when speaking about European leaders’ evolving attitudes since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. “I remind you that two years ago, many people around this table were saying: we’re going to offer sleeping bags and helmets. Today they’re saying: we need to work faster and harder to get missiles and tanks.” Soon after, officials from Germany, Poland and other countries that participated in the Paris meeting sought to distance themselves from Macron’s comments, saying they would not send troops to Ukraine. The head of NATO, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, told The Associated Press there are “no plans for NATO combat troops” on the ground.

French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said the discussion about possibly sending Western troops into Ukraine centered on using them for de-mining and military training operations, away from the front lines — “not sending troops to wage war against Russia.” He said no consensus emerged from the discussion. The foreign minister, Stéphane Séjourné, said this type of military presence wouldn’t be “crossing the belligerence threshold.”

A French diplomat with knowledge of the Paris talks said the goal was also “to send a signal to President Putin that this is now an option and that he cannot simply count on the fact that none of Ukraine’s

partner countries will ever be deployed” there. The diplomat insisted on anonymity to discuss such a sensitive issue. Macron “didn’t rule out any options for one simple reason: as we’ve seen, there are all sorts of things that were ruled out two years ago but no longer are today,” he said.

Paris said talks with allied countries will continue at meetings of European foreign and defense ministers to be set at a later date. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Macron initially kept open a line of communication with Putin.

He said in June 2022 that the Russian president made a “historic error” but that world powers shouldn’t “humiliate Russia, so that when the fighting stops, we can build a way out together via diplomatic paths.” The remark drew strong criticism from Ukraine and many of France’s allies. Macron last spoke with Putin in September 2022; he’s taken a tougher stance publicly ever since.

His comments were clearly intended to “sound the alarm bell,” said François Heisbourg, a defense analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies based in London. “Yet some knock-on effects of the news conference were probably not expected,” Heisbourg said. “It gives the impression that (the French) ventured out as mavericks, with the risk of being misunderstood.” In presenting his case, Macron raised concerns over Russia “getting tougher in recent months.”

He cited the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the repression of Russia’s political opposition and the ferocity of combat along the front line in Ukraine. The French government recently revealed that Russian forces threatened to shoot down a French surveillance aircraft patrolling in international airspace over the Black Sea. And earlier this month it accused Russia of spreading disinformation across Europe. The hand-wringing over Russia in Europe comes amid worries that the US will dial back support for Ukraine. European officials are also concerned that former President Donald Trump could be reelected later this year and potentially change the course of US policy on the continent. “Our security as Europeans is at stake,” Macron said. “Should we delegate our future to American voters? My answer is no, whatever the vote is.” Whatever Macron’s message was, some analysts say he may have fumbled the delivery. “Macron wants to send a signal of strength to Russia. But for deterrence to work, it must be credible,” said Jana Puglierin, head of Berlin’s European Council on Foreign Relations, an international think tank. “He has unnecessarily introduced a potential for division into NATO.” “This is no way to promote European unity and strength,” Puglierin said in a written statement.

Leaked document warns of ‘hostile forces’

HANOI (BBC): If countries can be said to go in and out of fashion, then Vietnam is certainly having its moment in the spotlight. Once better known for sitting quietly in the strategic shadows, its leaders almost unknown to the rest of the world, Vietnam is now being courted by everyone.

US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping both visited last year. The US saw its relationship with Vietnam elevated to the highest level possible, that of a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. Vietnam has agreed to 18 existing or planned free trade arrangements. Its collaboration is being sought on climate change, supply chain resilience, pandemic preparedness and a host of other issues. It is viewed as a vital regional player in the growing US-China rivalry; in the South China Sea, where it contests China’s claim to some island groups; and as the best alternative to China for outsourcing manufacturing.

What has not changed is the iron grip the Communist Party keeps on power, and over all forms of political expression. Vietnam is one of only five Communist, one-party states left in the world. No political opposition is permitted. Dissidents are routinely jailed and the repression has become even more severe in recent years. Decision-making at the top of the party is shrouded in secrecy. However, a leaked internal document from the Politburo of the Central Committee, the highest decision-making body in Vietnam, has shone a rare light on what the party’s most senior leaders think about all these international partnerships.

The document, known as Directive 24, was obtained by Project88, a human rights organisation focussed on Vietnam. References to it in several party publications suggest it is genuine. It was issued by the Politburo last July, and contains dire warnings about the threat posed to national security from “hostile and reactionary forces” brought

to Vietnam through its growing international ties. These, Directive 24 argues, will “increase their sabotage and internal political transformation activities... forming ‘civil society’ alliances and networks, ‘independent trade unions’, creating the premise for the formation of domestic political opposition groups”.

The document urges party officials at all levels to be rigorous in countering these influences. It warns that for all Vietnam’s apparent economic successes, “security in the economy, finance, currency, foreign investment, energy, labour is not firm, there is a latent risk of foreign dependence, manipulation, and seizures of certain ‘sensitive areas’”. This is alarmist stuff. In none of its public pronouncements has the Vietnamese government sounded so insecure. So what does it mean?

Ben Swanton, co-director of Project88, is in no doubt that Directive 24 heralds the start of an even harsher campaign against human rights activists and civil society groups. He cites the nine orders at the end of the document to party officials, to police social media to counter “false propaganda”, to “not allow the formation of independent political organisations”, and to be alert for people taking advantage of the increased contact with international institutions to stir up “colour revolutions” and “street revolutions”. “The mask is off,” says Ben Swanton. “Vietnam’s rulers are saying they intend to violate human rights as a matter of policy.”

Not everyone sees it this way. “Directive 24 does not signal a new wave of internal repression against civil society and pro-democracy activists so much as business as usual, that is, the continuing repression of these activists,” says Carlyle Thayer, emeritus professor of politics at the University of New South Wales and a renowned scholar on Vietnam. He cites the timing of the directive, published right after

the US and Vietnam had agreed to their higher-level partnership, and just two months before President Biden’s visit.

This was a momentous decision, he says, driven by the party’s fear that the impact of the Covid pandemic and the economic slowdown in China would prevent Vietnam from reaching its goal of becoming a developed, high-income country by 2045. It needed closer ties with the US to move its fast-growing economy up to the next level. Hardliners inside the party feared the US would inevitably encourage pro-democracy sentiment in Vietnam, and threaten the party’s monopoly on power. Professor Thayer believes the combative language used in Directive 24 was intended to reassure hardliners that this would not happen. He thinks the decision to have General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, not just the most powerful political figure in Vietnam but also a known communist ideologue, personally sign the new partnership was intended do the same thing.

What Directive 24 does illustrate clearly is the dilemma Vietnam’s communist leaders face as their country becomes a global manufacturing and trading powerhouse. Vietnam is not large enough to do what China has done, and seal itself off behind its own “great firewall”. Social media platforms like Facebook are easily accessible there; Vietnam needs foreign investment and technology to keep growing quickly and cannot afford to cut itself off.

Some of the free trade deals Vietnam has agreed to, like the big one with the EU finalised in 2020, come with human and labour rights clauses attached to them. Vietnam has also ratified some of the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) conventions, though notably not the one requiring freedom of assembly. But Directive 24 suggests it is reluctant to honour these clauses.

UN reports ‘large number of gunshot wounds’ following ‘flour massacre’

NEW YORK: A United Nations team and medical officials have reported seeing “a large number” of gunshot wounds among Palestinians in Gaza after Israeli troops opened fire near an aid convoy, which has triggered global condemnation and calls for justice.

Their claims confirm numerous testimonies by witnesses that Israeli gunfire killed and wounded scores of Palestinians desperately seeking food aid, contradicting Israel’s initial claims people were hurt due to a stampede and trampling. At least 117 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 wounded during the “flour massacre” at the Nabulsi Roundabout on the southwestern side of Gaza City, after Israeli troops opened fire on the crowd.

A UN team visited some of the wounded in Gaza City’s al-Shifa Hospital, and saw a “large number of gunshot wounds”, UN chief Antonio Guterres’ spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. The hospital received 70 of the dead, and about 200 wounded were still there during the team’s visit, Dujarric said.

He was not aware of the team examining those killed, but said that “from what they saw in terms of the patients who were alive getting treatments is that there was a large number of gunshot wounds”. Georgios Petropoulos of the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said he had seen people with gunshot wounds sustained during the deadly attack.

“It is one day after the tragic events at the Beach Road checkpoint, where hundreds of people lost their lives and were injured,” Petropoulos said in a video report, standing in front of al-Shifa Hospital. “We have seen people with gunshot wounds. We have seen amputees, and we have seen children as young as 12 that were injured,” he said in the video shared on X early on Saturday.

“These events cannot be allowed to go on.” The head of a Gaza City hospital that treated some of the Palestinians wounded in the bloodshed said that more than 80 percent of the injured had been struck by gunfire, suggesting there was heavy shooting by Israeli troops.

Mohammed Salha, the acting director of Al-Awda Hospital, told

The Associated Press that of the 176 wounded brought to the facility, 142 had gunshot wounds and the other 34 showed injuries from a stampede. He could not address the cause of death of those killed, because the bodies were taken to government-run hospitals to be counted.

Dr Hussam Abu Safia, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, said all the casualties it admitted were hit by “bullets and shrapnel from occupation forces”, referring to Israel. The majority of the injured taken there had gunshot wounds in the upper part of their bodies, and many of the deaths were from gunshots to the head, neck or chest, he said.

The bloodshed underscored how the chaos of Israel’s almost five-month-old offensive has crippled the effort to bring aid to Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians, a quarter of whom the United Nations says face starvation. The Israeli version of events changed over the course of the day.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera’s Bernard Serfat said the Israeli military “initially tried to pin the blame on the crowd”, saying that dozens were hurt as a consequence of being crushed and trampled in a stampede when aid trucks arrived. “And then, after some pushing, the Israelis went on to say that their troops felt threatened, that hundreds of troops approached their troops in a way they posed a threat to them, so they responded by opening fire,” Smith added. However, they didn’t explain how those people posed a threat.

Witnesses insisted that the stampede happened only after Israeli troops started firing at people looking for food. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor based in Gaza said Israeli forces intentionally opened fire on the crowd of aid recipients to “intimidate” anyone struggling to get a handful of food. The human rights monitor published a report stating that evidence shows that dozens of victims suffered gunshot wounds, “rather than being run over or crushed, in contrast to what the Israeli army spokesman claimed”.

Footage released by the Israeli army includes audible evidence of gunfire coming from Israeli tanks positioned near the coast, it said. The

group identified the bullets’ distinct sound audible in the footage as 5.56 bullets coming from an automatic weapon used by the Israeli army. The majority of those present at the scene, including those who had initially been far from the aid trucks, are seen in the video fleeing from the trucks and running in the opposite direction, it added.

“This indicates that the danger did not originate from the trucks themselves or from the surrounding crowd of people, but rather from an outside source that terrified everyone in the area, both close to and far away from the trucks,” the monitor said. “Furthermore, the video clip released by the Israeli army does not depict any ramming operations, which aligns with numerous survivors’ accounts of being shot in the back as they attempted to flee the scene.”

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, said that “a famine is almost inevitable” in Gaza unless things change. Laerke cited the near-total closure of commercial food imports, the “trickle of trucks” coming in with food aid, and the “massive access constraints” to moving around inside Gaza.

The United Nations has particularly cited restrictions on access to northern Gaza, where residents have been reduced to eating animal fodder and even leaves. Human Rights Watch earlier this week said Israel was violating the orders of the International Court of Justice by blocking aid to Palestinians who are facing near-famine conditions after nearly five months of Israeli bombardment that has killed more than 30,000 people, most of them children and women.

“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. “The Israeli government has simply ignored the court’s ruling, and in some ways even intensified its repression, including further blocking lifesaving aid.” The UN refugee agency, UNRWA, has also raised concerns against Israel’s blocking of aid. — Al Jazeera

Taiwan faces steady ‘drip’ of pressure as China tightens pre-inauguration squeeze

TAIPEI (Reuters): Taiwan is facing a steady “drip, drip” of Chinese pressure ahead of the inauguration of its next president in May, with officials in Taipei fearing Beijing could further squeeze the island’s room to manoeuvre without resorting to direct conflict.

Since current Vice President Lai Ching-te won the presidency in January - China views Lai as a separatist - Beijing has snatched away a diplomatic ally, altered an air route in the narrow Taiwan Strait, and begun regular coast guard patrols around the Taiwan-controlled Kinmen islands, which hug the Chinese coast. China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, over the island’s strong rejections.

Visiting Taipei last week, US Representative Mike Gallagher, chairman of the US House of Representatives select committee on China, said Beijing’s patrols around Kinmen, which is a short ferry ride from the Chinese cities of Xiamen and

Quanzhou, were part of a pattern of steady pressure on Taiwan. “It is a salami-slicing effort; they are slowly turning up the rheostat,” he said, referring to a resistor used to control an electric current.

One foreign official tracking security matters in the region described what was happening as a “drip, drip” of pressure, keeping up the message that Beijing does not like Lai, but without holding war games - as it has twice around the island in the past year and a half - or forcing direct military confrontation. “It’s part of the pattern of gradually altering the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, seeing what they can get away with and shifting to a new normal, restricting Taiwan’s space to move,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

China says the coast guard patrols are to ensure the safety of its fishermen. Two Chinese fishermen died last

month trying to flee Taiwan’s coast guard after approaching too close to one of Kinmen’s heavily fortified islets. Asked whether the Kinmen tensions were part of China’s pre-inauguration pressure on Lai, a spokesperson for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office did not answer directly, reiterating China’s right to the coast guard patrols.

“Both sides of the Taiwan Strait are part of one China, and Taiwan is a part of China,” Zhu Fenglian said. China says it alone has sovereignty over the Taiwan Strait, and that it also recognises no “off limits” waters for its fisherman around Kinmen. Taiwan strongly rejects China’s territorial claims. Li Zhenguang, a Taiwan expert at Beijing Union University, told China’s official Xinhua news agency this week that it was up to China to “firmly grasp the initiative” when it came to dealing with Taiwan, and that asserting jurisdiction around Kinmen was a necessary step on the road to “reunification”.

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UN report on Afghanistan

THE UN special rapporteur for Afghanistan has labeled the human rights situation in Afghanistan as dire and painted a grim picture of civil liberties in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, criticizing the cleric regime for widespread torture and discrimination against women and minorities. While presenting the half-yearly human rights report at the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett emphasized prioritizing human rights, particularly women's rights, in engagement with the Taliban. Bennett condemned the Taliban's discriminatory actions against Afghan women and stressed the importance of prioritizing the Afghan people and ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes in the country.

The UN human rights report on Afghanistan was widely expected by the global community on the eve of half yearly session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. As human rights situation continues to deteriorate causing unacceptable suffering for the people of Afghanistan. The country witnessed continued depression, especially among the youth, women, and girls, and increased pressure on ethnic and religious minorities in Afghanistan particularly target killings of the Hazara community by Daesh was widely reported around the globe. Meanwhile, institutionalized gender-based discrimination including the imposition of women's dress code, a ban on women's work in certain fields, and barring of girls' higher education in the country attracted worldwide condemnation, whilst, accusations of gender apartheid were also leveled by some sections of the global community against Taliban. At the same time, the globally proscribed terror outfits found a haven and flourished in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan wherein extra-judicial killings, public executions, and corporal punishments along with discrimination against political opponents remained a persistent issue in Afghanistan. Interestingly, the Islamic Emirate was also conscious of the UN Special Rapporteur's report and the Afghan Spokesperson categorically called on Richard Bennett to consider peculiar Afghan culture, religious rituals, and ground realities in that country which altogether diverged from Western social ethics, women's dress code, law and order issues in those nations.

The dilemma of human rights and political wrangling between the Islamic Emirate and its Western contenders continuously grapple with the Afghan public adding to glaring economic and humanitarian crises that are exacerbated due to the denial of economic, social, and cultural rights of Afghans not only by the Afghan interim rulers but the global community who always linked its humanitarians' assistance with political issues in Afghanistan. The global community not only reduced its humanitarian aid to Afghanistan but shortcut its diplomatic engagement and civic work with the IEA over a wide range of contentious issues including non fulfillment of the Doha accord, political inclusiveness, and alleged human rights violations in that country. During the recent Doha conference on Afghanistan, there was a consensus among the participants to engage with the Afghan government to overcome mutual issues as the policy of disassociation did not work satisfactorily. Unfortunately, before the global community initiated its civic work, Mr. Bennett echoed his opposition urging the international community not to move toward normalization of relations with the Afghan de facto authorities until there is no significant improvement in human rights, including the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan.

Presently, a wide range of differences exist between the Afghan rulers and the global community on diverse issues that are conversely adding to the sufferings common public and seriously affecting development and civic work in Afghanistan while reducing the scope for cooperation on shared interests concerning terrorism, regional security, and global peace at the broader level. Dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation are the only pathways to secure collective goals. Neither the global community nor the Islamic Emirate can achieve their agendas without employing some degree of tolerance in their approaches to reach common ground. So, over 43 million Afghans do not suffer from this political rivalry anymore.

Conduct of DCs

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday sentenced Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon to six months in prison in a contempt case about Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Shehryar Afridi and Shandana Gulzar's detention under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance. IHC judge Justice Babar Sattar announced a reserved verdict sentencing Islamabad DC to six months in prison, SSP to four months in prison, and SHO to two months. All three of them have also been fined Rs100,000 each for their misconduct and violation of the court's orders dated back to May 2023. However, the honorable judge provided safe passage to the bureaucrat by agreeing to suspend the sentence of the Deputy Commissioner for a month and gave him time to file an appeal against the decision. That will surely provide him with an escape from punishment and face-saving to the court along with encouraging other power abusers to continue their unlawful activities with full impunity and freedom.

Historically, unlawful use of authority, play with the law, and manipulation of the constitutional provisions by government executives, particularly Police officials, Petwaries, Revenue Officers, and local administrators including Assistant Commissioners, and Deputy Commissioners is a routine practice that not only undermines the writ of the law but continuously contributes to corruption and bad governance in the country. In fact, no police officer or District administrator violates rules and disobeys court orders until or unless advised by the Senior hierarchy or encouraged by any political leader. Gien to to the lax Court's verdict, all those government servants will surely not only escape punishment, but also elude accountability, and will be reinstated in their positions and receive all compensation in due course through a set procedure.

Historically, the Pakistani bureaucracy and government servants are across-the-board politicized and divided on political lines, while every other bureaucrat, police officer, judge, or general supports a political group are seeks backing from a senior bureaucrat or politician to grab lucrative positions in his career or avail promotion, deportation or posting abroad. Those government servants had always been ready to comply with unlawful orders of the senior hierarchy or fulfill the illegal demands of the political bosses that duly violated their oaths and service/ professional codes. The recent cases of DC Islamabad and Commissioner Rawalpindi Division are nothing else than political affiliation and future investment of government servants to reach high offices in the future. After all, such kind of unconstitutional attitude of the people sitting in sensitive positions has brought our nation to the verge of collapse otherwise this country has no scarcity of resources and capabilities. Awfully, modern justice argues to protect the rights of the accused instead of the victims, uphold compensations in lieu of obligations, and promote nepotism in place of merit and transparency. That's why our country lags in each walk of life.



Settler violence: Israel's ethnic cleansing plan for West Bank

Alice Panepinto & Triestino Mariniello

ON February 8, Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian shepherds who were out grazing their herds in the Sadet a-Tha'leh community, near Hebron in the occupied West Bank. They expelled the Palestinians from the pasture and used drones to scare their livestock. As a result, the shepherds suffered severe losses as many of their terrified animals had miscarriages and stillbirths in the middle of lambing season.

The incident is not unique and it is part of what human rights defenders are describing as "economic warfare by settlers which leads to displacement". What happened at Sadet a-Tha'leh is one of 561 incidents of Israeli settler attacks against the Palestinians, which the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded between October 7 and February 20. As of January 17, settlers have killed at least eight Palestinians and injured 111, per OCHA's database. Repeated waves of violence by settlers, often backed by the army, have led to the displacement of 1,208 Palestinians, including 586 children, across 198 households.

While humanitarian and human rights organisations tend to register these violent acts as separate incidents, they constitute systematic brutality unleashed by extremist settlers onto the Palestinian population of the occupied West Bank in parallel to the plausibly genocidal acts carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza. Supported by the Israeli security forces and aided and abetted by the government, settler violence is a central part of the Israeli state's policy and plan to ethnically cleanse the occupied Palestinian territory in order to establish full sovereignty over it and enable settlement expansion - despite settlements being illegal under international law.

Settlements are a range of state-sponsored (or largely state-tolerated, in the case of more informal outposts and "farms") urban colonies built for Israelis in the occupied West Bank and Golan Heights. All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, as they violate Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has ratified. Furthermore, settlement

expansion plans are often used as a way to consolidate Israel's de facto annexation of occupied territory, in contravention of the prohibition of territorial conquest through force set out in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

Despite the clarity of international law on the matter, supported by the 2016 UN Security Council resolution not vetoed by the United States, Israel has provided the political conditions and economic incentives, as well as infrastructural support, for the growth of 279 settlements in the West Bank in which some 700,000 settlers reside. The imprint of settlements extends beyond walled urban areas into the surrounding countryside, where vulnerable Palestinian families live in constant fear of attacks against their homes, the herds they depend on to make a living, and their lives in general.

In some of the 16 Palestinian communities forcibly transferred since October 7, such as Khirbet Zanuta in the South Hebron Hills, settlers have already fenced off land, effectively controlling it for their own use, and preventing the Palestinian communities from returning. The political positions of extremist settlers, at the heart of which is the desire to rid the occupied West Bank of Palestinians, have entered Israeli mainstream politics.

After high-profile incidents of settler violence, government officials have embraced and expressed support for such acts. Government ministers have openly incited settlers to commit violent acts against Palestinians. Last year, for example, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for the Palestinian town of Huwara to be wiped out. Settlers enjoy not only political backing but also military support. In the past two decades, the deployment of Israeli security forces to the West Bank to help "secure" the illegal Israeli settlements has expanded. In addition, so-called "territorial defence units" comprised of settlers have been created, trained and armed by the Israeli military.

For years, armed settlers have attacked Palestinians under the protection and with the participation of Israeli security forces. Since

October 7, many army units have been deployed to the Gaza front, which has given the settler territorial defence units an even more prominent role in establishing control over occupied land. The line between the security forces and armed settlers has been increasingly blurred, especially under the leadership of Israel's minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir. In recent months, he has ordered the distribution of thousands of firearms and other combat equipment to settlers. Although perpetrated by private citizens, settler violence in occupied Palestine can only be understood as state violence. The applicable international law, including the Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, confirms that a range of conducts committed by non-state actors, such as Israeli armed settlers, may be attributed to the state.

Prominent human rights organisation B'Tselem has described settler violence as a form of state violence, through which Israel can "have it both ways". It can claim that this is violence carried out by private individuals - a few "bad apples" among the settlers - and deny the role of its own security forces, all while benefiting from its consequences - the expulsion of Palestinians from their land. Under international law, Israel as the occupying power has the obligation to protect the Palestinian population. Nonetheless, settler violence takes place openly and in total disregard of the laws of war and human rights. The fact that Israeli security forces have accompanied and protected settlers on their violent rampages clearly indicates they actively ignore legal responsibilities towards the occupied population.

The lack of accountability for settler violence in Israeli courts - military or civilian - demonstrates that the Israeli authorities are unwilling to put an end to impunity. Already in 2013, a UN fact-finding mission reported that "the identities of settlers who are responsible for violence and intimidation are known to the Israeli authorities, yet these acts continue with impunity". A more recent survey by a human rights NGO found that between 2005 and 2023 the Israeli police closed 93.7

percent of investigation files concerning Israelis who harmed Palestinians and their property in the occupied West Bank. Since the current government took office in December 2022, 57.5 percent of Palestinian victims of Israeli crime chose not to file a complaint given a lack of trust in the system. Settler violence has been adopted by the Israeli state as a tool to accelerate the pace of Palestinian displacement. Once key portions of occupied Palestine are cleansed of the Indigenous Palestinian communities, then the settlement enterprise can proceed unabated and unopposed and annexation can also take place.

Given settlement activities are a recognised violation of international law, the international community cannot acquiesce to settler violence that drives Palestinians from their land to facilitate settlement expansion. There are pending investigations about the situation in Palestine at the International Criminal Court (ICC). ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan has confirmed that his office is accelerating investigations in relation to settler violence, stressing that "Israel has a fundamental responsibility as an occupying power" to investigate and prosecute these crimes and prevent their recurrence and ensure justice. In our view, ICC's investigations might have deterrent effects only if they covered the role of the Israeli authorities in enabling this violence, but also the illegality of settlements. The "transfer of civilians" by the occupying power is indeed one of the most documented alleged war crimes in Israel.

We also find the recent sanctions against individual violent settlers imposed by the US, the UK, France and other states short-sighted. By targeting individuals, but not the state, Western powers continue to give Israel a free pass when it comes to violating the rights of Palestinian civilians living under Israeli occupation. Instead, the international community must clearly and without hesitation ascribe settler violence to the Israeli state, and hold its officials to account in the appropriate international forums for not taking decisive action to prevent it, stop it, and reverse its effects.

Real solutions to climate change in Africa

Fati N'zi Hassane

AT this year's African Union Summit held on 17-18 February in Addis Ababa, African leaders adopted the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change - a powerful show of unity in the face of a real threat to Africa.

Alternating droughts and floods have withered or flushed away crops and decimated livestock. Hunger is sweeping across the continent. In East Africa alone, Oxfam calculated last year that 13 million animals, worth \$7.4bn, and hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops were lost, leaving millions of people without income or food. Our water engineers warned that one in five water boreholes they dig now in East Africa is dry or has water unfit for people to drink without treatment. Too often, they must drill deeper, more expensive, and harder-to-maintain boreholes only to find dry, depleted, or polluted reservoirs.

Faced with the threat of climate change, the unity of African countries is increasingly evident in negotiating forums, and deserves to be applauded: the initiative to create a yearly African Climate Week, along with the involvement of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and the African Group of Negotiators for COP, all under the leadership of the Committee of Heads of States and Governments on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), and with the Nairobi Declaration as the cornerstone of a common African position, will create a robust mechanism to champion the interests of Africans.

The Nairobi Declaration's assessment aligns significantly with civil society's viewpoint, especially regarding Africa's minimal historical contribution to global warming compared to the substantial burden of consequences affecting lives, livelihoods and economies. It is positive to note that the Declaration acknowledges the key role of local communities in climate action. However, we must ensure that we give these communities the resources and protection needed to cope with the effects of climate change. And this is exactly where the Nairobi Declaration falls short.

African countries committed to implementing policies, regulations and incentives aimed at attracting local, regional and global investment in "green growth". The lack of clarity about what can be considered "green growth" opens the door to a myriad of solutions prioritising profit over people. For example, corporations can buy vast tracks of land to offset their carbon emissions abroad and continue pumping oil and gas - a reality sadly widespread in Africa and elsewhere - to the detriment of smallholder farmers and their environment. The call to rich countries to honour their commitment and scale up climate finance is an important ask, but it is necessary to look at the quality of the finance provided. While donors claim to have mobilised \$83.3bn in 2020, Oxfam calculated that the real value of their spending was - at most - \$24.5bn. The \$83.3bn is an overestimate because it includes projects where the climate objective has been overstated or as loans cited at their face value. By providing loans rather than grants,

these funds are even potentially harmful rather than helpful to local communities, as they add to the debt burdens of already heavily indebted countries.

Furthermore, the civil society organisations we work with often point to the lack of access and inclusion in existing climate finance mechanisms. In 2022, Oxfam found that only 0.8 percent of organisations that have direct access to international climate finance in the West Africa/Sahel region could be identified as "local". There is still a lack of transparency in contributor reporting on how much climate finance reaches the local level and involves community participatory processes - this needs to change. It is necessary to create small grants that are both accessible and manageable for local populations. The Nairobi Declaration does not comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges faced by women. This is troubling. When food is scarce, women often eat last and last; and girls are the first to be pulled from school or married at a young age so there is one less mouth to feed. Many have to walk extra miles under the scorching sun, even carrying a child, to fill a jerry can of water, exposing themselves to safety issues. Resource stress exacerbates gender-based violence. A study on domestic violence in East Africa found that as the wealth status of women increases, the prevalence of domestic violence decreases, possibly due to fewer resource-related disputes.

The Declaration urges world leaders to establish a carbon tax on transport. But without adequate mitigation strategies, a global carbon tax could disproportionately impact the most vulnerable, further raising the costs of food, medicine and other essentials. What we need are investments that will truly reach and help people adapt to climate change so they can produce food. IFAD reports that in Africa, there are an estimated 33 million small-scale farms, producing around 70 percent of Africa's food supply. Despite this, people in rural areas account for 90 percent of people living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa according to FAO.

We also need investments in water and sanitation systems that will provide people with clean water and hygiene. In Southern Africa, only 61 percent of the population of SADC countries have access to drinking water, and only two out of five people have access to adequate sanitation. This is undoubtedly fuelling the recent spread of cholera in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe where thousands of new cases and hundreds of deaths have been recorded since January. Africa stands at a decisive crossroads. By resisting quick fixes and deadly traps offered by the market and by bringing the people at the centre of the climate action, our leaders have a great opportunity to make a decisive step towards the Agenda 2063 aspiration of a "prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development". It is by championing equitable access to resources and opportunities that we will build a continent where every individual not only survives but thrives in harmony with the natural world.

Pro-Russian narratives rise among Latin American X users

Matthew Kupfer

WHEN Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago, it sparked outrage in many parts of the world. Images of atrocities by Russian fighters and destruction of Ukrainian cities tilted much Western public opinion in favor of Kyiv.

Not necessarily in Latin America. A study by Georgetown University in Washington found that the social network X, formerly Twitter, has seen a significant uptick in pro-Russian and anti-Ukraine narratives among Spanish-language users in Latin America.

But there's a catch: "Unofficial" sources of information and, particularly, anonymous accounts are playing a large role in the spread of Kremlin narratives, the researchers concluded. That research, published by Ukrainian fact-checking organization Stop Fake, was the work of Valerie Senger and Jacob Basseches. They are stu-

dents of a master's degree program in Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Despite the rise of pro-Russian sentiment on X, Senger and Basseches say these views may not have truly taken hold among actual people in the region.

"We did not see a lot of die-hard, nonanonymous, Latin American locals boosting pro-Russian narratives - yet," Basseches told VOA. To analyze the changing narratives on X, Senger and Basseches selected five key events in the war: the start of the invasion; Russia's shelling of a railway station in the city of Kramatorsk; Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a "partial mobilization"; Finland joining NATO; and Russia's shelling of a pizzeria in Kramatorsk. That last incident, on June 27, 2023, killed well-known Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina and injured two Colombian citizens.

Sanger and Basseches chose these events because the Kremlin officially commented on them and because the events generated peak searches on Google for "Ucrania," the Spanish word for Ukraine. From there, the researchers identified 200 Spanish-language tweets about each event that received the most shares, likes or comments. These were further categorized based on the sentiments the posts expressed. The categories ranged from the most pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian to the most pro-Ukrainian/anti-Russian opinion. A rating of zero meant the tweet was neutral. Sanger and Basseches found that Latin American X users reacted fairly neutrally to the onset of the invasion.

But after the shelling of the Kramatorsk station, responses became more polarized. Pro-Russian tweets used insulting terms like "Ukronazi," while pro-

Ukrainian ones called Putin a "terrorist" or "war criminal." When Putin announced a partial mobilization in Russia, Latin American X users began to express pro-Ukrainian views more often and the level of polarization increased. Finland's ascension to NATO sparked more pro-Russian posts, but the number of neutral tweets also increased significantly. After the shelling of the pizzeria in Kramatorsk, Latin American X users were more likely to show pro-Russian views.

Despite fluctuations in the reactions, the researchers say the overall trend is a rise in support for Russia among Spanish-language X accounts - particularly those in Latin America. "Many would assume that it would be the opposite [...] with all the [Russian] atrocities and all the visuals," Senger said. Beyond charting the overall direction of public attitudes, Senger and

Basseches found that at the start of the war, the most ardently pro-Russian opinions came from Spain, not Latin America. Some of those posts were shared by prominent individuals, while others came from anonymous accounts. The researchers say that finding could indicate such opinions are more common in Spain or that Russian influence operations initially targeted Spain.

In November, the State Department's Global Engagement Center pushed a similar view. The center said it had found a well-financed disinformation campaign targeting the region. "[I]ncreasingly the Kremlin has realized that

they are not having much success in Europe, that they are not able to change government opinion and popular opinion about the Ukraine war," special envoy James P. Rubin, the center's coordinator, told journalists last month. According to Rubin, that has led Russia to look elsewhere, including Latin America and Africa.

Senger and Basseches also see signs of that effort. "Our findings demonstrate that Russian efforts to influence public discourse among Hispanics [...] intensified after the invasion began," their study states. "And that these efforts were successful."

VOA

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China’s diversified and deepened engagement with Africa

Mercy Tedeku

IN the dynamic landscape of Sino-African relations, the year 2024 is unfolding as a pivotal chapter, marked by the impending Ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in China. FOCAC 2024 signifies not only a renewed commitment to enhance collaboration between China and Africa but also a year of looking ahead, where the outcomes of various initiatives in the Africa-China space are expected to be reviewed and the way forward discussed.

Amid this pivotal event, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently concluded his first foreign trip of the year to Africa as part of the established tradition. Wang's visit marked the 34th consecutive year Africa has been the chosen destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit. His visits to Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire are of great diplomatic importance in the context of broader Africa-China engagement. Beyond the formal platforms of the FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative, the visits not only serve as a dynamic channel to deepen bilateral cooperation, address issues of mutual benefit and set the stage for a future characterized by strengthened diplomatic ties but also send a powerful signal regarding the future trajectory of Africa-China collaboration.

During Wang's latest visit to Africa, China's diplomatic relations with the four countries were reviewed, with the focus being on key areas such as the economy, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, education and culture. The China-Togo relationship, spanning over half a century, and the China-Tunisia relationship, which completes 60 years this year, were highlighted for their importance and for China's firm support and continuous enhancement of political mutual trust. As for

Wang's visit to Cote d'Ivoire, the emphasis was on the two countries' friendship and partnership for development, which are yielding some tangible, mutually beneficial results- notably, China's contribution to Cote d'Ivoire as it hosted and won the just-concluded 34th Africa Cup of Nations showcasing the diverse facets of collaboration.

Egypt, on the other hand, was congratulated for becoming a new member of BRICS from Jan 1. Wang's discussions in each of the four countries focused on strengthening economic ties and promoting development initiatives. Discussions revolved around increasing trade volumes, diversifying trade products and promoting investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture and the implementation of the Belt and Road projects with special, renewed emphasis on environmental sustainability.

The visits also showcased China's commitment to promote peace and stability in the African continent. Wang emphasized China's support for Africa-led initiatives and China's willingness to contribute to resolving regional conflicts. In Egypt, hotspot issues especially the Israel-Palestine conflict and its spillover effects on the region, the Red Sea turmoil, for example, were discussed, with the two sides asserting there is a need for an immediate cease-fire, in order to prevent the further escalation of the conflict. Wang emphasized that China supports African countries' efforts to safeguard their sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security. It also supports African countries in their quest for strength and to choose their respective development paths with African characteristics, so that they continue to develop further while maintaining their independence and stability.

The fact that Africa has been the chosen destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit for 34 consecutive years shows the importance China attaches to its diplomatic ties with African countries. The China-Africa friendship has withstood many challenges, is proud of its accomplishments and is looking forward to a promising future. It demonstrates China's commitment to maintain and deepen its relationship with the continent, highlighting the long-standing and enduring nature of their partnership.

Wang's annual tour to Africa not only reinforces the long-standing diplomatic relationship between China and African countries but also demonstrates China's dedication to further boost collaboration and cooperation with Africa. The visits therefore have significant implications for the future trajectory of Africa-China relations. Also, the emphasis on continuous enhancement of political mutual trust, as seen in the case of China and Togo, suggests a commitment to a stable and supportive political relationship. In fact, this trust is the foundation for deeper cooperation in various domains.

The commitment to advance pragmatic cooperation and opening up new prospects for bilateral relations, guided by the consensus reached by the heads of state, implies a forward-looking approach. Both China and Togo asserted they are committed to exploring new opportunities and adapting their collaboration to the changing circumstances, while China envisions greater collaboration in emerging fields such as green development, digitalization and healthcare. As Africa's economic and technological landscapes undergo transformation, China aims to support its partners in leveraging these opportunities to achieve sus-

tainable development.

China's engagement with the African countries is aimed at diversifying and deepening its partnerships on the continent. This strategy promotes inclusivity and allows for a more comprehensive and robust collaboration in various fields. By visiting countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, Wang has taken bilateral relations beyond traditional partnerships, which reflects China's intention to engage with a diverse range of African nations and highlights China's recognition of Africa's growing importance on the global stage and its desire to forge stronger relationships with a broader array of African states. That China has helped build three of the six soccer stadiums that hosted the just-concluded Africa Cup of Nations shows the diversification of collaboration and cooperation between China and African countries. China's engagement with African countries goes beyond the traditional areas to cover the cultural and sporting fields as well.

In conclusion, Wang's visits to Africa highlight China's commitment to deepen cooperation in key areas such as the economy, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, education and culture. It signifies a forward-looking approach, the enduring nature of diplomatic ties and a dedication to explore new opportunities. The result will be a strengthened partnership, deeper bilateral cooperation and a shared commitment to achieve development goals. The visits serve as not only a testament to the diplomatic relationship between China and African countries but also a proactive step toward shaping a future characterized by strengthened diplomatic ties, mutual benefit and shared prosperity.

The China Daily

Navalny’s difficult relationship with indigenous Russians

RUSSIA'S most prominent opposition politician, Alexei Navalny, was murdered in a Russian prison on Feb. 16. As Navalny's team, along with his family, prepares to bid farewell to the politician, the rest of the anti-war Russian-speaking world is mourning a man described as last departed hope for a free Russia.

The work of the Anti-Corruption Foundation has done untold things for Russian society. In the 2010s it sparked many peoples' political awakening, including my own. But now, in the aftermath of Navalny's death, he is becoming canonized on the Russian-language internet, the only place where Russians gather together regardless of whether they left the country or support the war. There seems to have never been an appropriate time to criticize Navalny's views, words, and actions. You could not do it in 2020, when he was poisoned. Then when he was imprisoned, he was still immune from criticism because he was a political prisoner. Now he is dead, this is more the case than ever.

Meanwhile, this text is not intended to criticize him, but to reflect on the complex and contradictory feelings that Navalny evokes among some representatives of Russia's decolonial movement. Navalny was assassinated by the Russian regime. But his legacy still lives on in Russian anti-war society. A decolonial agenda that thought about anyone other than ethnic Russians was never part of Navalny's plan, nor is it ever likely to be after his death. Now that his widow Yulia Navalnaya is officially continuing his cause, it is necessary to talk about it. Because Russia is not only made up of ethnic Russians.

For many of his supporters, Navalny's far-right, Russian-nationalist past is little more than an unfortunate blunder a youthful mistake, an unimportant page of history that can be easily skimmed over dismissing it as having happened years ago. This is not surprising, given that most white Russians still do not (or refuse to) realize the scale of the problem that prevailed in Russia in the noughties - the flourishing of far-right nationalist groups and mass violence against all non-white people (mainly people from the republics of the North and South Caucasus, Central Asia and Asian republics of Russia). For example, in 2008 alone, according to the Sovra research center and the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, over 600 people were recorded as victims of ethnic hatred, of which 116 were murders.

Russian society has not sufficiently reflected on this part of their country's modern history. No official mourning days have been introduced, nor have any systematic measures and practices to combat xenophobia and racism. Everything has been hushed up or politely omitted. For many years, racialized non-Russian people were afraid to take to the streets of major Russian cities on VDV Day, People's Unity Day, and Hitler's birthday. The fear was not unreasonable, as; running into neo-Nazi groups could result in death.

For many, unfortunately, it ended that way. We do not have complete statistics on the beatings and murders that were committed in those years, because non-ethnic Russians were afraid to turn to the same law enforcement, fearing they would discriminate against them as mercilessly as the thugs they are supposed to apprehend. In explaining his position on the Russian March, Navalny appealed to concerns surrounding migration. It also became one of the main points of his campaign for mayor of Moscow in 2013. The politician's right-wing populist rhetoric on this issue had by then changed little from his speeches in the NAROD video clubs.

Yes, his language became softer and more considered, but he still launched xenophobic attacks against non-white migrants, especially those from Central Asia and the North Caucasus republics. For example, Navalny promised to reduce the

Dankhayaa Khovalyg

number of migrants in the capital by 70% if he was elected. He repeatedly justified this by claiming that half of the serious and especially serious crimes in the country are allegedly committed by them (in reality, of course, this is speculation, not supported by any official statistics).

In addition to incriminating 50% of all serious crimes in Russia against migrants, Navalny invoked the threat of terrorism, saying "Immigrants to Russia are 90% young Muslim men from rural areas, the very environment from which terrorists are recruited." Without commenting now on the extent to which these data correspond to reality and their economic justification, I will try to explain why I personally find this migrant-phobic rhetoric absolutely unacceptable for a Russian public and political figure.

Russia is home to about 190 ethnic groups, many of whom are indigenous and non-white. Multiculturalism in the country is

nent members of the Russian opposition failed to provide solidarity and support to the victims of repression in Bashkortostan. The same goes for the Crimean Tatars, who make up 116 of the 182 political prisoners in annexed Crimea. Right now, Zarifa Sautieva from Ingushetia and Zarema Musaeva from Chechnya are in detention. The same goes for Altan Ochirov from Kalmykia, Natalia Filonova from Buryatia, Alsu Kurmasheva from Tatarstan, Alexander Gabyshev from Sakha (Yakutia), and many other activists who receive virtually no media coverage except from regional and decolonial activists.

Yulia Navalnaya has also equated paganism with Satanism, saying in 2024 "What Putin is doing is hatred. No, it's not even hatred, it's some kind of Satanism, paganism." For all my sorrow, sympathy, and empathy for Navalny's family, I cannot help but feel bitter at how the words of a person to whom so many gazes and micro-

Without commenting now on the extent to which these data correspond to reality and their economic justification, I will try to explain why I personally find this migrant-phobic rhetoric absolutely unacceptable for a Russian public and political figure. Russia is home to about 190 ethnic groups, many of whom are indigenous and non-white.

supported only on paper and at rare events where people dance in national costumes and politicians give speeches about "friendship of peoples." In reality, the level of racism and chauvinism in Russia is still dangerously high. This includes the elevation of Russians as "state forming people" in the Constitution, the stigmatization of national republics and marginalization of non-Russian nationalities in the media, apartments that are only rented to Slavs, widespread hate speech, the lack of representation of indigenous peoples in culture. Russian nationalist movements are legitimized, but any similar movement by a minority group is immediately branded extremist. Unfortunately, the list of examples could go on forever.

What does migrant-phobic policy have to do with non-Russian citizens of Russia? The fact is that the radicalization of anti-migrant sentiments and the pedaling of right-wing populist ideas directly affects our quality of life because for the majority of white people in Russia we are no different from migrants. In many ways, this is a logical consequence of all the above examples of ethnic discrimination against indigenous peoples. Therefore, the discriminatory attitude towards migrants from Central Asia and the South Caucasus is an attitude towards us, too. I do not cite here Navalny's derogatory comments about Georgians, as he officially apologized for them. That said, he did not recant his words of support for Moscow's actions in 2008.

The Russian regime committed the terrible crimes of Navalny's imprisonment and subsequent murder. It is just the latest of many that the Kremlin continues to commit against political prisoners every day for many years. In January 2024, mass peaceful protests took place in Bashkortostan in support of Fayil Alsynov, a Bashkortostan public figure and environmental activist who was sentenced to four years in prison for political reasons. Law enforcement officers used violence to disperse protesters and then began to identify and prosecute the participants of the rally. To date, more than 160 people have been involved in administrative and criminal cases. Two people suspected in the so-called Bashkir Case have already been killed - Rifat Dautov and Minniyar Baiguskarov. Dima Davletkildin, who is now in pre-trial detention, was severely beaten by law enforcers.

Unfortunately, promi-

phones are now - in tragic circumstances - pointed, adds to the stigmatization of non-ethnic Russians, most of whom follow a religion other than Orthodox Christianity. Many peoples of Russia practice shamanism, Tengrianism and other forms of polytheism, including traditional paganism. With the systemic racial and ethnic discrimination already in place in Russia, conflating hate with paganism (and any religion in general) is disturbing. Especially when one considers how many non-Orthodox peoples there are in the country, some of whose representatives continue to resist the regime and deserve more attention and support.

Navalny's promised "beautiful Russia of the future" mainly implied a Russia without Putin and corruption. However, Putin is not the only one to blame for the current situation in the country or the war. The aggressive dominance of so-called Russianness, dividing the country between true Russians and foreigners, believing some people to be more civilized than others, colonial extractivism, the protection of Russian people and culture, neglecting minorities in favor of the majority, everyday xenophobia, Islamophobia Russian imperialism so deeply embedded in the regime that it would persist without Putin. It lies at the root of both Russia's anti-democratic behavior and the military aggression unleashed against Ukraine.

Does the Russian opposition, which constantly appeals to the Russian people instead of Russians, denigrates minority religions, and ignores the concerns of its non-white citizens, share these views? No. Hopefully not yet. I also hope that Navalny's death will not lead to his canonization as a great martyr. Rather, I hope it will lead to more support for all political prisoners in Russia, and all anti-war Russian actors will band together on the grounds of increased repression. I hope people will consequently realize the necessity of listening to and working with each other, sharing institutional resources and platforms to amplify the voices of the oppressed, and thus truly democratize.

Otherwise, the "beautiful Russia of the future" may solve the problems of ethnic Russians living in central Russia, but it is unlikely to significantly improve the lives of indigenous peoples and people who live in the national republics. What is so beautiful about leaving so much of your country behind?

The Moscow Times

It is time to articulate a Muslim approach to justice and liberation

Shaykh M A Kholwadia

MILLIONS of non-Palestinians have marched through the streets of the Americas, Europe and other continents demonstrating against Israel's war on Gaza. Thousands of students throughout the world have also voiced their anger at the brutal occupation and mass killing. Recent outbursts of dissent against politicians at public events throughout the United States and other places also show the amount of disdain the world is feeling.

These voices and protests against the war have certainly changed global public opinion, and Israel has lost whatever semblance of a good image it previously had. And yet those who are in a position to stop the killing in Gaza remain stubbornly attached to the claim: "Israel has a right to defend itself." So what can or should be done to cause a major change or shift in policy? What can the Muslim community do for its part? Civic action and standing up against oppression are no doubt necessary to engage in. But they are short-term tactics and far from a comprehensive strategy.

What I propose is a serious look into a long-term approach towards liberation that is based on ayat (verses) of the Quran that give us, Muslims, clear guidance. The first important guidance to consider is that the Quran does not condone the art of the artist if it has no bearing on society and community affairs. Surah Ash-Shu'ara in verses 225-226 speaks about poets who

"wander in all valleys" of the imagination and "say what they do not do". In today's context, the equivalent of such poets or artists in general are the "ivory tower" academics, whose art and intellectual effort do not come to terms with reality and civic engagement.

The Quran makes an exception and "commends" those poets who believe, do good deeds and thus translate their art into real action. They also remember Allah plenty and thus live with the Real and seek vindication when the oppressed are wronged. The second guidance we find in the Quran is the idea of establishing and promoting academic engagement even in the face of civic struggle. Verse 122 at the end of Surah Taubah (9) says:

"It is not proper for believers to go out and fight (in the path of Allah) all together. If only a group from each group (stay behind) and exert themselves to understand the religion (through studying and research) so that they may advise their people (who go out and fight) as they return to them, so that they (the activists) may be well advised and take precautions."

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This is an obvious call for a dual duty of the Muslim community that reflects division of communal labour and activity. One department can be in charge of preserving peace and justice in the land, and the other can engage in learning and research - that is, writing, researching and formulating policy

through educational institutions, think tanks and NGOs. These researchers and academics would then advise policymakers and lawmakers to reform and change laws that are subject to ijihad and politics (siyasa). As we call for Muslims to join in direct action in the short term, the Quran calls us to fund and support academic and research institutions for the sake of Muslim longevity. This is a model that has yet to be tested and tried in our modern global community. But there is historical precedent for it.

The great Indian freedom fighter Mawlana Mahmud Hasan was imprisoned in Malta during World War I by the British for resisting their occupation in India. Yet while he was in prison, he continued engaging in his academic writings. Following his release after the war, he continued his revolutionary work at the Islamic Institute of Darul Uloom Deoband in both the political and intellectual realms, seeing them as mirror images of each other. Due to his work, he was honoured with the title "Shaykh al-Hind", a recognition for his incessant efforts at resisting British imperialism and oppression in the Indian subcontinent. The effects of his work, both in the realms of political activism and intellectual engagement are still felt today through the institutions and movements he was integral to. His followers did not see academic engagement as being entirely separate from direct action to liberate the oppressed.

Mawlana Mahmud Hasan's efforts were contextual to his time and the unique circumstances of early 20th century British imperialism. The modern sociopolitical context requires new efforts that are similarly rooted in authentically Islamic content. The secularised language of decolonisation has proven to be a failure at actual and total liberation. Even as colonised countries have thrown off the yoke of imperialism in name, much of the world remains economically, socially, and culturally within the grasp of imperial powers.

The need of the hour is to formulate new notions of sovereignty and articulate what an authentically Muslim form of justice would look like in the modern world. Muslims must not shy away from being creative in how they explore new possibilities of political and social theory at the local, national and international levels, even (and especially) in contrast to prevailing Western notions of modernity, sovereignty and justice. Muslim activism that is still rooted in the framework of Western imperial ideology and political theory is not sufficient. We must authentically articulate our approach on a theoretical and practical level. If modern Muslims are to once again lead the world community in resisting oppression and standing up for justice, there is no alternative to a twofold approach that recognises the political and the intellectual struggles that are necessary prerequisites to the manifestation of true liberation.

Similar tasks, similar goals

Yu Jiang

THE African Union joined the G20 in September 2023, making it the second regional organization - after the European Union - to be included in the grouping. At a summit in Ghana held in November 2023, delegates from the AU and Caribbean Community agreed to establish the Global Reparation Fund that seeks compensation owed to millions of Africans enslaved centuries ago during the transatlantic slave trade. This represents an effort by African countries to increase their say in international affairs, and throw off the yoke of Western oppression and control.

On Jan 1, 2024, the BRICS group officially included five new members, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, doubling the bloc's membership to 10 nations, a move that caters to the shared desire of emerging economies and developing countries, and follows the global trend toward multipolarity. Currently, there are three BRICS member countries from Africa, giving the continent greater weight in the group. The latest expansion of BRICS has ushered in a new era in the cooperation of Global South, and helps enhance the representation and voice of the Global South in international affairs and foster a more just and equitable global order.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the principles of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith and the principles of pursuing the greater good and shared interests. Adhering to these principles, China-Africa cooperation has yielded fruitful results over the past decade, serving as a prime example of a new

type of international relations. First, political mutual trust has been strengthened. At the 2015 Johannesburg summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Africa relationship was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Later in 2018, the two sides proposed to build a closer China-Africa community with a shared future. And at the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in 2021, the spirit of China-Africa friendly cooperation was encapsulated as "sincere friendship and equality, win-win for mutual benefit and common development, fairness and justice, and progress with the times and openness and inclusiveness".

Second, practical cooperation has been upgraded. In terms of trade cooperation, the China-Africa trade volume hit a record high of \$282.1 billion in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 1.5 percent. China has remained Africa's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years. During the first half of 2023, China's industry-wide direct investment in Africa reached \$1.82 billion, jumping 4.4 percent year-on-year, while the country's contract volume for new projects in Africa was \$28.4 billion, a growth of 7.64 percent. In the field of the digital economy, China and Africa have formulated and implemented a plan for digital innovation partnership to help Africa improve its digital infrastructure to harvest digital dividends by fostering the digital economy and developing digital education.

As the world is confronted with tough challenges, China is commit-

ted to building a multipolar world that is equal and orderly and a global economy that is inclusive and open. Standing at a new starting point, China and Africa have a promising prospect of building a community with a shared future. First, China's African policy closely integrates China's development with Africa's development. As the world undergoes profound shifts in the balance of power, the international community is attaching greater emphasis to Africa. To cozy up to Africa, some countries have made pie-in-the-sky promises; and in pursuit of their narrow self-interests are looking to turn Africa into a stage for major-power competition, forcibly impose their values on Africa and wantonly interfere in the internal affairs of African nations. China opposes hegemony and power politics, as well as the monopoly of a small number of countries over international affairs. China seeks multipolarity and believes that all countries, large or small, are equal, and that all nations, especially the vast number of African countries, can find their own places in a fairer global order.

Second, it is the shared pursuit of China and Africa to realize modernization. The two sides have produced impressive results in industrial and agricultural modernization since the Belt and Road Initiative was launched. Currently, Chinese people are marching toward the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects, and Africa is pushing ahead with its economic integration and modernization drive under the 2063 Agenda. China and

Africa support each other in exploring their respective modernization paths, and the two sides have similar goals and tasks. The success China has achieved in its modernization has prompted many African countries to "look to the East". In recent years, countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda have realized fast development by combining experiences from China with their own realities.

Third, China and Africa have extensive and profound common strategic interests. Against the background of the collective rise of the Global South, China and Africa are jointly pushing the building of a global order that is more fair and just and creating a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future. Safeguarding world stability and peace is in the fundamental interests of the vast number of developing countries. Africa is striving to end its conflicts and wars. China and Africa should jointly pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and push for the settlement of global and regional hotspot issues through dialogue. To solve the common challenges facing humanity, such as development deficits, security dilemmas, and mistrust among civilizations, China has proposed the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, and put forward the vision of building a human community with a shared future, gaining wide support from African countries. Going forward, China and Africa will cooperate more closely in tackling global challenges, building a fairer global governance system and a new type of international relations for a better future.



CKMA, LCCI discuss rate lists and quality control

LAHORE (APP): A Central Karyana Merchants Association Punjab (CKMA) delegation here Saturday visited the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) to discuss their issues including rate lists, hoarding and quality control.

The CKMA delegation led by its President Hafiz Arif Gujjar briefed LCCI President Kashif Anwar about the issues faced by Karyana merchants. Other members included General Secretary Sheikh Rizwan Shaukat, Chairman Sheikh Waqas, Senior Vice Chairman Mian Amir Shahzad, Vice Chairman Chaudhry Sajid Islam, Senior Vice President

Chaudhry Falak Sher and others.

The delegation members stated that the biggest issue for Karyana merchants is the rate list, which is arranged based on average rather than on the basis of superior quality and inferior quality rates. They emphasized that respective Deputy Commissioners of districts need to ensure accuracy and timely provision of rate lists.

The delegates mentioned that it is the manufacturers' responsibility, not the retailers, to apply stickers on perishable goods under Track and Trace System. Furthermore, retailers cannot ensure the quality stan-

dard as it is also the responsibility of the manufacturer. They stated that there is no mechanism in place for fixing prices in the country.

They claimed that CKMA Punjab has always cooperated with the government and has organized Ramadan and other bazaars from their own pocket. They urged the Punjab Chief Minister to address the issues of Karyana merchants.

The delegation suggested that at least two representatives of the Central Karyana Merchants Association Punjab should be included in the government's Price Control Committee (PCC). They

stated that instead of focusing on raids, FIRs, and penalties, other activities should be prioritized.

They said that the crackdown on traders should be stopped, asserting that instead of food authorities and other institutions, a centralized body should be established for Karyana merchants.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar assured that Lahore Chamber would raise the issues of Karyana merchants on every platform and make all possible efforts for their resolution. He said that Lahore Chamber has an open-door policy aimed at resolving members' issues quickly.



SARGODHA: Students visiting different stalls during Research Arena Exhibition.

Most serious challenge for new govt to tackle inflation: DFPA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Disposable Food Packaging Association (DFPA) Ahsan Shahid has said that the most serious challenge to the economy for the new government in the current fiscal year would be inflation, because it is already hitting economy due to continuous raise in oil prices and depreciation of local currency.

Ahsan Shahid warned the high cost of doing business has been hurting the economic growth, as the inflation rate bounced back to 32.2% in concluding month, hurting the trade and industry the most, who faced the brunt of a staggering 520% increase in gas prices.

Quoting the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, he said that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) surged to 29.2% last month compared to a year ago. The increase was more than market expectations and has lessened the prospects for a cut in the interest

rates, which stand at the country's highest ever level of 24%.

This reading, the first announced by the PBS after the recently concluded International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks, in which the global lender also cut the inflation forecast for Pakistan to 22.8%, may strengthen the IMF's view of keeping the policy rate unchanged until core inflation starts easing out when the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meets.

He predicted that inflation would remain high and may even increase further due to market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gap of essential items, exchange rate depreciation and recent upward adjustment of administered prices of petrol and diesel. The trader leader called for keeping check on government expenditure and high cost of debt servicing to contain budget deficit, as the Pakistan's federal budget deficit projection has been revised to history's highest to over Rs6 trillion,

highlighting the unending fiscal woes that have pushed the country into a debt trap despite putting additional burden of billions of rupees on industry in the current fiscal year.

Expressing serious concern over the high jump in country's budget deficit, he said the revision has been made in light of agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which exposed the massive underreporting of expenditures at the time of budget presentation by the finance ministry.

This is a highly unsustainable level and has already pushed the country into a situation where debt restructuring seems to be the only viable option. He maintained that the failure to reform the tax system and increase revenue collection is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government.

In view of the low level of available FX reserves, the debt management strategy of Pakistan may have to be revisited, to ensure

the stability of Pakistani rupee and restoration of international capital markets' confidence in the economy of Pakistan.

Ahsan Shahid expressed surprise at the impact of the gas price hike, stating that it has surpassed market expectations. His analysis suggests that PBS included fixed costs, such as meter rent, in the weekly inflation calculation in addition to the gas tariff hike.

The pace of inflation increased in urban areas while there was deceleration in rural areas, reported the PBS. The interim government has increased gas prices with effect from November 1st. Contrary to the claim of increasing prices up to 193%, the PBS report revealed that prices were jacked up as high as 520% for consumers.

The people's purchasing power has massively gone down, and the lenders-pushed energy policies to address fiscal issues through increasing prices have failed to yield the desired results.

Gold rates up by Rs.3,500

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.3,500 and was sold at Rs.220,300 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs.216,800 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.3,001 to Rs.188,872 from Rs.185,871 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.173,132 from Rs.170,382, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola silver increased by Rs.30 to Rs2,600 whereas that of ten ten gram Silver went up by Rs.25.72 to Rs.2,229.08.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$36 to \$2,103 from \$2,067, the Association reported.

Reconstruction likely complete by end-2025

ISTANBUL (APP): Infrastructure in Nagorno-Karabakh, a region Azerbaijan liberated from nearly 30 years of Armenian occupation in 2021, is expected to be completely rebuilt by the end of next year, according to the head of an investment bank based in Türkiye.

Major Turkish contractors are advancing rapidly in projects to rebuild the region's infrastructure, including roads, buildings, and waterlines, Cenk Eynehan, the CEO of Pasha Bank, told Anadolu.

In 1991, the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh (Upper Karabakh), internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory, and seven adjacent regions.

Pasha Bank was established in Istanbul in 1987 under the name Yatirim Bank as the country's first investment bank with foreign capital, operating under the management of different groups until 2015.

In 2015, the Baku-based Pasha Bank OJSC acquired a majority share of the lender and changed its name to Pasha. Eynehan said Türkiye has a remark-

Affordable power rates vital to attain sustainable industrial growth: Gohar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Car-taker Minister for Commerce Dr Gohar Ejaz on Saturday stressed the need for prioritizing industrial power rates for the local industrial sector to attain sustainable industrial growth as well as enhance the competitiveness of manufacturing sector of the country.

In a press statement, the minister underscored the significance of maintaining energy prices at 9 cents per unit for local industry, adding that it was essential for the survival of the

industrial sector, which was a source of job creation, export production, and import substitution.

The minister emphasized for prioritizing industrial growth to stimulate economic prosperity by enhancing exports and making the local manufacturing sector viable to achieve ambitious targets in global markets, including China, GCC countries, Africa, ASEAN, EU, UK and USA.

The provision of electricity at 9 cents per unit to industries aims to provide a

level playing field for local industries and enhance their competitiveness globally, he said adding that the proposal was also approved by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), reflecting the government's commitment to supporting industrial growth.

Gohar Ejaz expressed optimism that the new government would decide on the issue, enabling industries to operate more efficiently and contribute significantly to national economic prosperity.

Stocks end week at fresh records as Nvidia tops \$2tn

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks finished the week with a flourish Friday behind continued momentum for equities tied to artificial intelligence, especially Nvidia, which finished with a valuation above \$2 trillion for the first time.

Both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq ended at fresh all-time highs following records in Tokyo and Frankfurt.

"This week saw risk on sentiment take several global stock indices to record highs, the first day of March being no exception," said Axel Rudolph, senior market analyst at online trading platform IG.

David Morrison, senior market analyst at Trade Nation, said "market sentiment remains bullish, and there seems little appetite for profit-taking."

Stock markets have been on a march higher since late last year, initially on hopes that central banks will soon be able to begin lowering their high interest rates as inflation began to fall closer to normal levels.

While hotter-than-expected inflation data from recent months has pushed expectations for the first interest rate cut to mid-year,

markets have instead been propelled by stellar results from AI firms in recent weeks. Perhaps no company has benefited as much as Nvidia, which is led by Jensen Huang, who has developed technology perfectly suited for developing the large language models (LLMs) that underpin generative AI interfaces such as ChatGPT. Nvidia jumped four percent Friday to end the day with a valuation above \$2 trillion, joining an elite club that includes just Apple, Microsoft and Saudi Aramco. Also Friday, Dell Technologies became the latest big beneficiary of the AI fever, surging more than 31 percent following an earnings report that highlighted its growing AI business.

The tech-rich Nasdaq led the major US indices, rising 1.1 percent.

CFRA Research's Sam Stovall said the gains in New York were also supported by

weaker economic data, including the Institute for Supply Management survey of manufacturers and consumer confidence data as "indicating that there could be more reason" for the Fed to cut interest rates in May.

In Europe, Frankfurt's DAX set a new record while the CAC in Paris was also near its record high, with a less-than-expected drop in eurozone inflation failing to derail sentiment.

Meanwhile in Asia, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei index almost touched 40,000 points for the first time.

Asian markets mostly rose, with better-than-expected Chinese data helping sentiment.

"China's factory growth rising above forecasts even though manufacturing shrank for a fifth straight month did not dent investors' mood with the country's stock indices pursuing their recovery," said IG's Rudolph.

FRIA hopes new govt to ensure prudent utilization of public money

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association Lahore (FRIA) has said that in a bid to ensure prudent utilization of public money, the upcoming government should introduce an austerity plan that included ban on purchase of all vehicles and ban on purchase of machinery and equipment.

Fria senior vice chairman Shahbaz Aslam said that there shall be a complete ban on purchase of all vehicles except ambulances, buses for educational institutions, solid waste vehicles, tractors, fire fighting vehicles, motor bikes; and there shall be ban on creation of new posts under PSDP/current budget during Financial Year 2023-24.

The government's austerity measure needed at the time when the country's budget deficit was increasing. The consolidated fiscal deficit has been recorded at 2.3 percent of GDP (Rs2407.8 billion) in first six months (July-December) of the current fiscal year FY2024 against 2.0 percent of GDP (Rs.1683.5 billion) last year. While a primary surplus witnessed a continuous improvement due to contained growth in non-mark-up spending relative to markup payments. Primary

surplus improved to Rs.1812.2 billion (1.7 percent of GDP) during Jul-Dec FY2024 from the surplus of Rs.889.6 billion (1.1 percent of GDP last year.

Total expenditures grew by 45 percent to Rs.9261.8 billion during Jul-Dec FY2024 against Rs.6382.4 billion last year. Within total, current spending increased by 41 percent mainly due to a 64 percent rise in markup payments during the first six months of the current fiscal year, according to the latest data of the ministry of finance.

Shahbaz Aslam called for keeping check on government expenditure and high cost of debt servicing, as the federal government debt has surged to a staggering Rs64 trillion, reflecting an alarming increase of over 29 percent

in just one year. He said that this unsettling trend has raised concerns about fiscal sustainability and the adverse impacts of steep currency devaluation come at a time when the World Bank has cautioned Pakistan about the growing risks of its macro-economic framework.

Quoting the State Bank of Pakistan report, he said that the federal government's debt has soared by Rs14.5 trillion, constituting a substantial 29.2 percent rise compared to the same period last year.

This rapid escalation in debt is widely seen as unsustainable, yet corrective measures to curb this alarming trajectory have not been implemented. The PIAF chairman said that the debt burden is gradually increasing because of insufficient tax revenue collec-

tion that forced the government to borrow from the domestic and external resources to finance the soaring fiscal deficit.

For the past one and half year, the country is facing a serious financial crunch and continually relying on borrowing to meet its financial needs.

The growing debt stock carries significant fiscal costs and exposes the country to debt vulnerabilities, as highlighted in the Pakistan Development Update report by the World Bank. He also emphasised that persistent fiscal deficits and debt repayments have resulted in consistently high annual gross financing needs, averaging 27 percent of GDP over the past decade. This level is notably higher than the emerging market threshold of 15 percent.

Spirit Aerosystems shares surge on possible Boeing buy

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Shares of Spirit AeroSystems surged Friday on news Boeing is in talks to potentially acquire the supplier as the aviation giant seeks to right itself amid its latest safety crisis.

Spirit finished Friday's session up more than 15 percent following a Wall Street Journal report that it hired bankers and was holding preliminary talks to be bought by Boeing.

Boeing confirmed the report after the stock market closed, describing the discussions as "preliminary," while adding that there was "no assurance" a deal would be completed.

"We believe that the reintegration of Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems' manufacturing operations would further strengthen aviation safety, improve quality and serve the interests of our customers, employees, and shareholders," said a statement from Boeing, which ended Friday's session down 1.8 percent.

Spirit, which manufactures fuselages and other large aerostructures, also confirmed the talks, echoing the caveat that there are

"no assurances" of a deal.

"The Spirit Board of Directors and management team are committed to enhancing shareholder value and regularly review the Company's opportunities to further this objective," Spirit said.

A deal would return Wichita, Kansas-based Spirit to Boeing after the larger company spun it off in 2005. The talks come as Boeing faces intensified scrutiny from Washington after a January 5 incident on an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX that experienced a panel blowout on the fuselage mid-flight.

A preliminary US investigation found that four bolts, which help secure the panel, were missing. The probe has pointed at Boeing's activities in Renton, Washington, where the plane was assembled. But Boeing over the last year also disclosed manufacturing and quality control problems at Spirit, which in October replaced its chief executive.

The Federal Aviation Administration on Wednesday gave Boeing 90 days to come up with a plan to address quality control

issues.

On January 31, Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun told CNBC that Boeing had sent a "huge team" to work with staff at Spirit. Calhoun acknowledged that the company's earlier moves to rejigger its supply chain processes such as the sale of Spirit probably "went too far."

But "it's here and now," Calhoun told the network. "And now I've got to deal with it. And we're going to do it with engineers and mechanics working constructively together."

Boeing originally divested the Wichita assets to Canadian private equity firm Onex in February 2005. The company went public as Spirit AeroSystems in November 2006.

Alan Mulally, who was Boeing's CEO at the time, described the move as allowing Boeing to focus on plane assembly, "which is where we are most competitive and can add the most value to our airplanes and services," he said, adding that an independent Wichita operation would lead to lower procurement costs for Boeing.

China listed 3,617 companies

BEIJING (APP): There were 3,617 manufacturing companies listed on China's stock market by the end of January, according to the China Association for Public Companies.

Manufacturing companies accounted for 67.5 percent of all 5,358 companies listed on the domestic stock market, the association said. The vast majority of companies in China focused mainly on manufacturing, information transmission, software, and information technology services, as well as wholesale and retail.

There were 2,268, 2,847 and 243 companies respectively listed on the country's Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Beijing stock exchanges, according to data from the association.

Pakistan's export of sports products to China increased

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan's exports of sports products such as football, basketball and volleyball to China registered 31 percent increase last year due to growing demand, Ghulam Qadir, Commercial Counsellor at Pakistani Embassy in Beijing. This growth trend underscores the quality and competitiveness of Pakistan's sports products in the global market, particularly in the realm of athletic equipment, he said in an interview. He said, the increase in sports products also indicates potential opportunities for further expansion and collaboration between Pakistan and China in this sector. "The city of Sialkot having a storied history as a hub for sports manufacturing, is recognized for supplying official match balls for prestigious global soccer tournaments. Pakistan's basketball, football, and volleyball export to China in 2023 crossed \$ 11.93 million whereas last year in the same period (January-December) it was only \$ 9.13 million.

Court Notice

In the court of Kaleem Ullah Civil Judge-II Malakand at Bathkela, Case No 95/1 of 2020, Next date: 08/03/2024. Mr. Qazi Naeem ud Din Versus Mr. Alamgir Proclamation Against Legal heirs: (1/1) Jehangir Khan (1/5) Gohar Zaib (1/6) Bakht Shah Zeb Sons of Alamzeb resident of Mohallah Akbar Abad Bathkela District Malakand. In the above title case the service of you above named defendants is not possible with ordinary means, hence you are hereby informed through this proclamation to attend this court on 08/03/2024 at 08:00am in person or through appointed agent/attorney or through counsel, otherwise you shall be place and proceed against ex-parte.



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Postal Address: Base Education Squadron, PAF Base, Peshawar

Email Address: baseedusqn@gmail.com





In brief

National U19 footballer killed

SWABI (APP): Famous footballer of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, former member of the Pakistan Football U-19 team, and player of Pakistan Air Force (Islamabad), Farhan Khan died after being hit by an unknown vehicle on Swabi-Jehangira Road. Farhan Khan was transferred to District Hospital Swabi and later to CMH Hospital Rawalpindi, from where he was later transferred to Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the early hours of Saturday. He succumbed to head injuries in CMH Rawalpindi. The deceased was a great footballer and was selected for the National U19 team. He was the cousin of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's well-known footballer and coach Wasim Dada. Meanwhile, people have announced a walk on March 5th at Aman Chowk to demand the arrest of the hitter.

PFF condoles death of Farhan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) has extended its sincerest condolences following the tragic passing of Farhan Khan, a player of the Pakistan U-19 football team. The FIFA Normalisation Committee was extremely saddened by the unfortunate news of the demise of a Pakistan football team player who has left the whole football fraternity of Pakistan aghast. The football family would always remember his contribution to this beautiful game. Farhan was a part of the U-19 team that competed in the AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers held in Oman in 2019.

Tentoglou retains title

GLASGOW (AFP): Greece's Miltiadis Tentoglou retained his world indoor long jump title in Glasgow on Saturday as American Grant Holloway moved smoothly into the semi-finals of the 60m hurdles. Tentoglou, the reigning Olympic, world and European champion, leaped a best of 8.22 metres on his first effort. Italy's Mattia Furlani, 19, claimed silver with the same mark, Jamaican Carey McLeod taking bronze with 8.21m. Tentoglou, however, was less than impressed by a final held in a morning session at the Emirates Arena. "This result does not mean anything to me. I did not like the competition today, it was really bad for me. I jumped terrible. The morning final was like a 'dog shit'," the Greek said. "It was very close. I hope everyone had some fun today, at least it was exciting in the end." Tentoglou also laid into proposals by World Athletics to trial a "take-off zone" in the long jump in a bid to eliminate foul jumps. Currently, long jumpers have to launch themselves into the pit from behind a set wooden board. One spike over such board results in a foul jump being called. The new proposal would see all jumps counting, with the distance measured from the take-off point within the given zone and landing point. "I consider long jump to be one of the hardest events because of the board and the accuracy you need," Tentoglou said. "You need to run like a sprinter, to hit the board perfectly - this is the difficult part of the long jump. The jump itself is easy. The hard part is the run up. So if they want to remove this, the long jump would be the easiest event. If that happens, I will not do long jump anymore. I will be a triple jumper."

United, Gladiators fixture called-off as rain washes opening day of Pindi-leg

ISLAMABAD (APP): The opening day of the Pindi-leg of HBL PSL 9 has been washed out after the Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators fixture, the 18th match of the tournament, was called off as well followed by the abandonment of the Lahore Qalandars vs Peshawar Zalmi game, at Pindi Cricket Stadium on Saturday.

The two teams, Quetta Gladiators and Islamabad United, placed in second and fourth spot on the points table respectively, bagged one point each after the second game of

the double-header was called off an hour before the scheduled start of play due to rain.

Karachi Kings would face table-toppers Multan Sultans on Sunday at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi while the HBL PSL 9 action will return to Rawalpindi on March 4 as home team Islamabad United taking on Peshawar Zalmi.

Qalandars, Zalmi share one point each as game called off due to rain: The 17th match of the HBL Pakistan Super League 9 between Peshawar Zalmi and

Lahore Qalandars was called off due to persistent rain and a wet outfield at the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi on Saturday.

The Pindi-leg of the PSL was scheduled to kick off with a double-header on Saturday, of which the first game saw Zalmi, placed third on the table, and Qalandars placed sixth on the table, sharing a point each.

The second game of the day was set to take place between home team Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators. The first ball was expected to be bowled at 7 pm.

Engro National U20 Volleyball C'hip, KP, Punjab, AJK record wins

PESHAWAR (APP): Teams from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Azad Jammu Kashmir recorded victories against their respective rivals in the ongoing Engro National Under-20 Junior Volleyball Championship being played here at the indoor hall of the PSB Coaching Center on Saturday.

On this occasion, Secretary General of Pakistan Volleyball Federation Shah Naem Zafar was the special guest along with Organizing Secretary and Secretary KP Volleyball Association Khalid Waqar Chamkani, Secretary

Punjab MB Javed, Secretary Sindh Shahid Masood, Secretary AJK Sardar Farooq and other officials were present.

It was played between Punjab Green and Islamabad, in which Punjab Green won by 3-0, the score was 25-9, 25-16 and 25-6. In the second match, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa White

defeated Sindh by 3-0, the score was 25-9, 25-13 and 25-19 and in the third match, Azad Jammu and Kashmir defeated Gilgit Baltistan by 3-0, the score was 25-14, 25-18 and 25-17. Before that, in the last two matches played on Friday night, Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa Green defeated Gilgit-Baltistan by 3-0, the score was 25-19, 25-21 and 25-18 while the Pakistan Sports Board defeated Islamabad by 3-0, the score was 25-17, 25-20 and 25-21. A total of 12 teams from across the country are participating in the Championship.

Three more matches will be played on Sunday in the Championship, in which the first match will be played between Pakistan Wapda and Sindh, the second match Balochistan and Punjab White, while in the third match, the teams of Pakistan Board and Punjab Green will compete.

Liverpool strike late to beat Forest, Spurs fight back to close on top four



MANCHESTER (AFP): Darwin Nunez headed in a 99th-minute winner as injury-hit Liverpool moved four points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 1-0 win at Nottingham Forest, while Tottenham came from behind late on to beat Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Liverpool's resources have been stretched to the limit by a series of injuries in recent weeks as they attempt to win a quadruple in Jurgen Klopp's final season.

The Reds were again without a host of star names including Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Alisson Becker and Diogo Jota.

But there was some light at the end of the tunnel with Nunez and Dominik Szoboszlai making their return as second-half substitutes.

The Uruguayan made the telling impact with virtually the last touch of the game as Nunez rose highest to flick home Alexis Mac Allister's cross.

Victory pulls Klopp's men clear of Manchester City, who face Manchester United on Sunday, and five points clear of Arsenal before they travel to Sheffield United on Monday.

Defeat leaves Forest still just four points

above the relegation zone and with the threat of a points deduction for breaches of financial rules still hanging over the club.

Son strikes for Spurs Tottenham have made a habit of late fightbacks at home under Ange Postecoglou and needed another one to inflict Oliver Glasner's first defeat as Palace boss with a 3-1 win.

Eberechi Eze's stunning free-kick gave the Eagles a shock lead on the hour mark.

Timo Werner's first Spurs goal set up the grandstand finish when he tapped home Brennan Johnson's low cross.

Cristian Romero then headed Tottenham in front before Son Heung-min sprinted clear to seal the three points.

Victory takes Spurs to within two points of fourth-placed Aston Villa, who are in action later away to Luton.

Brentford came from behind to pile more pressure on under-fire Chelsea boss Mauricio Pochettino in a 2-2 draw.

Nicolas Jackson's towering header powered the Blues into an early lead.

But Brentford are now five games unbeaten against their wealthier west London rivals.

Mads Roerslev levelled early in the second half before Yoane Wissa's

stunning overhead kick put the Bees in front.

A header from Axel Disasi saved Chelsea's blushes to salvage a point but they remain in the bottom half of the table.

Newcastle kept their quest for Europe alive with their first home win for nearly three months to climb up to eighth.

The Magpies beat Wolves 3-0 to leapfrog their opponents in the table thanks to goals from Alexander Isak, Anthony Gordon and Tino Livramento.

Brighton are falling further away from the fight for Europe next season after the Seagulls were soundly beaten 3-0 at Fulham.

Harry Wilson, Rodrigo Muniz and Adama Traore struck for the Cottagers to extend Brighton's barren run to three wins in 12 league games.

Everton remain in a relegation dogfight despite having a 10-point deduction reduced to six this week.

Beto missed a first-half penalty before putting the Toffees in front against West Ham.

But the Hammers came back to win 3-1 thanks to goals from Kurt Zouma, Tomas Soucek and Edson Alvarez.

David Moyes' men move up to seventh and within just two points of the top six.



RAWALPINDI: Staffers busy covered pitch due to rain during PSL-9 at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Pacer Hasan Ali confident of defeating Multan Sultans

KARACHI (APP): Karachi Kings' fast bowler Hasan Ali expressed optimism about his team defeating table-toppers Multan Sultans in their HBL PSL 9 clash on March 03, tomorrow.

While talking to the media persons during the Karachi Kings' practice session, reflected on his team's performance in the tournament so far.

"We played good cricket overall. Although we lost two matches, those were close matches and it is positive that we fought hard in those games," said the fast bowler.

"Multan Sultans is a good team and they are on the top of the table. But, our team is motivated and we are looking forward to defeating them tomorrow," he added.

Hasan Ali also shared an update about the players of Karachi Kings, who fell ill due to a viral infection.

"Unfortunately, some of our players were unwell due to the viral infection, but the good news is that they are all fine now and some of them also took part in the practice session," he stated.

The seasoned pace bowler also opened up about his personal goals and his desire to make a return to Pakistan's T20I team.

"I want to represent Pakistan in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024.

This is an important tournament for me to get there," the 29-year-old pacer said.

"I want to get the selector's attention with my performance in this tournament and make a return to the national T20I team for the upcoming T20 series as well as the World Cup."

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Master/Diamond Paints beat BN polo in cliffhanger

LAHORE (APP): Master Paints/Diamond Paints overcame BN Polo 8-7 in a cliffhanger in the 3rd President of Pakistan National Open Polo Championship 2024 at the scenic Jinnah Polo Fields here on Saturday. The match timings had to be adjusted due to rain.

The duo of Amirreza Bebboudi and Juan Zubiaurre led the charge for Master Paints/Diamond Paints, netting three goals each, with Raja Temur Nadeem contributing a crucial brace.

On the opposing side, BN Polo's Santiago Loza showcased his prowess with four goals, and Hilario

Ruiz hammered a hat-trick.

The competition was fierce from the start, but Master Paints/Diamond Paints edged ahead with a 3-2 lead in the first chukker.

They widened the gap to 5-3 by halftime, courtesy of an additional two goals in the second chukker against BN Polo's single goal.

The third chukker saw an evenly matched game, with both teams netting two goals each, leaving Master Paints/Diamond Paints ahead at 7-5.

A tense fourth chukker passed without any goals, setting the stage for a nail-biting finish in the fifth.

Master Paints/Diamond

Paints managed to extend their lead to 8-5, but BN Polo fought back valiantly, scoring two consecutive goals to narrow the gap to 7-8. Despite their efforts, BN Polo fell short of equalizing, handing Master Paints/Diamond Paints a hard-fought victory.

A large number of families and enthusiasts turned up to watch high-quality polo under delightful weather conditions.

Field umpires Nico Scortichini and Mark John Holmes supervised the closely contested match. DS Polo will face FG Polo in a top-tier polo competition on Sunday.

Pak players return after featuring in Fajr Open, World Taekwondo President's Asia Cup

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani players returned home on Saturday after participating in the 33rd Fajr Open and World Taekwondo President's Asia Cup played at Tehran, Iran.

Pakistani players Haroon Khan, Hamza Saeed, Mazhar Abbas, Shahzaib Khan, Arbaz Khan and Ikhteshamul Haq landed at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport.

Taekwondo Federation Executive Member Zubair Macha and other officials welcomed the national team with garlands and bouquets on their arrival at the airport.

Hamza Saeed, who won the gold medal for Pakistan in the +87kg category of the Fajr Open Taekwondo

Championship, said during the championship, it was a tough competition by the opponent players, especially the Iranian players gave a tough time, but thanks to our head coach Yusuf Karami's hard work and guidance in the training sessions, Almighty Allah gave me success and a victory.

"My next target for the Paris Olympics is to reach the victory stand in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers to be held in China this March and the Asian Taekwondo Championship in Vietnam in May, for which I will pay more attention to my training to further hone my skills, he said.

It may be mentioned that Hamza Saeed was declared best player of the Fajr Open

Championship and won the bronze medal in the President's Asia Cup.

Shahzeeb Khan, who won the bronze medal in the -54 kg category in the World Taekwondo President's Asia Cup, said he regretted not winning a gold medal. In the final, there was very tough competition between Bektor and Lakhanyu of Kazakhstan, unfortunately, he lost the fight.

Meanwhile, President of the Pakistan Taekwondo Federation Col. (R) Waseem Janjua, and CEO Omar Saeed expressed satisfaction over the team's performance at Iran and hoped for better results from the players in the upcoming events.

Verstappen cruises to season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix win

SAKHIR (AFP): Max Verstappen won Saturday's season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix to give Red Bull a timely boost after a trying week for the world champions and team principal Christian Horner.

Verstappen shut out all the off-track speculation surrounding the Horner inquiry to lead home Sergio Perez for a crushing Red Bull 1-2. Pole sitter Verstappen held off the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc to lead into the first corner, and it was business as usual for the Dutchman from there to the flag as he enjoyed the perfect start to his quest for a fourth consecutive world title.

In a statement of emphatic superiority, the 26-year-old Dutchman came home 22.5 seconds clear of Perez, who started from fifth, to ease some of the pressure on Horner and repeat his statement triumph last year.

By claiming the 33rd pole of his career, fastest lap and race win, Verstappen delivered the 12th 'hat-trick' of his career leaving only the seven-time champions Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton ahead on 22 and 19 trebles respectively.

"That was simply lovely," Horner told his ace driver. "To get pole, fastest lap, and a 1-2, a brilliant start to the year, thank you very much."

It was Verstappen's 55th race victory and 99th podium finish as Red Bull dominated an uneventful race on a cold evening at Sakhr's Bahrain International Circuit. It also extended his run as championship leader to 40 races since the 2022 Spanish Grand Prix.

Carlos Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year,



finished a pugnacious third ahead of team-mate Leclerc, who profited from a rare error by Mercedes' George Russell in the closing laps.

Russell finished fifth ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, Hamilton in the second Mercedes, Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren and the Aston Martin duo two-time champion Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll.

Horner show of unity After days of speculation, Red Bull boss Horner arrived hand in hand with his wife, former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell – a show of unity following the release on Thursday of a cache of alleged messages from him to a female member of staff.

On track, the team showed no apparent distraction as Verstappen topped qualifying to secure his 33rd pole position – and lead the pack when the lights went out in cold, dry conditions in the desert.

The Dutchman made a clean start and led Leclerc, Russell and Perez through Turn One while Stroll spun and dropped to the back of the field after contact with Hulkenberg, who pitted for a new front wing and hard

tyres. The entire field started on softs. On lap three, Russell passed Leclerc on the outside of Turn Four to take second and Norris seized sixth from Alonso, but Verstappen stretched his lead to two seconds.

By lap six, it was 4.8 seconds and clear that the Red Bull were in a race of their own. Perez endorsed this as he swept past Leclerc inside turn 11 for second on lap seven.

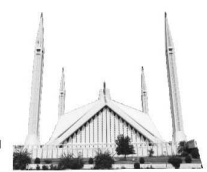
Hamilton, ninth, appeared to be stuck behind Alonso before squeezing through on lap 10, as Verstappen stretched his lead to 6.9 seconds.

The pit-stops began on lap 11 with Russell and Leclerc, with brake problems, going first of the leading group, re-joining 12th and 14th. Perez and Hamilton soon followed, all going for hards. When Verstappen finally pitted he had built up a 31 second lead.

For Horner and Red Bull, it was as good as it gets, the Dutchman in command by seven seconds ahead of team-mate Perez and the feisty Sainz with Russell fourth after the first round of stops. Crisis? What crisis?

For Mercedes, problems were piling up – overheating engines, power-unit issues and then, for Hamilton, a broken seat, with 28 laps remaining while Alex Albon's Williams flashed a message "car too hot".

Verstappen came in for a final set of new softs at the end of lap 37 and re-joined with a 17-second cushion ahead of Perez. It was a commanding performance from the champion, decorated with a fastest lap of 1:32.608 as he cruised through the final 16 laps: a lap that was fully 1.5 seconds quicker than any other.



In brief

Artists vital for promoting culture

RAWALPINDI (APP): President Management Board of Punjab Arts Council (PAC) Saqib Rafique on Saturday said that actors are the assets of the country and play leading roles in promoting the country's culture. He said this while distributing the prizes among the first, second and third winning teams on the occasion of the theater competition of the Rawalpindi Division at the first Punjab Theater Competition under the auspices of the Department of Information and Culture, Punjab. Saqib said that artists also provided entertainment to the people and were the soft image of the country. Deputy Director PAC Muhammad Shakoor on the occasion said that the divisional and provincial competitions of the first Punjab Theater Talent Hunt was an important achievement of the Punjab government. Shazia Theater Group, Patan Lok Natak, Royal Theatre, Rawalpindi Cultural Theatre, Dolphin Communication, NCDF Pakistan, Abbasi Culture Theatre and Green Channel Theatre Group took part in the competition and received great appreciation from the people by giving excellent performances. Ifat Chaudhry, Afzal Chahal and Shakeel Adnan were the panel of judges. Provincial Theater Competition will be held on March 9, 2024 in Lahore in which the team that attained the first position from each division would be able to participate.

77,000 kites confiscated

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested 950 kite sellers, kite flyers and recovered from them more than 77,000 kites and 1300 strings from their possession during this year. According to police spokesman, during the raids, police have also recovered 04 rifles, 23 pistols and 06 loud-speakers from their custody. City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani commended police teams for their effective crackdown against kite sellers and kite flyers. The police were better able to prevent kite flying, he said and urged the parents and the society to exhibit the responsibility and discourage bloody sports and illegal activities like kite flying. The accused involved in kite flying and kite selling will not escape from the grip of the law, he added.

Rescue 1122 averts tragedy

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rescue 1122 averted a major tragedy when a water tanker hit electric poles and gas pipeline in Gulzar-e-Quaid area here Saturday. According to the Rescue 1122 spokesman, the incident took place when a water tanker hit electric poles of high transmission line and putted the naked wires down on the road. The tanker hit the gas pipeline which resulted in gas leakage. According to details, fire broke out in the gas pipeline which was timely extinguished by Rescue 1122 firefighters and prevented it from further spreading. The area was saved by the timely action of the Rescue personnel. Initially no casualty was reported. The Rescue personnel cordoned off the area. Power and gas departments were also informed.



ISLAMABAD: Managing Director Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Syed Tariq Mahmood-Ul-Hassan called upon H.E. Hamid Abbas Lafta, Ambassador Republic of Iraq in Pakistan. —APP Photo

ANF recovers over 1540 kg drugs in seven operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover over 1540 kg drugs and arrested six accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday.

He informed that 1150 kg hashish was recovered from Qilla Abdullah while 170 kg hashish was recovered near Saryab Road

Quetta and an accused was arrested.

In third operation conducted near Coastal Highway near Gwadar, 105 kg hashish was recovered.

72 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded-up near Super Highway Karachi.

38 kg heroin was recovered from Kuchlak bypass Quetta area and 2 kg hashish, 1 kg opium and 1

kg Ice drug were recovered from the possession of 2 accused including a woman arrested from University Road Peshawar area.

In seventh operation, 1 kg Ice drug was recovered from the possession of an accused netted from Pirwadhai Mor, Rawalpindi.

Separate cases under Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

Death anniversary of Nasir Kazmi observed

ISLAMABAD (APP): The death anniversary of the pioneer of modern Urdu ghazal Nasir Kazmi being observed on Saturday.

Born in Ambala, India, he began his education at Muslim High School Ambala but had to discontinue his studies due to the partition unrest. He was born in Ambala, India. He passed his matriculation examination from Muslim High School Ambala and got admission in Government College Lahore for bachelor degree but he had to leave education due to the unrest witnessed during the partition of the sub-continent.

Nasir Kazmi worked in Welfare Department for some time and then in the Agriculture Department. He remained associated with Radio Pakistan. During his radio career, Nasir Kazmi wrote sketches of classical Urdu poets Mir Taqi Mir, Nazir, Wali, Insha and so on, which became very popular.

His first poetry collection was 'Barg-e-Nay'. Afterwards, his two more collections 'Dewaan' and 'Pahli Barish' were published. 'Khawab-e-Nishat' is a collection of his poems.

Besides being a poet, he was also a good prose writer. He also wrote a drama series 'Sur Ki Chhaya'. Nasir Kazmi was died on this day in 1972 in Lahore and buried in Mominpura graveyard.

12 stolen motorcycles recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two separate gangs involved in motorcycle theft and recovered 12 stolen motorcycles and Rs 10,000 from their possession during operation here on Saturday. According to police spokesman, the Cantt Police held 03 accused for motorcycle theft identified as Samiullah, Osama and Zubair and recovered 09 motorcycles and Rs 10,000 from their custody. Similarly, Taxila police recovered 03 stolen motorcycles from 02 accused namely Javed and Bagh Din. SP Potohar Nasir Nawaz appreciated the performance of police teams and said that the arrested accused would be brought to justice with solid evidence and would be punished. Those who attack the life and property of the citizens cannot escape from the grip of the law, he added.

Charter of economy is inevitable: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Atta Ullah Tarar said on Saturday that charter of the economy was inevitable in order to get the country and the nation back on track.

Talking to a private

news channel, he said that political leaders should look forward without getting stalled in settling political scores.

Tarar took a jibe at the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying, "They [PTI] want to derail the democracy in the country."

"Under which capacity had the letter been penned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?", he questioned.

Tarar urged politicians from all parties to set aside their differences and join hands for the betterment of the nation.

NHA restores traffic on rain affected highways

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highway Authority (NHA) on Saturday restored traffic on several affected highways during heavy rains.

According to NHA spokesperson, instructions have been issued to the staff to be alert all the time to deal with any kind of situation.

Necessary machinery and personnel have been deployed at various places to maintain important national highways and connecting roads.

Full support from NHA National Disaster Management Authority, Provincial Disaster Management Authority, FWO and other national and regional institutions have been on the go.

A central control room has been established at

NHA headquarters to monitor time to time situation during rains.

Caretaker Minister for Communications Shahid Ashraf Tarar, Chairman NHA Arshad Majeed Mohmand and all zonal members were engaged in self-monitoring of traffic restoration and timely repair and construction activities of the affected highways.

The national highways that have been opened for emergency traffic include Kuchlak Dana Sir Road (N-50), Quetta-Chaman (N-25), Saifullah Fort-Loralai (N-70), Luck Pass, Nushki-Nokundi (N-40), Quetta-Sibi Jacobabad (N-65), Karachi-Khuzdar Quetta (N-25), Gwadar-Khuzdar.

All highways from Khuzdar Wagbo M-8, Coastal Highway N-10, Karachi to

Gwadar have been restored to traffic. However, the movement of large heavy vehicles was currently blocked on at Zhob-Dhana Sar (N-50).

Similarly, the Gwadar-Gabad highway (Iran border) has been closed due to construction and repair issues, while due to heavy snowfall and landslides, Sazin highway RD 352, RD 326, RD 311 and RD 240 + 300 were closed on both sides.

It may be mentioned that the national highways of Balochistan and northern regions have been affected due to recent heavy rains and snowfall.

Meanwhile, the NHA staff was busy in the rehabilitation works and relief activities are underway with support of all related departments.

Dr Fai urges int'l focus on occupied Kashmir's reality

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the New York based Kashmir International Awareness Campaign, Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai, emphasized a renewed effort to spotlight the facts, figures and ongoing situation in Jammu and Kashmir worldwide, with the goal of bolstering international opinion.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Fai highlighted that cross-opinion digital media seminars on Kashmir are a key component of the Kashmir

Awareness Campaign.

The "Kashmir and the Global Conscious" seminar will be held at the Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad's Nasr Chamber in E-11/3 Islamabad on March 7, 2024.

This hybrid international seminar will specifically highlight the historical and current aspects of the holistic dispute in Jammu and Kashmir, with a particular emphasis on the significant contributions made by the late Dr. Ayub Thakur.

Dr. Thakur played a prominent role in reiterating the Kashmir dispute's importance, both within the South Asian region and internationally, including in Europe and the USA.

Dr. Fai remarked that the extremism exhibited by the Modi government in different manifestations in Jammu and Kashmir would inevitably have repercussions, as the realities of Kashmir as a region and its significance in global history cannot be erased.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive view of thick clouds hovering over the skies of Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Tourists urged to get weather updates before visiting Murree

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Murree district administration on Saturday urged the tourists to get weather updates and traffic-related information prior to traveling to Murree and also

advised the tourists to take all due precautions in Murree, Galiyat and surrounding areas.

According to a Murree district administration spokesman, the administration on the special directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Murree had finalized all arrangements to facilitate the tourists. The tourists were being given information about weather updates and travel advisories at all entry points of Murree, he added.

The tourists had also been requested to follow the instructions being given at the entry points, he said adding that strict action was also being taken against parking rules violators.

Murree District Administration had set up a special control room to facilitate the people, particularly tourists, he added.

The control room was working round the clock under the supervision of senior officers. In case of any difficulty, the tourists could get help and guidance from the tourist facilitation centers. The citizens were also advised to follow the traffic rules to ensure the flow of traffic on the roads.

The tourists could contact Emergency Service,

Rescue-1122, Tourism Helpline-1421, or PDMA Helpline-1129 in case of emergency, he added.

Personnel from various departments were present at all the tourist facilitation centers to guide and assist the tourists, he added.

13 tourist facilitation centers had been established at various places to help and guide the tourists.

In case of any emergency, Punjab emergency service, Rescue-1122 could be contacted while the tourists could also use Tourism Helpline-1421, and PDMA Helpline-1129.

Murree administration was ready to deal with any kind of situation, he said adding, the departments concerned were using every possible forum to provide information to the tourists.

People should check the vehicles thoroughly before leaving for the journey, he urged the tourists and said that they should keep the necessary items in view of the snowfall. Murree district administration control room numbers 051-9269015, 051-9269016 and 051-9269018 could also be used by the tourists for help and assistance.

CPO to utilize all resources for ensuring peaceful conduct of PSL

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani on Saturday said all available resources would be utilized to ensure peaceful conduct of Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2024, Season 09 matches in Rawalpindi.

Talking to APP, he said Rawalpindi district police had completed all the security and traffic arrangements for the matches. He said a strategy had been adopted to ensure the peaceful and safe conduct of PSL matches in Rawalpindi.

Police teams would provide full security to both local and foreign players, officials, and cricket fans in Rawalpindi, he said adding, coordination with all the

relevant departments had been completed. Over 5500 officers and officials would be deployed to perform security duties during PSL matches in Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, he added.

The CPO said search, sweep, combing, and intelligence-based operations would continue. With the assistance of the cameras, close monitoring of stadium, hotels, and the teams' routes would be ensured, he maintained. Lady police officers would be deployed for the security and checking of women cricket fans, he said and directed the officers concerned to issue traffic advisories before the matches to maintain citizens' awareness and traffic flow.

According to a

Commissioner Office spokesperson, Commissioner Rawalpindi

Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak had reviewed all the arrangements finalized for PSL matches. The Commissioner directed the authorities concerned to make the best possible arrangements for PSL matches which would start from March 2 and continue till March 10 at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. Engr. Aamir Khattak said that Rawalpindi would host nine matches of PSL, adding out of them, three would be day and six would be night matches.

In view of security, the Food Street at Double Road, closed on Feb 28 would be reopened on March 11. The

Commissioner instructed the authorities to finalize foolproof security and other arrangements for the security of the national and international players and the spectators. The citizens should cooperate with the administration and the law enforcement agencies for the sake of national interest, he urged.

There should be no compromise in PSL arrangements, Engineer Aamir Khattak directed and said that the road patch work on Double Road and Cricket Stadium had been completed. All the street lights on the routes were also repaired. Foolproof security arrangements had been completed by the District Administration

Rawalpindi, Engr. Aamir Khattak said.

5500 security personnel would perform their duty during the matches, the commissioner informed. He said walk-through gates and CCTV cameras were installed with the establishment of a NADRA verification counter at the entry gate of the stadium. He said the encroachments from the route had also been removed. A control room had been set up in Shahbaz Sharif Sports Gymnasium to monitor all the arrangements.

The car parking would be in open area of Rawal Park and Satellite Town College to ensure smooth flow of traffic, Engineer Aamir Khattak said.

Journalists face threat

KABUL (Monitoring Desk): Some journalists and media professionals from Afghanistan who have fled to Iran following the Taliban's resurgence say they are grappling with numerous challenges in that country. They face economic hardships, unemployment, lack of access to shelter, and legal documents to sustain life in Iran. They express concern over the start of a new wave of forced expulsion of refugees and migrants from Iran.

ACB names squad

KABUL (Pajhwok): ACB has named a 16-member squad for three-match ODI series against Ireland. Two key spinners, Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman, will miss the series, scheduled to commence on March 7 at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium, due to injuries. ACB said in a statement right-arm off-spinner Allah Mohammad Ghazanfar, who took part in the ICC U19 Men's World Cup 2024, has been included in the team and is expected to be a potential debutant for Afghanistan.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 21, 1445 — Sunday, March 03, 2024

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

Snowfall kills 15, injured 30 in several provinces

KABUL (TOLONews): As a result of heavy snowfall in some provinces of the country over the past three days, 15 people have died, and nearly 30 others have been injured.

Statistics received from the provinces of Balkh and Faryab by TOLONews indicate that, in addition to human casualties, nearly ten thousand livestock have also perished due to the recent snowfalls.

"The snow is ongoing and very heavy, and people are anxious as their livestock have suffered losses, many roads are blocked, and there is hardly any movement," said Abdul Qadir, a resident of Sar-e-Pul.

Amanullah, another resident of Sar-e-Pul, said: "By the grace of God, there is a lot of snow; however, the road is blocked, and the snowfall is heavy, and people's sheep are hungry, the government should help," said Amanullah, another resident of Sar-e-Pul.

Concurrently, the Islamic Emirate has announced the formation of a committee composed of various ministries to address the damages in different provinces, especially to livestock owners, and stated that fifty million Afghans have also been allocated for the livestock owners of the provinces of Balkh, Jawzjan, Badghis, Faryab, and Herat.

"Committees have been formed in all provinces, and since yesterday, these committees are trying to open the blocked roads and have started their service to distribute food and fodder to the people and also to rescue those who are stranded," said Misbahuddin Mustaeen, spokesperson for the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock.

"So far, winter service workers have been able to assist individuals in Badghis, Ghor, Farah, Kandahar, Helmand, Jawzjan, Nuristan, and several other provinces who have been affected by the recent snowfalls," said Erfanullah Sharafzoi, spokesperson for Afghan red crescent society.

The snowfalls of the past two days have caused the Salang Pass and the route to several provinces of the country, including Ghor, Badghis, Ghazni, Herat, and Bamyan, to be blocked to traffic.

"Due to the snowfalls of the past two days, the Salang highways, several routes in the Bamyan province, Daikundi, Ghazni, and in some

provinces have been temporarily blocked," said Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas, spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Work.

"Heavy snowfall in the province of Faryab has caused the roads in most districts to be blocked, and residents living in remote areas were stranded due to the heavy snow. One person in the jurisdiction of the Chahar Sada district on the border with Turkmenistan has died," said Esmatullah Muradi, spokesperson for the provincial governor of Faryab.

So far, the final statistics on fatalities and livestock losses have not been shared with TOLONews by the officials of the Islamic Emirate, and the number of victims of this event and livestock losses may increase in the coming days.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and First Lady Jill Biden will host the annual International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards ceremony at the White House. Yaqoobi will be one of 12 recipients globally of the award.

She has also served as a Commissioner for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, where she focused on educating blind children, the statement said.

"Yaqoobi is living in exile but remains a tireless advocate for Afghans with disabilities, particularly calling for the international community to ensure that the rights of disabled persons are concretely incorporated in humanitarian response efforts undertaken by donors," the statement said. "She is also working diligently to ensure that Afghan girls with disabilities are represented and continue to fight for their right to attend school."

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Terrorist arrested by Taliban

KABUL (Monitoring Desk): Authorities in Afghanistan have arrested an Indian terrorist who came into the country to join the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP). The terrorist, Sanaul Islam, is from Ullattupara in Malappuram city of Indian state of Kerala, and he is currently detained in Kandahar jail. The Indian terrorists were arrested after an investigation by Afghan intelligence agencies.

The Taliban government of Afghanistan has informed India about the arrest, and discussions between authorities in the two countries are going on over further steps to be taken.

As per Afghan investigators, Sanaul Islam reached Afghanistan through Tajikistan, and his intention was to join the terror group Islamic State of Khorasan Province, which is active in Afghanistan. Afghan authorities have also released a photograph of Sanaul Islam in detention.

The Indian terrorist was arrested in Afghanistan after his connection with ISKP was revealed by investigators. As per reports, when confronted by police, he could not explain the purpose of his visit to Kandahar, prompting an investigation by the General Director of Intelligence (GDI) of the Afghan Interim Govt. Police then handed him over to GDI for further probe.

Sanaul Islam has confessed that he has connections with the ISKP. He also revealed that he travelled to Kandahar on the instructions of an official in India to meet certain individuals.

Kerala has emerged as a hotspot for recruiting Islamic State terrorists. As per Afghan officials, at least 11 Indians linked with ISKP have been either killed or nabbed in Afghanistan since 2014, and majority of them are from Kerala.

Bennett's report propaganda against IE



KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid called a recent report on Afghanistan by UN expert Richard Bennett a "propaganda."

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, said Thursday that "women and girls are being erased from

public life, peaceful dissent is not tolerated, violence and the threat of violence are used with impunity to control and instill fear in the population."

He called on countries Thursday to initiate a case against Afghanistan at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the violation of women's rights. Islamic Emirate's

spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, however, said that every citizen has their Sharia rights.

"Compared to the past, all Afghan women and men have physical, financial and spiritual security, no one can violate anyone's rights, every citizen has their Shari'a rights and lives in peace," Mujahid said in a post on X.

Qatar reaffirms support for Afghans, hosting talks

KABUL (Khaama Press): Qatar reaffirms its commitment to hosting international meetings on Afghanistan for the past two years, emphasizing its continued support for the Afghan people in a recent statement.

Juhara Abdulaziz Al-Suwaidi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Qatar to Geneva, underscored the importance of continuing to host meetings on Afghanistan at the fifty-fifth session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Qatar stands among the few countries that have been key hosts of the most significant international meetings on Afghanistan

since 2020, contributing to notable developments in the country.

The Doha meeting and the signing of the Doha Agreement were pivotal events, with eighteen months of negotiations hosted by Qatar in the capital city.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry, in its statement, highlighted issues of communication, increased coordination within the framework of human rights promotion, and ensuring a decent life for the Afghan people as part of its policy in supporting Afghanistan.

Continuation of providing humanitarian aid committed to supporting the

Afghan people and hosting meetings on the country are emphasized in Qatar's Foreign Ministry statement.

Qatar has played a crucial role in facilitating dialogues and negotiations aimed at resolving the Afghan conflict, fostering a platform for discussions and agreements critical for Afghanistan's stability.

Amidst dire humanitarian crises and ongoing violations of human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan, Qatar's sustained efforts to convene international gatherings signal a commitment to addressing the country's challenges and supporting its people.

Afghanistan's Benafsha Yaqoobi wins US Woman of Courage award



KABUL (Ariana News): Benafsha Yaqoobi from Afghanistan is being honoured by the United States with an International Women of Courage award. Yaqoobi, who is visually impaired, worked for years as an attorney defending the rights of

women who faced violence; founded the Rahyab Organization in 2008 with her husband to provide education and rehabilitation to visually impaired people in Afghanistan, US State Department said in a statement on Friday.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and First Lady Jill Biden will host the annual International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards ceremony at the White House. Yaqoobi will be one of 12 recipients globally of the award.

Damaged in past wars, 200 schools need reconstruction

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): About 200 schools have been destroyed or partially damaged due to the past conflict in southern Ghazni province and need reconstruction, residents say.

The decades-old conflict not only left many schools in ruins, but also hurt the spirit and mind of children who need a safe learning environment.

Hikmatullah, a tribal elder from Arzo area of Ghazni City, told Pajhwok that about 4,000 students were enrolled in their area's Ali Lala school.

He recalled the area had been the scene of fierce clashes about five years ago, with schools, seminaries, houses and farm fields sustaining damages.

He added: "The school in our area is riddled with bullet holes and direly needs reconstruction."

Haji Rassoul, a resident of Qala Qazi area, told Pajhwok that houses, bridges, shops, roads, schools and seminaries had been damaged in their area in the past conflict.

He asked the government to reconstruct the

damaged schools as ruined and bullet-holed buildings had a bad impact on students.

Meanwhile, students also insisted their schools should be reconstructed.

Fida Mohammad, a 12th grade student at Ali Lala School, told Pajhwok: "In our area, this is the biggest school. Thousands of students are studying here, but the past wars had destroyed it. The school has no windows and doors."

Several other residents expressed similar views about the damaged school

buildings and urged the government to reconstruct them.

Ghazni Education Director Nasir Ahmad Hussaini told Pajhwok that 200 schools had been damaged in the past conflict in Ghazni City and districts.

He said 50 schools had been extensively damaged and the remaining 150 superficially.

He said UNICEF repaired 10 schools at a cost of 10 million afghanis in the past one year.

Hussaini said he had sent a plan for reconstruction of all damaged schools to the Ministry of Education for approval and other actions.

According to him, most of the damaged schools are located in Mangor, Shahbaz, Qazi Qala, Arzo, Kochi Qala, Bakal, Esfandi, Pirzada and Deh Khodaidad areas of Ghazni City and in some districts such as Zankhan, Andar, Giru, Qarabagh, Ab Band, Muqar, Gilan, Wag haz, Jaghatu, Khwaja Omri and Deh Yek districts.

In Ghazni, there are a total of 752 schools, including private schools, where 400,000 students, including girls, are studying.

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): A businesswoman in western Herat province has established a well-equipped tailoring workshop and has employed 40 poor women.

Dresses of women, children, school uniform, government department uniforms and private companies' uniforms are sewn in the workshop where trainees are taught tailoring skills for free.

Madina, a worker at this workshop and the only breadwinner of her family, told Pajhwok Afghan News that she was happy that this workshop had been established and work environment created for women.

She said she earned up to 8000 afghanis a month to meet her family's needs.

"We prepare five to six types of clothes every day. I feel safe in this completely feminine place managed by a woman".

Samia, another employee, said the workshop had provided jobs to dozens of poor women and sole breadwinners of their families and it had a positive impact on their lives.

She urged the government to support women workers by organizing

exhibitions to promote their products.

On the other hand, Zia Gul Akbar, one of the teachers at the workshop, said that she had 10 years of experience in tailoring and had worked as instructor in several workshops.

Currently she has 25 students and has been supervising the sewing department.

Meanwhile, Abida Alizayee, owner of this workshop named "Angosht-i-Telaa" said they produced 100 to 150 types of clothes per day.



She said 40 women worked in the workshop.

Without disclosing her investment and income, she said her workshop in addition to supplying products to Herat markets also sent clothes to Kabul, Farah, Nimroz, Maimana and Badghis provinces.

She said she also exported her products to Pakistan, Iran and Turkey once a month.

According to her, she has not received any support from the government and salaries of the workers are determined based on

production.

Meanwhile, Maulvi Bashir Mohammad Sirat, commerce and industry director, said they had supported around 2,500 people either through institutions or government departments in form of financial support and equipment.

Sirat said the Ministry of Commerce and Industry paid serious attention to supporting working women and small businessmen and tried to support small and large businesses owned by women in various ways.

form an inclusive government as conditions for their recognition.

No country has yet officially recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, although China has accepted the credentials of the Taliban's ambassador in Beijing.

"Flawed in almost every way" Annie Pforzheimer, a former US acting deputy assistant secretary of state for Afghanistan, told VOA that there should have been "some kind of international guarantee" to prevent the Taliban's return.

"But instead, what happened was a withdrawal that happened before the right circumstances were in

place," she said.

The agreement was "flawed in almost every way, in terms of implementation," Pforzheimer said, adding that "the only people who complied with it were the international forces, and in fact the United States withdrew its forces and obliged NATO to do the same."

She added that she was concerned about the future of Afghanistan, especially for Afghan girls and women who are "denied an education and a future."

"Right now, there's not much hope, but I think that Afghans working together will understand that they are in greater numbers than the Taliban," Pforzheimer said.

Doha agreement flawed as US, Taliban accuse one another of violating terms

WASHINGTON (VOA): Four years after the signing of the Doha agreement, the US and Taliban accuse each other of violating its terms, while analysts say that the agreement was "flawed" and has had "disastrous" outcomes for Afghans.

"The Taliban have not fulfilled their commitments in the Doha agreement," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday in a news briefing in response to a question from VOA's Afghan Service.

"The Taliban have also not fulfilled their Doha commitment to engage in meaningful dialogue with fellow Afghans leading to a negotiated settlement, an inclusive political system,"

she said.

After seizing power in 2021, the Taliban established an all-male Taliban caretaker cabinet and rejected calls to form an inclusive government.

Jean-Pierre added that the US would hold the Taliban to their commitment and work "tirelessly every day to ensure that this set of commitments is fulfilled."

The Taliban, however, accused the US of "violating" the agreement.

"If you have read the agreement, it is written that the US would normalize its relations with the future government in Afghanistan, remove the sanctions and restrictions, and cooperate, which [the US does] not,"

spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said Thursday in an interview with state-run TV in Afghanistan.

Mujahid, however, said that the two main objectives — the US withdrawal and not allowing anyone to use Afghan soil against the US and its allies — have been implemented.

The US-Taliban peace deal, signed in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020, paved the way for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

The agreement obliged the Taliban to cut their ties with al-Qaida and other terrorist groups and participate in intra-Afghan peace talks to decide on "the future political map of Afghanistan."

Retired US General David Petraeus, who served as the commander of US forces in South Asia and then as director of the CIA, told VOA that the Taliban obviously had not complied with the deal.

"If they had, the leader of al-Qaida wouldn't have been a couple of blocks from the presidential palace, in a building controlled by the Taliban in Kabul, the capital... despite the promise in the agreement not to allow them back on Afghan soil," he added.

He said that the outcome of the implementation of the agreement was "very tragic, heartbreaking and disastrous," as since the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan has been facing multiple crises.

The United Nations says that Afghanistan continues to experience one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

"Disastrous for Afghan women"

The Taliban imposed repressive measures on women, including barring them from attending high schools and universities, traveling long distances without a male companion, working with public and nongovernmental organizations, and going to gyms and parks.

Shukria Barakzai, a former Afghan diplomat and member of the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of the Afghan parliament, told VOA that the Doha agree-

ment was "disastrous for Afghan women, as nothing related to human rights, women's rights and women's achievements from 2001 to 2021 were referred to in the agreement."

She added that the agreement paved the way for the return of repressive rules against women introduced when the Taliban were in power in the late 1990s.

Before the ouster of the Taliban by the US in 2001, women were not allowed to leave their houses without a male chaperone, work outside their homes, or attend school.

The international community has repeatedly called on the Taliban to respect women's rights and

form an inclusive government as conditions for their recognition.

No country has yet officially recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, although China has accepted the credentials of the Taliban's ambassador in Beijing.

"Flawed in almost every way"

Annie Pforzheimer, a former US acting deputy assistant secretary of state for Afghanistan, told VOA that there should have been "some kind of international guarantee" to prevent the Taliban's return.

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KARACHI: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the first Karachi festival of books and libraries.

Israeli's attacks on Gaza US president hopeful for truce before Ramazan

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Joe Biden has said he is "hoping" for a ceasefire deal in the Israel-Hamas conflict by the holy month of Ramazan but the agreement was still not sealed, AFP reports.

"I'm hoping so, we're still working real hard on it. We're not there yet," he told reporters at the White House when asked if he expected a deal by Ramazan, which will start on March 10 or 11, depending on the lunar calendar. "We'll get there but we're not there yet, we may not get there," Biden added, without elaborating, as he headed to his helicopter to spend the weekend at the presidential Camp David retreat.

Biden has said the incident could complicate talks, but would not comment Friday on what was holding up a deal, adding: "I'm not going to tell you that because that'll get involved in the negotiations."

Dave Harden, former USAID director to the West Bank, has told Al Jazeera that

airdrop deliveries planned by the US are a "symbolic" and ineffective way of delivering aid to the Gaza Strip. "The airdrops are symbolic and designed in ways to appease the domestic base," he said. "Really what needs to happen is more crossings [opening] and more trucks going in every day."

Airdrops recently delivered by the Jordanian air force ended up in the sea and in Israeli territory due to strong winds. Footage showed large crowds on the shore in Deir el-Balah scrambling into the sea to fetch the aid, which had been spoiled by the salty water. Harden said high-altitude airdrops are conducted to minimise the danger of flying at lower altitudes, making this an inefficient and risky way of delivering aid.

"I think the United States is weak and that's really disappointing to me," he added. "The US has the ability to compel Israel to open up more aid and by not doing that we're putting our assets and our people at risks and potentially creating more

chaos in Gaza."

Meanwhile, UK-based charity Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) has criticised a US plan to start airdropping aid into Gaza in the "coming days", Al Jazeera reports. "Instead of dropping packages from the sky — some of which end up in the sea or outside of Gaza and which the most vulnerable cannot reach in any case — the US, the UK and others should ensure that Israel immediately opens all crossings into Gaza for aid and aid workers to assist those in need," MAP's CEO Melanie Ward told Al Jazeera in a statement.

"This includes the Karni and Erez crossings which give direct access to the north of Gaza. Only safe and unfettered access for aid and aid workers, lifting of the siege, and an immediate ceasefire can end starvation in Gaza." The Palestinian foreign ministry says the US is acting as a "weak, marginal state" that is unable to secure aid access to starving Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to Al Jazeera.

IMF demands to increase tax on salaried, non-salaried class

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has demanded for a reduction in tax slabs along with increasing tax on the salaried and non-salaried class.

According to the details, the IMF has suggested to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to double the tax burden for salaried and non-salaried class to eliminate their disparity, reducing the number of slabs from seven to four and tax exemption on private employers' contributions to pensioners should be abolished.

IMF's officials stated that if the suggestions on Personal Income Tax (PIT) are fully implemented then it could generate an additional 0.5 percent of GDP revenue which is equivalent to Rs500 billion on an annual basis.

In the current financial year, FBR has so far collected Rs215 billion from the salaried class during the first eight months (July to February) of the current financial year. FBR can collect around Rs300 billion from the salaried class. However, this department can increase its revenue by eliminating exemptions and other preferential tax treatments.

PPP to seek votes for Zardari: Murad

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Saturday that Asif Ali Zardari would return with the highest votes as President of Pakistan for his second tenure.

"I have the honour to propose him for his candidature for the highest constitutional position of the country," he said while talking to media just after submitting the nomination papers to Chief Justice of Sindh High Court Justice Aqeel Ahmad Abbasi, proposing Asif Ali Zardari as a candidate for the Presidential Election.

PPP leader Faryal Talpur, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, Speaker Sindh Assembly Awaish Qadir Shah, Nisar Khuhro, Agha Siraj Durrani, Syed Nasir Shah, Sharjeel Memon, Saeed Ghani, Imtiaz Shaikh, Sardar Shah, Sohail Siyal, Deputy Speaker Anthony Naveed, and others were also present on the occasion.

To a question, Mr Shah said that PPP has a good working relationship with the Muttehid Quami Movement (MQM-P) and they [MQM] have been our coalition partners. "We would seek their voter for Asif Ali Zardari [for his presidential election]," he said and added his party would visit all the political forces in the parliament to seek their vote for Asif Ali Zardari.

In response to a question, Murad Ali Shah stated that the local body system in Sindh was more effective, powerful, and efficient than the local body systems in other provinces. He added that the MQM had taken up the issue of strengthening local bodies in Punjab, where this level/tier of government had not been properly established. He also mentioned that the MQM wanted to replicate the better works of the Sindh government in the local bodies of the Punjab for which it has made an agreement with the PML-N.

When asked about Ali Amin Gandapur's statements, the Chief Minister stated that as an elected Chief Minister of KPK, he will be following the lead of his party's leadership. The Chief Minister also mentioned that it is evident from Ali Amin Gandapur's statements that he is in line with his party leader's views.

Resolution for banning major social media sites on Senate agenda

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A resolution moved by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Senator Bahramand Tangi seeking a ban on mainstream social media platforms has been placed on the Senate agenda for its meeting on March 4.

In the resolution, the senator has called for bans on social sites, including Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter — now X, and YouTube, in the light of possible misuse against the country's interest to "save the young generation from their negative and devastating effects".

"Cognizant of the fact that social media platforms are adversely affecting the young generation in the country; Acknowledging the fact that these platforms are being used for promotion of norms against our religion and culture, creating hatred

amongst the people on the grounds of language and religion," the resolution read. The resolution of Tangi, whose tenure as senator ends on March 11, stated that there were concerns about the use of social media platforms against the interests of the country "through negative and malicious propaganda against the armed forces of Pakistan."

The resolution, which will be non-binding even if passed, further stated that these platforms were being used for vested interests in spreading fake news about various issues and trying to "create and promote fake leadership in the country to hoodwink the young generation." It may be noted that the PPP had reportedly terminated Senator Tangi's basic membership of the party for violating the party discipline and not responding to a show-cause notice issued to him over

his silence on a resolution seeking a delay in the February 8 polls.

Addressing a press conference, PPP district president Naeem Khan Umarzai along with other party activists said that Senator Bahramand Tangi had violated the party narrative during the recent session of Senate. He said Bahramand Tangi was silent over the resolution by independent Senator Dilawar Khan calling for the postponement of general elections.

The move comes as X is already inaccessible to Pakistanis and in the lead-up to the elections and during the polling day, internet services were shut down and social media sites could not be accessed. Digital rights activists have slammed the authorities' moves to disrupt the connectivity and called for transparency as the weeks-long X inaccessibility is still unanswered.

Bugti extends olive branch to Baloch insurgents

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan's newly-elected Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti Saturday reaffirmed the provincial government's plan to continue engaging in dialogue with those involved in armed insurgency.

Bugti extended the olive branch to dissidents in his victory speech after being elected as the province's chief executive. "Deterrence and dialogue are the two options that the government has to address the [law and order] situation in Balochistan," he said while calling on armed groups to join the mainstream politics and play their role in the province's development.

The chief minister, in his speech, urged the Baloch insurgents to continue their struggle while adhering to the Constitution of Pakistan, stressing that there will be no compromise on the state's writ. He noted that those fighting for their

"rights" can only achieve their goals via the parliamentary route and not armed struggle.

Bugti, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader, was elected unopposed as the leader of the house by 41 votes. Speaker Abdul Khaliq Achakzai chaired the session. The chief minister was sworn in as the province's chief executive by Governor Abdul Wali Kakar in a ceremony held at the Governor House.

Expressing gratitude to those who voted for him, including the opposition parties, Bugti underscored that the fact that the speaker, deputy speaker and the leader of the house were elected "unopposed" has given a "message of consensus" at a time when the province is going through difficult times. Commenting on the PPP's role as a party that represents the federation, the chief minister claimed that it is only the Bilawal Bhutto-led party that can address and solve the

crises that have gripped the country.

"I have faith that Asif Ali Zardari will steer the country out of the crises," Bugti said while stressing the need for reconciliatory politics in present times. Terming governance, terrorism and climate change as the leading issues faced by the province, the chief minister went on to provide a roadmap with regard to the government's strategy to tackle these challenges.

On the issue of governance, Bugti stressed that the legislators and the province's bureaucracy need to own up and not blame others for their shortcomings. "How long will we blame other people?" he questioned during his speech. Announcing the enforcement of an emergency in the education sector, the CM reassured that his government would give a comprehensive plan of action with regard to reforms to improve the province's education system.

Working class rejected fraudulent polls: Siraj

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has said that the working class of the country has rejected the fraudulent election of 2024.

Talking to media persons in Lahore on Saturday, he said that labourers were the backbone of country's economy but in the prevailing era of price hike, it has become difficult for them to arrange two-time meal for their families.

Sirajul Haq said that it has become difficult for labour class to educate their children, they were facing severe hardships due to contract system, there was law of jungle in the country and no one can inquire from the influential. He said that there were billions of rupees in all the social programs in Pakistan which belong to labour class but it was facing problems in its survival.

The JI leader said that the working class rejected the fraudulent election of 2024, as it was not an election but a selection. He said fraud was done with the people, 50 billion rupees were spent in the election but the countrymen rejected it before the government was constituted.

He said that JI stands with the labour class, a welfare card should be made for the laborers and we want education and other needs of the labourers to be taken care of. Votes were taken from the laborers, but after the public representatives are elected and their names are not even taken, he added. Sirajul Haq said that there were many international agreements that Pakistan has signed, people who count votes do not want change. Jamaat-e-Islami has announced that we will fight for the rights of Pakistani people, he added. He further stated that we were ready to make every sacrifice to solve the problems of workers and they were pride of the country.

Pak Army rescue efforts continue in KP

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Army has mobilized its forces to tackle the aftermath of heavy snowfall in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly around the Lowari Tunnel, Kalam, Chitral, and Malam Jabbā.

According to a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Saturday, army rescue teams have been working tirelessly throughout the night. Their efforts focus on clearing snow from critical roads and rescuing stranded passengers trapped in the snowfall.

The dedicated soldiers are not only clearing access routes but also providing essential supplies like food and medicine to those affected in snow-bound areas. This highlights their commitment to serving the community during times of need.

Since the snowfall began, the Pakistan Army teams, in collaboration with the district administration, have been actively working to restore traffic flow on impacted roads. They are utilizing heavy machinery to expedite the process and ensure a swift return to normalcy.



QUETTA: Unopposed elected Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti addressing assembly session.

Police baton charge PTI protesters in Lahore

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Police on Saturday baton-charged and arrested Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers including Mian Shehzad Farooq in connection with the protests being carried out in different parts of the country including Lahore by the party workers against alleged rigging in the February 8 general elections.

The PTI workers and lawyers are protesting in areas including Shahdara, GPO Chowk at Mall Road, and outside the commissioner's office against the "rigging" carried out in the polls with the party alleging that their mandate has been stolen.

Pakistan underwent general elections on February 8 this year which were rejected by many parties including the PTI and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F). The independent candidates affiliated with the Imran Khan-founded party won the election race as over 90 leaders emerged victorious.

The winning candidates later joined the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) to claim the seats reserved for female candidates and minorities. The party had decided to carry out protests across Lahore today amid heavy police deployment at the GPO Chowk where the PTI spokesperson said the

main protest would take place.

The police have also been deployed outside the Lahore High Court (LHC) and party's office at Jail Road. During the protests, the police used baton charges to disperse the enraged PTI workers. The PTI's spokesperson said that they would hold demonstrations in all constituencies of Lahore.

Earlier in the day, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Operations Ali Nasir Rizvi visited GPO Chowk and PTI's office at Jail Road, saying that no one would be allowed to take the law into their own hands. "We will take action against those who even touch a policeman's uniform. We will not allow anyone to destroy the peace of the city," said DIG Rizvi.

Meanwhile, workers belonging to the Insaf Lawyers Forum have been protesting outside the LHC. The police pushed them inside the court and locked the gate. PTI rally towards Islamabad changes route. Meanwhile, PTI's Sher Afzal Marwat, who was leading a rally from Peshawar to Islamabad, decided to change its route towards Rawalpindi.

The rally will now enter Islamabad from Purodhai to IJP Road in Rawalpindi. It reached Chowrangi No 4 after passing through

Raja Bazaar and Fawwara Chowk. PTI spokesperson said that their "peaceful protest" was interrupted by state machinery and law enforcement officials. "The people have taken to the streets to take back their stolen mandate," he added.

Aafia case: Our courts are the ray of hope: Fowzia

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Aafia Movement Pakistan leader and noted neurophysician of the country Dr Fowzia Siddiqui has said that our courts are the ray of hope for us, saying it is the duty of the courts to uphold the basic human and constitutional rights of all Pakistani citizens.

She was addressing a crowded press conference here the Karachi Press Club (KPC) flanked by Aafia's American lawyer Clive Stafford Smith. She said the world talks warmly about the women's rights but it suddenly becomes silent when the name of Dr Aafia Siddiqui is uttered. She asked why Dr Aafia's basic rights as a human being, as a woman and as a mother are being overlooked and that too by the West, the self-proclaimed rights champion.