

## Ramazan likely on 12th F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A weather expert Jawad Memon on Monday said Ramazan in Pakistan was expected to commence on March 12. Memon, speaking to a private news channel, disclosed that the moon for Ramazan is slated to appear on March 10, but visibility will only be feasible on March 11. "The first Taraweeh will be offered on the night of March 11," he asserted.



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# Shehbaz sworn in as Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday took the oath as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

President Dr Arif Alvi administered the oath of office to the newly-elected prime minister, who was elected to the country's top office for the second time. Held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr, the swearing-in ceremony was attended by Outgoing Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and his cabinet members, parliamentarians, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, services chiefs, provincial governors, chief ministers and diplomats.

Pakistan Muslim League-N Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, President of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, other political leaders including Hamza Shehbaz Sharif, Aleem Khan, Raja Zafarul Haq, Ahsan Iqbal, and Khawaja Muhammad Asif and senior officers also attended the ceremony.

**Shehbaz presented guard of honour at PM House:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif was presented guard of honour on Monday as he arrived at the PM House soon after taking oath of his office at the President House.

The national anthem was played and a smartly turned out contingent of the three services presented him salute. He inspected the guard of honour. The prime minister was later introduced to the staff of the Prime Minister House.

Later, during his meeting with outgoing Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, Shehbaz Sharif lauded the steps taken by the caretaker government for the continuation of the country's development under his leadership. He also expressed his best wishes for Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in his future life.

Meanwhile, a smartly turned out contingent of the three services presented a farewell guard of honour to the outgoing Caretaker Prime Minister. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif saw him off after the guard of honour and farewell meeting with the staff of Prime Minister Office.

**UN Chief congratulates Shehbaz:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres Monday congratulated Shehbaz Sharif after he was sworn-in as Prime Minister of Pakistan, saying he was looking forward to working with

him on a number of issues. On Sunday, the National Assembly elected Shehbaz Sharif as the Leader of the House by 201 votes, defeating Omar Ayub of the Sunni Ittehad Council.

PM Shehbaz took the oath of his office for a second term at a ceremony held at the President House in Islamabad on Monday. "We congratulate Shehbaz Sharif on assuming the post of Prime Minister of Pakistan and we look forward to continuing cooperation with the country on a wide array of issues," Stephane Dujarric, the UN Chief's spokesperson, said.

Saudi Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in separate messages on Monday congratulated Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif for taking oath as 24th prime minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wished Shehbaz Sharif success, and the people of Pakistan steady progress and prosperity.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim congratulated the newly elected Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on assuming the charge of his office. He expressed best wishes for newly elected PM and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, for which Premier Shehbaz Sharif thanked him saying that Pakistan and Malaysia had a long-standing brotherly relationship.

During a telephonic conversation with his Malaysian counterpart, PM Shehbaz said Pakistan wanted to further promote trade and diplomatic ties with Malaysia. The prime minister also invited Malaysian Prime Minister to visit Pakistan.

President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon on Monday congratulated newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, emphasising that through joint efforts, both the countries would enhance and expand long-term bilateral partnership. "I wish you, dear friend and brother, good health and great new successes in the implementation of your plans for the sustainable social and economic development of Pakistan, raising the well-being of the people of the friendly country as well as strengthening its reputation in the international arena," the Tajik president said in a congratulatory message to the prime minister.

## Focus on to improve law, order: KP CM

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has termed improvement of law and order as top most priority of his government and the same will not be compromised at any cost adding that the required financial resources would be provided to police on priority basis with the aim to strengthen it in terms of modern equipment, arms and ammunition. He said that without peace development and prosperity is not possible because investment and economic activities require conducive environment.

He was talking to media persons, during his short visit to district Charsadda, on Monday. "Poverty Alleviation, welfare of the vulnerable segments of society and addressing the issue of unemployment will be the second important priority of the provincial government, as the prevailing financial situation has affected the ordinary citizen the most, which needs to be addressed on priority basis," Ali Amin Gandapur stated adding that development and uplift of infrastructure will rank third on the priority list of his government; for which steps would be taken under a well devised strategy.

To a question, the Chief Minister replied that he had talked about necessary rectifications in police system which should not be taken as intimidation for any individual adding that he did not believe in revenge but rectification and improvement in the system was his duty. He remarked that rectification and improvement is necessary to develop a system wherein no one can misuse his authority and do unjust to anyone, and added that "we need to develop a system based on justice for the secure future of our coming generations".

Earlier, the Chief Minister visited the residence of Superintendent of Police, Ijaz Khan, who embraced martyrdom in an exchange of fire with miscreants in Mardan the other day. He expressed sympathies with the bereaved family and offered Fatiha for the eternal peace of the departed soul. Ali Amin Gandapur also met with the children of Ijaz Khan Shaheed and assured them of all out support of his government.

Talking on this occasion, the Chief Minister said that Ijaz Khan embraced Shahadat while bravely fighting against terrorists adding that he salutes all the martyrs of Police and other security agencies who laid their precious lives for the secure future of others. Ali Amin Gandapur assured that all the financial support under Shahada package will be extended to the bereaved family, and the provincial government would also provide all out support for the better future of the children of Shaheed Ijaz Khan.

## KP assembly approves one month budget

F.P. Report

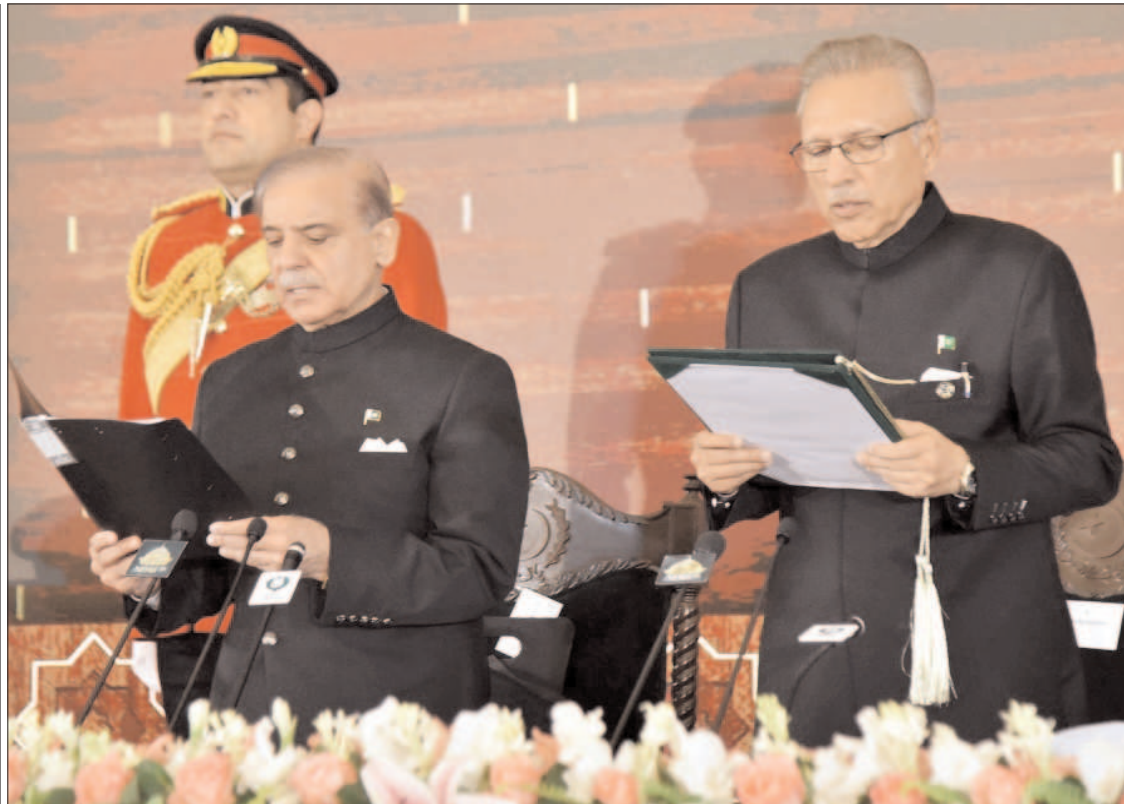
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly with Speaker, Babar Salim Swati in chair Tuesday approved one month budget of over Rs. 159 billion for the province.

KP Chief Minister, Ali Ameen Gandapur moved the motion for budget approval under rule 150 of the Provincial Assembly Procedure and Conduct Rules. Among Rs. 159b, Rs. 40b rupees are reserved for ongoing developmental schemes under ADP. While Rs. 118 billion are earmarked for running expenditure. The motion was put to vote and was passed with majority. Meanwhile, leader of opposition, Dr. Ibadullah rejected the move over arguments that cabinet is not formed and such passage is illegal.

Parliamentary leader of PPP, Ahmad Karim Kundi supported viewpoint of Ibadullah of PML-N. The Chief Minister Ali Ameen Gandapur also presented a motion for declaring KP assembly as polling station for upcoming Presidential Elections to be held on March 9.

## Polio worker, cop injured F.P. Report

BARA: In a horrific incident, a policeman and polio worker sustained injuries in the attack on polio team in Bar Qambar Khel, Khyber district. The unknown assailants opened fire on the polio team in Khyber district, injuring a policeman Gul Karim and polio worker Abdullah. Both the injured have been shifted to hospital and a search operation is being carried out surrounding areas of the incident.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi administering the oath of office to Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## ECP rejects SIC's bid for reserved seats in NA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Monday turned down the Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) application for reserved seats for women and minorities in the National Assembly.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed SIC had submitted this request, sparking controversy and prompting extensive deliberations within the electoral body.

After a thorough examination, a five-member bench, led by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, delivered a split verdict of 4-1, ruling against the entitlement of the Sunni Ittehad Council to reserved seats in the National Assembly. The ECP clarified

that these seats would be allocated among other political parties based on their proportional representation, emphasising the principle that reserved seats cannot remain vacant in the assemblies.

However, it's noteworthy that Babar Hassan Bharwana, ECP member from Punjab, dissented from the majority decision, expressing dissent regarding the allocation of reserved seats to other political entities. The controversy surrounding the allocation of reserved seats for the SIC escalated following reports of a potential 'merger' with the PTI specifically for this purpose.

The ECP faced criticism for the delay in issuing a verdict, leaving the matter unresolved as the National Assembly convened its inaugural ses-

sion last week. Reacting to the decision, the PTI had previously indicated its intention to escalate the matter to the Supreme Court if the reserved seats were distributed to other parties.

Adding another layer of complexity, the controversy deepened when the ECP disclosed allegations that SIC Chairman Hamid Raza had purportedly written a letter declining to accept the reserved seats. Raza vehemently refuted this allegation, injecting further confusion and intrigue into an already convoluted situation. The ECP's rejection of the SIC's application has reignited discussions about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process in the country, fueling ongoing debates on these critical issues.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur presenting interim budget for the month of March 2024 in provincial assembly session.

## Bilawal endorses PTI's call for judicial inquiry into May 9 riots

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing the National Assembly today said that there is a proverb in the English language, 'History repeats itself, first as a tragedy and then as a farce'. We have reached the farcical stage in Pakistan's long and arduous democratic journey. Chairman PPP said that he belongs to the third generation of elected representatives from his family. Chairman PPP said that the foundation stone of the building of the National Assembly was laid by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The hall of the National Assembly belongs to all, and it is the mother of all institutions. The members of the House should come to the realisation that strengthening this institution amounts to strengthening the people, and weakening it weakens not only the members, but the federation and the entire democratic system.

Bilawal, as a representative of the youth of the country said that he appeals to his elders, those who have become members numerous times before, to take decisions that allow for the coming generations to have bright futures. We should take decisions that ease the path towards the Parliament, for the youngsters who wish to represent their people in

this House as members and politicians. We should be lauded by the coming generations of members for our commitment, not be bashed by them for weakening our own institutions.

Bilawal said that the manner in which the members of the House were conducting themselves under the garb of protest during the speeches of the PM and the Opposition Leader was disappointing. The people of Pakistan would be disappointed after witnessing this. They are looking at us with hope-filled eyes. Pakistan has reached an alarming stage. The people of Pakistan have voted in the elections to be rid of the pain they face due to the plethora of economic crises we face. The PM talked about his plan in his speech, while the Opposition Leader talked about his issues, however the point was not conveyed to the people of Pakistan as the backbenchers from both the sides were protesting. The Opposition Leader has raised the objection that his speech was not aired on PTV. This trend, that was initiated by Imran Khan should no longer continue, and the speeches of the members should be aired live.

Bilawal said that the PPP did not reach the Assembly due to forms 45 and 47, but because of the blood and sweat of the workers of the Party. Shaheed Abdul Wahid

Awan, Shaheed Sabir Magasi and Shaheed Abdul Rehman sacrificed their lives for us to reach this House. Shaheed Abdul Rehman, who belonged to Karachi was a twelve year old child, who was martyred by a shot to the head, because the enemies of the PPP wanted to intimidate its voters. In Moro, a worker by the name of Bilal Zardari was martyred during the elections. Mansoor Ali was martyred in Naushahro Feroze.

Raza Khoso was martyred in Mirpurkhas. In Balochistan, the PPP's candidates were subjected to violence through grenade attacks. Zahoor Buledi from Turbat faced two grenade attacks during the election. Mir Asghar Rind of the PPP faced a similar attack in Mand. Ali Madad Jattak's office was attacked by a bomb blast in Quetta, injuring two. Our candidates in Mastung, Khuzdar and Kachhi were too subjected to attacks. Shaheed Abdul Malik from Sanghar too sacrificed his life. Elections in Pakistan lead to our workers being martyred, and this is strongly condemned. In my first address in the previous assembly as well, I had condemned the fatal attacks on Haroon Bilour and Siraj Raisani, and am proud to see the latter's son in the National Assembly as the youngest representative, Chairman Bilawal said.



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**Phone: 091-9217840**

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## AAG submit resignation



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional Advocate General (AAG) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Danyal Asad Chamkani forwarded his resignation to Chief Minister, on Monday. According to details, Danyal Chamkani was appointed as AAG after dissolution of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government in early 2023. He contested more than 1100 cases before Peshawar High Court on behalf of provincial government. Moreover, Danyal Asad Chamkani is senior most AAG at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and considered as expert criminal cases practitioner in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He had resigned from the position due to personal schedule. He has served National Accountability Bureau as Special Prosecutor General and he will continue his legal practice.

## Ibad notified Opposition Leader

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) Dr Ibadullah has been appointed as the leader of the opposition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. As per declaration issued by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Secretariat on Monday, Dr Ibadullah, elected from PK-30 Shangla 3 was given office and staff according to the rules. Earlier, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Amin Gandapur took the oath as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister in a ceremony held in Peshawar on Saturday. KP Governor Ghulam Ali administered the oath to Gandapur at Governor House. On this occasion, the party leaders and workers attended the oath-taking ceremony in large numbers. Gandapur had completed his graduation from Gomal University. It was from PK-113 (DI Khan) that Gandapur emerged victorious in the recently held general elections. The newly-elected KP CM made it clear that the decision on the formation of the cabinet will be taken following consultations with the PTI founder.

## Relief supplies dispatched

PESHAWAR (APP): On the special instructions of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, more relief materials have been sent to the people affected by the rains and landslides. Director General of Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Kaisar Khan said in a statement issued here Monday that nine trucks of relief goods have been sent to Battagram, Kohistan Upper and Bajaur.

## Khwaja Wajih-ud-Din

As a humble student of law a lot of lessons were learned during my entire career. My tenure in the KP Judicial Academy authenticated my view that the Rule of Law does not only relate to the administration of justice. It is a comprehensive system that encompasses every institution and segment of society and demands that each one of them acts within the four corners of the law. The role of courts cannot be denied in upholding the rule of law but their roles are limited to corrective justice. The concept has to be implemented in entirety. It has to be based on merit and free from human bias/discretion. I've been fortunate to be the longest serving Registrar of the Peshawar High Court in the Single tenure. It provided me an opportunity to plan, implement, improve, and address

# Mother holds right over custody of minor till 7 years: PHC observes

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Waqar Ahmad ordered provision of custody of minor to his mother while ordered Guardian Judge to decide the plea within three months, on Monday. PHC observed that mother has first right over the custody of minor seven years and annoyed snatching of children from his mother by force. The counsel Umair Khan and Shah Sawar Khan advocates argued that the petitioner was ousted by her husband from his resi-

dence one month earlier after four years of marriage over domestic dispute and took custody of minor named Muhammad Mustafa by force. Additional Session Judge had turndown plea that bailiff didn't recovered the minor from his father residence while the verdict has been challenged before PHC, the counsel argued. They added that both law of the land and Shariah contending for provision of custody of minor up-to seven years to the mother. The counsel argued that a complaint had made before local police but to no veil and added that Advocate General Amir Javed assured the recovery

of Muhammad Mustafa within two days on previous hearing. They added that the minor had recovered on Saturday due to Advocate General efforts and the local magistrate hand over custody to the mother (petitioner). The counsel requested for permanent custody of minor to the petitioner (mother) and added that if his father demanding the custody then he must file appeal before Guardian Judge. The respondent's lawyer contended for provision of minor's custody to his father because the guardianship plea is pending before Guardian Judge. However, PHC declared that the mother has first

right over the custody of minor up to seven as per Shariah and Law of the land as well as several verdicts are available in this regard. Although, Justice Shakeel Ahmad observed that the Heaven lies under the feet of Mother due to her role in look after of child and mother can ensure proper grooming of minor in this time period. PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Waqar Ahmad observed that the father may approach concerned forum for obtaining custody of his son while ordered Guardian Judge to decide the case within three months.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur meeting with children of Martyred SP Ijaz Khan.

## SIC demands reserved seats in KP Assembly

PESHAWAR (APP): The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) on Monday expressed concern over the delaying tactics in the allotment of reserved seats and announced that the Party will soon knock the door of court to get the seats. Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani of SIC said that the Party had won maximum seats but had been deprived from

reserved seats in KP Assembly as well as in the country. The success in the elections is unique in the history of the world. On February 8, the people stamped the symbols of carrot and radish and made PTI backed successful. The mandate and reserved seats should be returned, Mushtaq Ghani demanded.

Meanwhile, Speaker Babar Salim Swati said that since the matter was in the court, they cannot discuss it further. It is worth mentioning here that the PTI backed women raised placards demanding for reserved seats outside the Assembly Hall after which, the meeting was adjourned for indefinite period.

## Commissioner calls for strict action against profiteers

PESHAWAR (APP): Commissioner Peshawar, Muhammad Zubair, has directed the district administration of the province to devise an oriented strategy for the relief of the masses and to control artificial price hikes in the holy month of Ramzan-ul-Mubarak. He was chairing a meeting convened to control price hikes in the month of Ramzan. He stressed the need to devise a plan to rein in profiteers during Ramzan, as well as to revise price lists of essentials for the relief of the common man.

He also directed assistant commissioners to visit markets in the morning and set prices for essential food items, including poultry, vegetables, and fruits, taking into account the financial position of the people. He further directed the formation of raiding teams to visit markets during Sehri and Iftar timings. The Commissioner also instructed the holding of a meeting of the price review committee every fifteen days and stated that profiteers would be sent to jail for thirty days. He also requested daily reports on the efforts made by concerned officials to control price hikes. The meeting was attended by all the deputy commissioners of Peshawar Divisions, who submitted monthly reports of their activities and plans against price hikes and hoarding.



PESHAWAR: Polio worker administering polio drops to children at local school during anti-polio vaccination campaign.

## Prices fixed of essentials

PESHAWAR (APP): The District Price Review Committee (DPRC), Mardan fixed the prices of various essentials through mutual consultations with the trader community on Monday. The meeting, held on the directives of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was presided over by Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance and Planning Samiur Rahman. Besides Assistant Commissioners, officers of the Food Department, president of Tanzim e Tajiran Ehsan Bacha, president of Chamber of Commerce and Industry Zahir Shah, vice president of press club Faqir Hussain Hoti, representatives of grocers and butchers and other concerned stakeholders attended the meeting. The participants of the meeting after consultations fixed the price of beef per kg at 750 rupees, while the price of mutton was fixed at 1300 rupees per kg. Similarly, it was decided to change the prices of grocery items keeping in view the market situation.

The District Food Controller briefed the meeting about the computerized pricing App introduced by the Food Department, which has made it very easy to fix the market price of food items for any region. The Additional Deputy Commissioner asked the traders to respect the holy month of Ramadan and provide maximum relief to the consumers in view of the recent inflation. The Additional Deputy Commissioner Samiur Rahman warned the traders to display the price list at prominent places and strictly follow them. He said that as a Muslim, everyone should fully help and cooperate with the poor citizens during Ramadan and the business community has more responsibilities in this regard. He directed the Administrative officers to check the price committee rates in the markets regularly and take immediate action against the violators. On this occasion, the leaders of the business community also assured

the administration of full cooperation.

## INU team visits Hamza Foundation

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A delegation of Iqra National University (INU) Peshawar comprising of faculty members and students visited Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital, on Monday. The visit was supervised by Director Social Welfare Society Dr. Adil Adnan and stressed upon social responsibilities. Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital founding chairman Ijaz Ali Khan brief the delegation about the operation of the institute. Hamza Foundation chairman said that the institute initiated its services to serve humanity especially thalassemia patients. He added that 1483 patients are registered Hamza Foundation.



PESHAWAR: Member National Commission Rights of Child Ms. Nadia Bibi in a group with other participants during Provincial Consultation meeting on Free and Compulsory Education in Pakistan.

## NCRC concludes consultation on free and compulsory educ

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In an effort to address the critical issues plaguing education access and quality in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) organized a pivotal provincial consultation on Free & Compulsory Education. A diverse array of stakeholders, including academia, social welfare advocates, media representatives, and political leaders, gathered to confront the challenges head-on. The consultation uncovered a myriad of pressing concerns, including the pervasive influence of economic challenges hindering children's access to education. Moreover, the alarming dropout rates among girls, primarily driven by socio-cultural norms, demand immediate attention. Urgent infrastructural enhancements are imperative, as evidenced by the dire state of

many schools. Despite the constitutional mandate stipulating free and compulsory education for all children aged five to sixteen (Article 25A), a staggering reality persists: a mere fraction of the education budget is allocated to development plans, exacerbating the scarcity of higher secondary schools and perpetuating the challenge of inadequate school facilities, particularly in remote areas and newly merged districts. A glaring gap in inclusive education was also highlighted, particularly concerning children with disabilities, including those affected by landmines in newly merged districts. Their needs have been consistently neglected, highlighting an urgent call for action to ensure their right to quality education. Nadia Bibi, Member KP, NCRC emphasized the constitutional obligation to provide free and compulsory

education to all children, underscoring the urgency of addressing the current education crisis. Article 25A of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan clearly states the state shall provide free and compulsory Education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years. "However, unfortunately, only 52.9% of children in Pakistan are in school, and out of these, only 4.5% of children complete secondary-level education, making it the lowest in Asia. Moreover, Pakistan has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in the world, as it is home to more than 26.2 million out-of-school children," she said. The NCRC pledges to collaborate closely with stakeholders and work in collaboration with the new provincial government to devise an advocacy plan aimed at ensuring every child's fundamental right to quality education.

## ICS staff pays tribute to Dr. Salam



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Islamia Collegiate School (ICA) Teaching Staff Association

arranged a farewell party in honor to Dr. Adus Salam on his retirement for the serving the prestigious institution for 34 long years, on

Monday. During the ceremony Teaching Association president Kafeel Ahmad, general secretary Muhammad

Shahzad, Islamia Collegiate School (ICA) Principal Sikandar Khan, vice principal Hayat Khan and Section Heads along with the teaching staff cabinet were present. Principal Islamia Collegiate School (ICA) Sikandar Khan and Teaching Staff Association president Kafeel Ahmad paid homage to the services of Dr. Abdus Salam for the school and the students. They appreciated his commitment toward educating nation as teacher at the prestigious institution of Islamia Collegiate School Peshawar.

## Rule of law

stakeholders were strengthened through the platform of provincial justice committee. Improved collaboration with the stakeholders like Police, Bar, prison and Prosecution etc was a step in the right direction. It was linked with the criminal justice coordination committees at the district level and the contentious issues highlighted by the said committee were discussed and decided after mutual consultation. All the stakeholders were encouraged to plan their performance for the next year. The meeting was held quarterly to evaluate the work plan of all the stakeholders and its implementation was stressed upon. Enforcement plans were regularly monitored by the provincial Justice committee. Stress was laid on effi-

cient record and office management. For the first time in the history of the court a proper stock taking was done ensuring that the assets of the court were duly protected from pilferage. There were complaints from the District Judiciary that files moved were never kept a track of and important files were lost without being tracked. Measures like file tracking system, strict adherence to dairy and dispatch and training to the staff on record and file management were introduced to address the issue. Virtual connectivity was established providing access to all the district bars in KP through video link. Virtual benches of the Peshawar High Court were created at Kohat and Mardan to facilitate the litigants, the lawyers and the district

judiciary to save time and cost of litigation. It resulted in promoting coordination between the bench and the bar and resulted in better working environment in the district judiciary. First ever all Pakistan Registrars' conference was conducted followed by Virtual Registrars' conference to deliberate upon common way forward and mutual learning. Establishment of different courts like model courts, gender-based violence courts, child courts small claims and minor offenses court, juvenile courts and virtual courts provided forums to the needy litigants. COVID-19 was a challenge for the entire world. Formulation of COVID-19 strategy of the Peshawar High Court was appreciated by all and sundry.

Financial management, better planning helped in curtailing throw forward liability and as a consequence main projects pending for a long time, like Hariapur courts complex, Peshawar High Court Bannu Bench, sub jail at Bisham, KPJA Hostel and many others were completed. The performance also resulted in allocation of extra budgetary allocations for the development projects by the government. Collaboration was made with national school of public policy for joint training of judicial officers and other stakeholders. The aim was national consensus and mutual learning on matters of public policy, and implementation of the rule of law. As a result of which District Judiciary of KPK is one of the components of the courses of the national school of public policy. Digitalization of record rooms and enhanced partic-

ipatory coordination with District Judiciary and systematic human resource mobilization were one of the main focuses. It was a gigantic task. The record rooms not only in the Peshawar High Court but also in the District Judiciary what rapidly digitalized. For that purpose human resource was also provided to the District Judiciary thanks to the contribution of the government. First ever annual tree plantation drive, cleanliness policy were a regular feature. The plantation drive ensured thousands of trees being planted across the KP. These trees were regularly taken care of by the concerned Judicial Officer for which the record was kept. Whereas The Honorable chief justice himself took the initiative of leading both the tree plantation and cleanliness drive. The results were very encouraging. (To Be Continued)





## In brief

### Snow blankets mountains F.P. Report

WANA: Snow has blanketed the mountainous areas of South Waziristan and rain also turned the weather pleasant in lower parts of the district. Like other tourist spots of the country, a large number of families have thronged Kaniguram area of South Waziristan. Besides pleasant weather, the families along with children also enjoyed the natural beauty of the area. They also admired the local administration for making best possible arrangements for the people visiting the area. It should be mentioned that Pakistan Army and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Department were jointly working on various projects to promote in merged districts in South Waziristan. The local population of merged districts has also been endowed with training to promote tourism which has not only become source of income for them but also resulted in development of the areas.

### Transporters block highway NOSHKI (PPI):

Transporters blocked Quetta-Noshki highway near Gurgina area of Kardigab in district Noshki in protest over extortion forcibly received by influential persons of Kardigab today, causing long queues of vehicles on the highway. According to detail, Quetta-Noshki highway near Gurgina area of Kardigab in district Noshki was blocked by transporters against extortion forcibly received by influential persons of Kardigab. Long queues of vehicles were seen on both sides of Quetta-Noshki highway. The protestors said influential persons of Kardigab were forcing transporters to pay money without any justification. Highway remained blocked till filing this report.

### Police solve blind murder case F.P. Report

BALAKOT: Balakot Police solved blind murder case of a youth and arrested accused along with murder weapon and snatched cell phone. According to details, a youth Munsaf was shot dead by unknown culprits in Bissian Chowk of Balakot about three weeks earlier. The police using modern scientific techniques continued investigating the people and Mujahid s/o Ali Zaman a close friend of deceased hailing from Naran and currently residing in Bissian was also interrogated. During investigation, Mujahid revealed that he had got loan of Rs700,000 from Munsaf and over failure to back the money shot him dead and snatched his iPhone. The police recovered the murder weapon and snatched cell phones from possession of the detainee.

### Two killed in road accident

HYDERABAD (INP): Two children, including a tiktoker, were killed and 5 others were injured when a passenger bus collided with a rickshaw on Hyderabad-Tando Muhammad Khan road near Zeal Pak market on Sunday. The SHO SITE police station Akhtar Panhwar informed that six children were traveling in the rickshaw while one of the deceased, 14-year-old tiktoker Ali Haider alias Shahmeer Sheedi was hanging out from the bus. He added that following the collision Sheedi fell from the bus and was critically injured. The SHO told that the children were residing near Zeal Pak colony and were heading towards a seminary while the bus was going from Hyderabad to Husri.

# Severe weather in Dir compel schools to remain shut

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The local administration has announced the closure of schools across Lower Dir on March 5 due to severe cold weather. Meanwhile, educational institutions will also remain closed for three days effective immediately in Kurram.

The decision to close the schools for three days in upper and central Kurram has been made by Deputy Commissioner. A notification to this effect has been issued.

More than 30 people have died in rain-related incidents in Pakistan during

days of heavy downpours, with thousands of schools closed.

Widespread heavy rain since Thursday has caused severe disruption in some areas of the country, including the closure of all schools in Balochistan province until Thursday. Eighteen children were among 26 killed in north-western

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province as a result of collapsed buildings.

“As a result of continuous rainfall over the past four days in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a total of 27 individuals have lost their lives,” said Taimur Ali

Khan, the spokesperson for the Provincial Disaster Management Authority in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Another person was killed in a landslide and more than 150 houses were also damaged.

In southern Balochistan province, five people were killed when buildings collapsed on Thursday and Friday, said Jahanzain Khan, head of the disaster management agency. Damaged roads, floods and landslides have cut villages off from main towns in Balochistan, while major roads were blocked in Gilgit-Baltistan, local media reported.

# Snowfall in Karak portrays climate change impact

## F.P. Report

KARAK: After a long period of snowfall in Karak, it snowed in Palusa Sar, Sabrabad, Sepina etc. in Tehsil Banda Dawood Shah along with various areas. To deal with any unpleasantness, in light of the orders of Deputy Commissioner Karak Mujibur Rahman, Additional Assistant Commissioner One Karak Shamimullah carried out relief activities while staying on the road with his team in the limits of Spina and Jindri in the snow.

During the snowfall, the vehicles were stopped on one side so that no accident would happen. After the reduction of snowfall, the road has been opened and the traffic is moving slowly, but in the light of DC Kirk's orders, Additional AC Shamimullah is on alert along with his team to deal with any untoward incident.

**Jirga resolve old enmity:** In Takt Nusrati Siraj Khel, the 15-year local rivalry has come to an end, Haji Mir Daraz family and Rahmatullah family side by side, determined to live like brothers in the future, in this regard, the area of Takt Nusrati Siraj Khel in Muhammadi Banda is a magnificent peace ceremony was held under the chairmanship of Haji Zar

Wali Shah, in which former MNA Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz, Tehsil Mayor Sajjad Ahmad Khan, Haji Mansoor, Khushal Muhammad Farakht, Hafiz Ibn Amin, Sahib Gul Chairman, Haji Ilyas, Village Nazmin Malik Muhammad Ayaz. Tariq Akhund, Guldar Ali, Ahmad Nawaz Babar, Faheem Khattak, Tariq Faqir Khel, Waqas Ayaz, Akhtar Ali, Zafraan Khattak, Dr. Aamir, Ehsanullah, along with other scholars, local leaders and youths participated in large numbers on this occasion. Addressing the event, Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz, Tehsil Mayor Sajjad Ahmad Khan, Haji Mansoor and others said that the message of peace is spread by holding peace in the region.

Play your role for the establishment of lasting peace, on this occasion, Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz, representing the Rahmat family, said that we are sorry for what we have done, we have brought humility to the door of the Mir Daraz family, we hope they will forgive us. Principal Jamshed Khattak, representing the Mir Daraz family on the occasion, said that first of all we thank the scholars and leaders of the area and accept the humility of the Rahmatullah family.

# Social media activist dead in road mishap

## F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: One of the famous social-media stars of Sindh, Ali Hyder Sheedi died in a road accident. He was traveling in a passenger bus that met with an accident on main Hyderabad road leaving him critically injured.

He was rushed to Civil Hospital Hyderabad where he succumbed to his injuries. Ali Hyder Sheedi shot to fame across Sindh after his video in which he was complaining about the maltreatment of his maternal uncles to police officials in a unique style went viral through different social media

websites.

After his popularity he started performing comic characters and traditional dance of Sheedi tribe in different festivals and annual Urs across Sindh. He uploaded different videos on his social media channels that made people laugh. Despite popularity he was unable to eliminate the financial crisis from his life. 19-years old comedian also resorted to laborious work to make both ends meet.

A large number of his local fans started reaching Civil Hospital Hyderabad as soon as the news of his death broke out. Late Journalist Naseer Nohrio played a vital role in pro-

moting him through social media and was making efforts to launch him in the main-stream media but he died of COVID-19 in 2020.

Social media users who fondly watch his comedy videos expressed deep grief on his tragic demise and also denounced the apathy of the society that failed to groom an actor with multiple skills. Ali Hyder spent most of his time wandering in different cities of Sindh finding opportunities of livelihood. The body of the young comedian was shifted to his native village Naseer Laghari located in Tando Alahiyyar district for burial.

## World Bank delegation visits Dhabeji F.P. Report

THATTA: A delegation of World Bank has ensured cooperation for improving supply of water to Karachi from Dhabeji pumping station. A delegation of World Bank that included global director to the world bank Suraj Kumar Jha, Watson J. noted water expert Khairi Al Jamal, practice manager Jozes Mugabi among others visited Dhabeji pumping station on Monday to evaluate supply of water and the sewage system.

During the visit chief operating officer water corporation gave a detailed verifying to the delegation regarding the supply of water to Karachi from Dabeji pumping station. The delegation discussed multiple measures to perk up the supply of water to Karachi the biggest city of the country from Dhabeji pumping station.

The officials of water supply corporation told this correspondent that the team had visited the pumping station of the government sought the assistance of World Bank for refurbishment and alteration of pumping station. The delegation after visiting the station expressed its satisfaction besides proposing further improvement for the sewage system.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Dhabeji pumping station has been facing multiple issues with regards to maintenance for the past one decade that cause suspension of water to Karachi.

## Price control committee meeting held F.P. Report

MARDAN: On the direction of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a meeting of the District Price Review Committee Mardan was held in the office of the Deputy Commissioner under the chairmanship of Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance and Planning Samiur Rahman. Besides Assistant Commissioners, officers of the Food Department, president of Tanzim e Tajran Ehsan Bacha, president of Chamber of Commerce and the Industry Zahir Shah, vice president of press club Faqir Hussain Hoti, officials of Kariana and Anjuman Qureshan and other relevant officials were present in the meeting.

The District Food Controller briefed the meeting about the computerized pricing App introduced by the Food Department, which has made it very easy to fix the market price of food items for any region. The Additional Deputy Commissioner asked the traders to respect the holy month of Ramadan and provide maximum relief to the consumers in view of the recent inflation. On this occasion, the prices of various items were fixed through mutual consultation.

The price of beef per kg was fixed at 750 rupees, while the price of mutton was fixed at 1300 rupees per kg. Similarly, it was decided to change the prices of grocery items keeping in view the market situation.



UPPER DIR: TMA workers busy in removing of snow from roads in Sheringal.

# Minor killed in rain Lakki related incidents

## F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: A minor was killed and two other children were injured in a rain related incident in Achukhel area of Lakki Marwat district. Officials said that the two days downpour lashed parts of the district, causing flash floods in the rainy water courses and forcing people both in urban and rural areas to stay indoors.

The continuous downpour also inundated roads, disrupting intra district and inter district flow of vehicular traffic. In many areas including Lakki city and its surrounding localities the shower also damaged roads and caused ditches and cavities on them. But settlements in Lakki city and other areas mostly remained safe from the currents of rainwater as the consistent downpour could not trigger flash

floods in the urban locality.

“After rain forecast, assistant commissioner Yasir Nazir had launched the desilting drive to clean drains with the help of municipal workers for uninterrupted flow of rainwater”, officials claimed. They said that removing garbage and filth from sewerage drains before the start of rain spells proved helpful to avert flash floods and subsequent catastrophes.

In Achukhel village, a group of children playing outside their homes were buried under a sand mound. Villagers rushed to the place to rescue the trapped kids when they learnt about the incident.

After hectic efforts they retrieved a body and two injured boys from the debris and shifted them to a local hospital. The deceased was identified as Abdullah, 9 while the

injured included Awais, 8, and Murtaza, 9, sons of Ayyub Khan.

On the other side, local farmers are of the view that the continuous rains for two days are beneficial for wheat and chickpea (gram) crops in the sandy area of the district. They told the media personnel that they sowed wheat and gram crops once in a year and those were totally dependent upon rains.

They said that the prolonged dry spell was proving detrimental for crops and their fields were in dire need of rain. “The two days rain spell has brought life to the dead plants and wheat and gram”, they added. They said that local growers would get enhanced yield if weather conditions remained normal and kept their crops safe from hailstorm and gusty winds.

# MCMC 39th batch visits DC's office

## F.P. Report

ATTOCK: A delegation comprising officers of the 39th Midcareer Management Course (MCMC) visited the Deputy Commissioner's office, here on Monday. The Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif Raza welcomed the officers and the meeting held in the conference room of the DC office, the officers of the course were briefed about the district.

Deputy Commissioner highlighted the historical tourism background of Attock district and apprised the course officers about the development works. He briefed the officers regarding Local Government, Land Revenue and Other Departments in the district. He also gave a briefing about the implementation of the price control mechanism. The officers were also informed about the future plans including repair and rehabilitation of other public welfare projects in the district.

The Deputy Commissioner also answered the questions related to some departments of the officers. The participants of the course were presented with a

shield by the district administration.

Later officers of the 39th Midcareer management course (MCMC) also visited Office of District Police Officer, Police Officer DSP Mr. Asghar Gurayah briefed the participants regarding the policing of Attock Police.

A briefing was also given regarding the crime trend, police operations against criminals, use of modern technology in the police department and new initiatives on the instructions of IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar in Punjab Police. The participants appreciated the measures taken by the Attock Police to control crime and protect the lives and property of the public. The delegation also visited the District Command and Control Center established in the office where a briefing was given on the use of modern technology in police working.

**PFA kickoff 'eat safe kids' campaign to ensure healthy nation:** Punjab Food Authority (PFA) organized awareness seminars for students under eat safe kids campaign by starting practical steps regarding food selection and awareness among students. In this regard, training was

given at Razia Sultana, City School and Boys High School in Attock and a training session was given to the students on using homemade items instead of street food.

On behalf of District Food Authority 'Eat Safe Kids' campaign seminar was organized under which the students were made aware to adopt healthy lifestyle and nutritious food habits. The guest of the seminar was Special Deputy Director Operation Jeha Nazeeb Khalid, on this occasion District Food Officer, Secondary Education, Principals of three schools and a large number of students were also present on the occasion.

The campaign offers interactive activities, workshops, and educational resources to educate children about the significance of including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins in their diet. As reported by correspondent on Monday, the Spokesman of Food Authority said that the future of the country and the nation is connected with the better mental and physical development of the students. To create a disease-free healthy society, we have to work at the grassroots level.

# KPCTA resumes Safari train for Takhtbhai archaeological site

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: After a long break of 14 years, a safari train journey was initiated in Mardan. The journey was organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Department, took 130 tourists on a one-day trip from Peshawar to Buddhist Remains of Takht Bhai to explore ancient sites.

Additional Assistant Commissioner Abdul Ghaffar Gandapur and officials from the Tourism Department welcomed the safari train and ensured tight security arrangements for the esteemed guests. The one-day train journey from Peshawar to Takht Bhai station will operate every Sunday, according to Saad Tariq, spokesperson for the Tourism Department.

Guests enjoyed exploring the historical landmarks of Takht Bhai during the visit. The purpose of the initiative is to revitalize train travel and promote tourism, stated Madam Hasina, Director of Tourism Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The launch of the safari train marks the beginning of a new era, said Madam Hasina. She said that the tourism

tours will soon be extended to other stations as well, ensuring greater accessibility. The tourism journey was organized through collaboration between the Mardan district administration and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Authority.

**Female Judo athlete died during practice:** A female student injured during Judo match and died later in the hospital. According to the details, during a judo competition held at the Education Board Sports Complex, a female student sustained injury in the head. The incident occurred when she was struck on the head during the judo match resulting in her condition worsening.

The medical rescue team swiftly responding to the situation continued CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) procedures to stabilize the student's breathing and heart rate while transferring her to the hospital. Doctors at the hospital confirmed the severity of the injuries sustained by the 20-year-old student and confirmed the death of the deceased. The

deceased student hailed from Faisal Colony Peshawar.

**Saplings to distributed among public:** Commissioner Mardan Shaukat Ali Yousafzai has emphasized the need to plant more trees and maintain them regularly in the context of climate change and its devastating effects.

He was talking after handing over 30,000 saplings of different varieties provided by Pakistan Tobacco Company to Assistant Commissioners for planting in their respective

tehsils. Deputy Commissioner Mardan Saeedullah Jan, Additional Assistant Commissioners Khaula Haqdar and Junaid Khalid, PTC Regional Manager Leaf Kifayat Khan, Manager External Jamal Khan Toru and other relevant officials were also present on this occasion. While giving a briefing to Commissioner Mardan on this occasion, PTC officials said that their organization is providing lakhs of different types of plants to farmers and government institutions to improve the environment.

Commissioner said that a total of 21 lakh saplings will be distributed in Mardan, Swabi, Mansehra and Buner this year. Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai while appreciating the plantation initiative of PTC directed the Assistant Commissioners to ensure the planting and maintenance of these trees in their respective tehsils. He said that in the context of climate change, plantation and regular maintenance of planted trees is the need of the hour and all institutions including the Forest Department should fulfill their responsibilities in this regard.

He also inaugurated the plantation campaign by planting saplings in the lawn of the Commissioner's office.

**Polio eradication campaign kicks off:** An anti-polio campaign has been launched in Mardan district with stringent security measures in place. The district has witnessed the deployment of a heavy police contingent to ensure the smooth and peaceful execution of the vaccination drive. District Police Officer (DPO) Najib-ur-Rehman

is personally overseeing the security arrangements for the campaign.

The 5-day anti-polio campaign commenced today, aiming to vaccinate a total of 466,000 children across the district. To facilitate this massive undertaking, 2041 teams have been mobilized for administering the polio vaccine.

DPO Najib-ur-Rehman has been actively engaged in supervising security protocols, holding meetings with police officers and officials at various locations. He emphasized the importance of vigilance and instructed security personnel to wear bulletproof jackets and helmets for their safety and that of the vaccination teams. Furthermore, he urged them to remain vigilant and vigilant, keeping a close watch on any suspicious activities or individuals throughout the duration of the campaign.

The comprehensive security measures underscore the commitment of authorities to ensure the success of the anti-polio campaign and safeguard the health and well-being of chil-

dren in Mardan district. On the other side, to perform the polio campaign smoothly, Deputy Commissioner Mardan implements Section 144 for Polio Campaign in the district.

In preparation for the upcoming anti-polio campaign starting from March 3rd, Deputy Commissioner Mardan, Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpa, has imposed strict security measures to maintain peace and order. Under Section 144, a ban has been placed on pillar riding, vehicles with tinted windows, and the display of weapons until March 7th, 2024.

Anyone found violating these directives will face legal action under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code. The announcement was made officially by the government to ensure compliance and smooth implementation of the security measures.

These measures aim to create a secure environment conducive to the successful execution of the polio vaccination campaign in Mardan, underscoring the commitment of local authorities to public health and safety.





## Strike crisis escalates

# S Korea to suspend doctor licences

SEOUL (AP): South Korea's government began steps Monday to suspend the medical licenses of thousands of striking junior doctors, days after they missed a government-set deadline to end their joint walkouts, which have severely impacted hospital operations. Nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents have been on strike for two weeks to protest a government push to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions. Their action has led to hundreds of canceled surgeries and other treatments and threatened to burden the country's medical service.

On Monday, officials were sent to dozens of hospitals to formally confirm the absence of the striking doctors as the government began steps to suspend their licenses for at least three months, Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told a briefing. Park said authorities will later notify the striking doctors of their expected license suspensions and give them a chance to respond. He suggested the license suspensions would take weeks to go into effect.

"Despite repeated appeals by the government and other parts of society, the number of trainee doctors returning to work is very insignificant. Starting

from today, we begin the execution of law with the on-site inspection," Park said. Park again repeated the government's call for the doctors to end their walkouts. "We again strongly urge them to return to patients by not ignoring the pains of patients hovering between life and death - and their families," he said.

South Korea's government earlier ordered the striking doctors to return to work by Feb. 29. South Korea's medical law allows the government to make such back-to-work orders to doctors when it sees grave risks to public health. Anyone who refuses to follow such orders can be punished with a suspension of his or her license for up to one year, and three years in prison or a 30 million won (roughly \$22,500) fine. Last month, the South Korean government announced it would raise the country's medical school enrollment cap by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058.

Officials said it's urgent to have more doctors to deal with a fast-aging population and resolve a shortage of physicians in rural areas and essential yet low-paying specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments. Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-

population ratio is one of the lowest among developed countries. But many doctors have opposed the plan, arguing universities can't offer quality education to such an abrupt increase in students. They also say adding so many new doctors would also increase public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments.

They also predict newly added students would also want to work in high-paying, popular professions like plastic surgery and dermatology. Critics say many doctors oppose the government plan simply because they worry adding more doctors would result in a lower income.

The striking junior doctors are a small fraction of the country's 140,000 doctors. But they account for 30-40% of the total doctors at some major hospitals, where they assist senior doctors while training. Senior doctors have staged a slew of street rallies supporting the young doctors but haven't joined their walkouts. Police said they were investigating five ranking members of the Korea Medical Association, a body that represents South Korean doctors, for allegedly inciting and abetting the walkouts.

## Burkina Faso says 170 dead in village 'executions'

BURKINA FASO (BBC): Some 170 people including women and children have been "executed" in attacks on three villages in Burkina Faso, a public prosecutor has said. Aly Benjamin Coulibaly appealed for witnesses to help find those who attacked Komsilga, Nordin and Soro. Separately, the army warned of the increased risk of attacks by Islamists, "including attacks on urban centres".

The country's army seized power in 2022, but more than a third of Burkina Faso is controlled by insurgents. Mr Coulibaly said he had launched an investigation into the village attacks in Yatenga province on 25 February. The AFP news agency reported that dozens of women and children were among the dead. It was not known which group was behind the attacks. They are not believed to be related to other recent violence - attacks on a church as well as a mosque and army bases - elsewhere in the country. The country's army chief warned soldiers to stay vigilant due to an increased risk of suicide attacks by militants. He said there were also "fears of a series of large-scale attacks" against security forces in cities. Humanitarian workers say Burkina Faso is one of the world's most-neglected crises. Years of rampant insecurity has forced more than two million people from their homes, and the UN estimates that a quarter of all children under five have stunted growth resulting from hunger. The military seized power two years ago promising to win the battle against rebels, yet the violence continues. "The epicentre of terrorism has now conclusively shifted out of the Middle East and into the central Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa," said the Institute for Economics and Peace earlier this week. The Sahel includes Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger among other nations.

## Thailand facilitates transfer of victims

BANGKOK (Reuters): Thailand has in the last week helped facilitate the transfer of some 900 Chinese nationals who had been trapped in scam centres in a Myanmar border town back to China, Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said.

Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, has become a hub for telecom and other online fraud, according to the United Nations, with hundreds of thousands of people trafficked by criminal gangs and forced to work in scam centres and other illegal operations. The operation, which Thai police say started and was completed, involved transporting the Chinese nationals from Myanmar's border town of Myawaddy to an airport in the Thai border district of Mae Sot, where they were transferred to Chinese planes.

"This was a joint voluntary operation between three countries, China, Myanmar and Thailand," Prime Minister Srettha said. "The process was done voluntarily, based on humanitarian principles, it was not forced," Srettha said, adding that Thailand had facilitated the transfer to the flights at Mae Sot. Thai deputy police chief Surachae Hakpam said the operation involved 15 flights over three days to return Chinese scam victims to China. The Chinese foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Myanmar's military spokesperson also did not respond to a call seeking comment. Last November Myanmar authorities handed over 31,000 telecom fraud suspects to China in a joint crackdown against online scams in Myanmar.

China and Myanmar also helped facilitate the transfer back to Thailand of more than two hundred Thais, both victims and those involved with telecom fraud gangs, who were trapped in fighting between Myanmar military and armed ethnic-minority groups in Laukaing in Myanmar's northern Shan State.



SEOUL: A doctors wearing a mask attending a rally against government's medical policy in South Korea.

# Southeast Asian leaders meet: China and Myanmar on agenda

MELBOURNE (AP): An increasingly assertive China and a humanitarian crisis in Myanmar are likely to be high on the agenda when Southeast Asian leaders meet in Australia for a rare summit this week. The ASEAN-Australia Special Summit that starts in Melbourne on Monday marks 50 years since Australia became the first official partner of the Asian bloc.

Leaders of nine of the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations are expected to attend the three-day summit, with Myanmar excluded from political representation over its failure to stem violence in that country since a military junta seized control in 2021. East Timor's leader has been invited as an official ASEAN observer and Australian Prime Anthony Albanese invited his New Zealand counterpart to Melbourne to meet regional leaders. "Australia sees ASEAN at the center of a stable, peaceful and prosperous region," Albanese said in a statement. "Strengthening our relationship ensures our shared future prosperity and security," he added. Australia has hosted ASEAN leaders once before in Sydney in

2018. The leaders issued a statement with the host country then that called for a code of conduct covering the contested waters of the South China Sea, where China has become increasingly assertive over its competing territorial claims with a number of ASEAN countries. Australia and the Philippines, an ASEAN member, conducted joint sea and air patrols in the South China Sea for the first time in November last year. Also in November, Australia proposed to ASEAN members that they declare in a joint statement at the end of the Melbourne summit their support for the 2016 arbitration ruling in The Hague in favor of the Philippines that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea. Australian Broadcasting Corp said in December. China has rejected that ruling. Other ASEAN countries with territorial claims in conflict with China are Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. China's increasingly assertive posture in the South China Sea and violence in Myanmar topped a meeting of ASEAN diplomats in January in Laos, the group's poorest nation, which has taken over the

bloc's rotating leadership this year.

International Crisis Group's Asia program deputy director Huong Le Thu, who is attending the summit in Australia, said ASEAN has always been divided over how to approach China, with each member nation maintaining a unique bilateral relationship with the economic giant. "I don't see the commonality of one approach being feasible. They are working out the best way to manage this power asymmetry that they have with China," Le Thu said. The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar that hangs over the summit challenges ASEAN's credibility as an organization, she said. "It poses the question for its existence in the first place: why the countries' governments in the region get together and what is the purpose of this intergovernmental institution if it cannot act on the internal crisis that effects its own organization and the region?" Le Thu said. Around 200 protesters, mostly from the Myanmar diaspora, demonstrated outside the summit on Monday morning demanding the restoration of democracy in Myanmar

and that ASEAN not engage with the country's military leaders.

Australia, as the summit host, is focused on maritime cooperation, economic ties, climate change and clean energy. Melissa Conley Tyler, executive director of the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defense Dialogue think tank, expects leaders will focus on what they share in common rather than their differences on issues such as China and Myanmar. "The focus is very much going to be on how do Australia and the ASEAN countries work together to create a region where we want to live?" said Conley Tyler, who is attending the summit. "Myanmar is a continuing issue, but I'm not sure it'll be a focus. I feel the focus will be all positive, very future-oriented, talking about what we can do together and building that sense of excitement and momentum," she added. ASEAN members include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and they have a combined population of more than 650 million and GDP of more than \$3 trillion.

# Outrage over Brazilian tourist's gang rape in India

JHARKHAND (BBC): The alleged gang rape of a Brazilian tourist in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand has led to outrage in the country. The 28-year-old woman and her husband, who were on a motorbike tour, had stopped for the night in Dumki district when the alleged attack took place.

Police say that they have arrested four men and are searching for three more. The identities of the men, who are also accused of beating the woman's partner, have not been disclosed yet. The couple had travelled to several parts of Asia on their motorbikes before arriving in India a few months ago. Over the weekend, the woman posted a video on their Instagram page which has 234,000 followers. "Seven men raped me. They have beaten us and robbed us, although not many things [were taken] because what they wanted was to rape me," she said in Spanish, adding that the men beat them and threatened to kill them.

In a separate video, her husband, who is Spanish, said: "My mouth is destroyed, but my partner is worse than me. They have hit me with the helmet several times, with a stone on the head. Thank goodness she was wearing the jacket and that stops the blows a little." The videos are no longer up on their page. Dumka's police

superintendent Pitamber Singh Kherwar told reporters the couple flagged down a patrol van which took them to a local health centre for treatment. "The couple were speaking in a mixture of English and Spanish so the patrolling team could not understand them initially. But they appeared visibly injured so they were taken for treatment," he said, adding that the couple then told doctors about the alleged rape. The Brazilian embassy in India told the BBC that the woman - who has dual Brazilian-Spanish nationality - and her husband "were victims of a serious criminal attack". The embassy said it had contacted the woman and local authorities as well as the Spanish embassy, as the couple had used Spanish passports to enter India. "The Spanish embassy said that it had offered all the assistance available, including psychological care, but that the victims had declined the offer as they were already being looked after by the Indian emergency services," the Brazilian embassy said, adding that it would continue to "monitor all developments". The BBC has reached out to the Spanish embassy for comment.

"We need to stand united in our commitment to end violence against women everywhere in the world," the Spanish embassy in India posted on X (former-

ly Twitter). Conversations around rape and sexual violence became more prominent in India after the 2012 gang rape and murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi led to huge protests and changes to the country's rape laws. But tens of thousands of rapes are reported every year and activists say there is still a long way to go to tackle the issue. Over the weekend, several women shared their stories of dealing with unwanted sexual attention while travelling in India. The chief of India's National Commission for Women, Rekha Sharma, also sparked criticism after she responded to a post from a US journalist who wrote that while India was one of his favourite places, "the level of sexual aggression" he witnessed while living in the country was "unlike anywhere else I have ever been". He also gave a couple of examples of sexual assault faced by women he knew. "Did you ever report the incident to police?" Ms Sharma wrote. "If not then you are totally an irresponsible person. Writing only on social media and defaming whole country is not good choice." The response led to an outpouring of criticism from people on social media. Several people have also left comments under the couple's Instagram and YouTube videos, expressing solidarity and sympathy with them.

# Seven killed in Russian drone attack on Odesa

KYIV: A Russian drone attack on an apartment block in the southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa has killed at least seven people, including a three-year-old and a woman with an infant child, regional authorities said. "Rescuers in Odesa have just uncovered the bodies of a mother with a three-month-old baby," Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said in a post on the Telegram app.

At the scene, smoke poured from rubble strewn across the ground where the drone had ripped a chunk several storeys high out of the building. Clothes and furniture were scattered in the ruined mass of concrete and steel hanging off the side of the apartment block. Ukraine's State Emergencies Service posted photos, including of a dead toddler being placed in a body bag by rescuers. "This is impossible to forget! This is impossible to forgive," it wrote. It said five people including a child had been rescued alive.

Odesa region governor

Oleh Kiper said eight people were wounded, and rescuers were still looking for more people under the debris. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the drone was a Shahed supplied by Iran. Russia has launched several thousand of these long-range winged drones throughout the war at targets deep inside Ukraine. Al Jazeera's Rob McBride, reporting from Kyiv, said a total of 17 Shahed drones targeted Ukraine in the overnight attacks, with most of them intercepted by air defences. Separate shelling attacks on the front-line Kharkiv, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions killed three, Ukrainian officials have said. The spate of attacks led Zelenskyy to re-iterate his calls on the West to deliver more air defence systems. "We need more air defences from our partners. We need to strengthen the Ukrainian air shield to add more protection for our people from Russian terror. More air defence systems and more missiles for air defence systems save

lives," he said. Ukraine is currently on the back foot in the two-year war as a crucial \$60bn aid package is held up in the US Congress. Ukraine also appears to have launched an attack of its own, with a drone striking a five-storey residential building in St Petersburg, Russia's second city, causing no casualties, according to Russia's National Guard division. Videos on Russian social media showed what appeared to be a drone spiralling downwards into the building, triggering an explosion, blowing out windows and causing small fires.

The city's National Guard division said its preliminary assumption was the damage was caused by a "falling drone". Ukrainian media reported that the drone was shot down by Russia's air defences while targeting an oil depot around a kilometre from the crash site. Kyiv has hit several Russian oil facilities in recent months in what it has called fair retribution for Moscow's attacks on Ukraine's power grid. — Aljazeera

# Haiti declares curfew after 4,000 inmates escape jail

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti's government has declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew after an explosion of gang-led violence over the weekend saw thousands of prisoners escape after assaults on the country's two biggest prisons. The 72-hour state of emergency went into immediate effect as the government said it would set out to find the killers, kidnappers and other violent criminals it said it had escaped in the attacks.

The curfew will be in force from 6pm (23:00 GMT) until 5am (10:00 GMT). "The police were ordered to use all legal means at their disposal to enforce the curfew and apprehend all offenders," said a statement from Finance Minister Patrick Boisvert, who is acting as prime minister while Ariel Henry is overseas trying to salvage support for a United Nations-backed security force to stabilise the country in its conflict with increasingly powerful

crime groups. Gangs led by Jimmy Cherizier, a former police officer known as Barbecue, are trying to force Henry from power. Pierre Esperance of the National Network for Defense of Human Rights said only about 100 of the National Penitentiary's estimated 3,800 inmates remained inside after the assault. "We counted many prisoners' bodies," he added. A reporter from the AFP news agency who visited the prison said they saw about a dozen bodies outside it. The gate was open and there was "hardly anyone" left inside, they added. The Reuters news agency reported that there were no signs of police officers at the prison and its main door was open.

"I'm the only one left in my cell," one unidentified inmate told Reuters. "We were asleep when we heard the sound of bullets. The cell barriers are broken." In a statement, the Haitian government said police tried to repel the gang

attack against that prison and at another facility called Croix des Bouquets. Esperance said it was not immediately clear how many inmates escaped from the second prison, which he said held 1,450 inmates. The government said the attacks left "several wounded" among prison staff and inmates. In a statement, it thanked "the population for their calm, despite these very difficult times". Violence in Haiti has spiralled in recent days after calls by Cherizier for criminal groups to unite and overthrow Henry. Cherizier heads an alliance of gangs and faces sanctions from the UN and the United States. One voluntary prison worker said that 99 prisoners had opted to remain in their cells in the main jail for fear of being killed in the crossfire. These included several retired Colombian soldiers who were jailed for their alleged involvement in the assassination of former President Jovenel Moise. Authorities warned people

to be careful and "to continue to support the National Police who will do everything possible to track down fleeing prisoners and arrest those responsible for these acts", the statement read. The prime minister's exact whereabouts remained unclear. Henry had been due to return from a visit to Kenya where he signed a security deal to tackle gang violence.

Nearly 15,000 people have been forced to leave their homes in recent days, with 10 sites hosting internally displaced people emptied over the weekend, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM). Henry, who became prime minister in 2021 after Moise's assassination, was supposed to step down by early February, but told a regional summit in Guyana before travelling to Kenya that he would only hold elections by August 2025 once the situation was more stable. The last elections took place in 2016. — Aljazeera

# Seven-year-old girl killed in English Channel crossing attempt

LONDON: A seven-year-old girl has drowned after a small boat carrying 16 people trying to get to the United Kingdom capsized in northern France, according to French authorities. The boat overturned after the passengers boarded it in the Aa Canal, several kilometres from the waterway's opening into the English Channel, the prefecture in France's Nord department said.

Firefighters and policemen rushed to the scene after a witness raised an alarm. The local authority said in a statement that the vehicle "was not appropriately sized to carry so many people". It said that the "apparently stolen" boat was carrying the

girl's parents, who were travelling with three more of their children. Another couple, two men and six young children were also on the boat, and all of them have been taken to hospital in Dunkirk. This is the third fatal crossing attempt this year. In January, five people including a 14-year-old Syrian boy were killed as they tried to board a boat south of the port city of Calais in freezing temperatures. Last week, a 22-year-old Turkish man died after falling overboard into the sea off Calais, while another two people went missing. An Eritrean citizen suspected to be part of a gang has been charged with manslaughter

in that case and has been held in custody.

Rising channel crossings have proven to be a thorny issue between France and Britain. Boat arrivals to the UK jumped from 299 in 2018 to 45,755 in 2022, according to the think-tank UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE). At least 671 people have made the crossing so far this year. A total of 12 people were killed trying to cross the channel last year, while some 29,437 reached Britain, according to figures from London's interior ministry. Most arrivals were from Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Eritrea and Iraq. France and the UK signed a pact in March 2023 that pro-

vides for 541 million euros (\$585m) in British funding for hundreds of French police to prevent migrants from making the risky journey. British Home Secretary James Cleverly told reporters last month that the cooperation was successful, and that the countries would "expand upon" it. There was a 36 per cent reduction in crossings in 2023. European Union countries arrested 19 Germany-based people smugglers operating a highly sophisticated network during a major raid in February. The group charged 1,000-3,000 euros (\$1,080-\$3,242) per passenger on an inflatable boat. Authorities said 19 people were arrested. — Aljazeera



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## A new government, Shehbaz's dos and don'ts

**PAKISTAN Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif was elected prime minister of Pakistan for the second time on Sunday. According to the results of Sunday's election for the premiership, Shehbaz grabbed 201 votes against his competitor PTI-SIC candidate Omar Ayub, who fetched 92 votes. During the inauguration speech, Shehbaz thanked PML-N's allies and legislatures who voted for him and promised to work for the uplift of the nation and the welfare of the public during his stay in office.**

As the election for the premiership was held and the new Prime Minister took oath, an important constitutional process was accomplished that was eagerly awaited by the masses over the past several months. Hopefully, the cabinet formation and the election for the slot of the President will take place in due course of time along with the governmental and national affairs will turn normal very soon. Historically, the country and the public went through unimaginable stress, anxiety, and economic hardships due to unceasing turmoil and dogfights of the political groups over the past almost three years. The national economy faced a debt payment crisis and has narrowly escaped a collapse multiple times in the past two years wherein skyrocketing inflation, massive utility bills, and bulk taxes have turned this nation into an abyss for the middle-class and low-income sections of society. As a newly elected government took control of the country, ahead of the revival of IMF's bailout program and impending talks with the global lender on the next budget, the nation perceives a fresh wave of inflation due to massive increases in the prices of electricity, gas, petrol that will flare up headline inflation in the prices of all commodities, social services, transport fares, etc. Such scenarios are surely not a good sign for the new government and a pleasant phenomenon for the masses.

The new government faces multiple challenges at the internal and external fronts, relating to national security, the economy, terrorism, political stability, improvement in the social sector, energy problems, foreign relations with neighbors including India, Afghanistan, Iran, China, and overall Muslim world and the global community. However, domestic issues are the primary and most important element that not only affects governance but will surely undermine the government's position at the global level. The Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) in general and Sharif Junior in particular have significant governance experience in addition to the previous 16 months of PDM coalition government in the country. Hopefully, Shehbaz will not repeat his past mistakes and will endeavor to complete a 5-year constitutional term in office while maintaining fraternity and teamwork with allies, the opposition, and other political groups in the country.

In the prevailing conditions, an army of ministers, advisors, and special assistants is not essential to govern the ruins of the government, whilst the public did not give a mandate to the ruling elite to bestow important positions upon the family members and friends of the elite club. The economy is the most sensitive and important portfolio that demands utmost care and due diligence. Mr. Dar played the worst role not only in tackling the economic issues but dealing with the IMF during the PDM tenure, hence Shehbaz must seek an alternative to him or hire an economist from other parties. At present, the PML-N and allies can easily form an experienced cabinet as they possess a wealth of seasoned administrators who have successfully steered the nation during crucial periods in the past. For Sharifs, it is the last opportunity to show their ability, wisdom, and sagacity to rescue the nation from the current challenges through rational policies with no repeat of previous blunders, nepotism, and politicized decision-making. So, Pakistan emerges as a prosperous nation on the map of the world.

## Growing famine in Gaza

**THE UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri, has called for sanctions against Israel, asserting that a potential famine may already be occurring in the besieged territory. According to him, Israel has intentionally imposed a blockade and starving the Palestinian people in Gaza since October 8. The UN rights expert stressed that an immediate ceasefire is essential to prevent or end an escalating famine and called for sanctions against Israel to push the Jewish state for a ceasefire.**

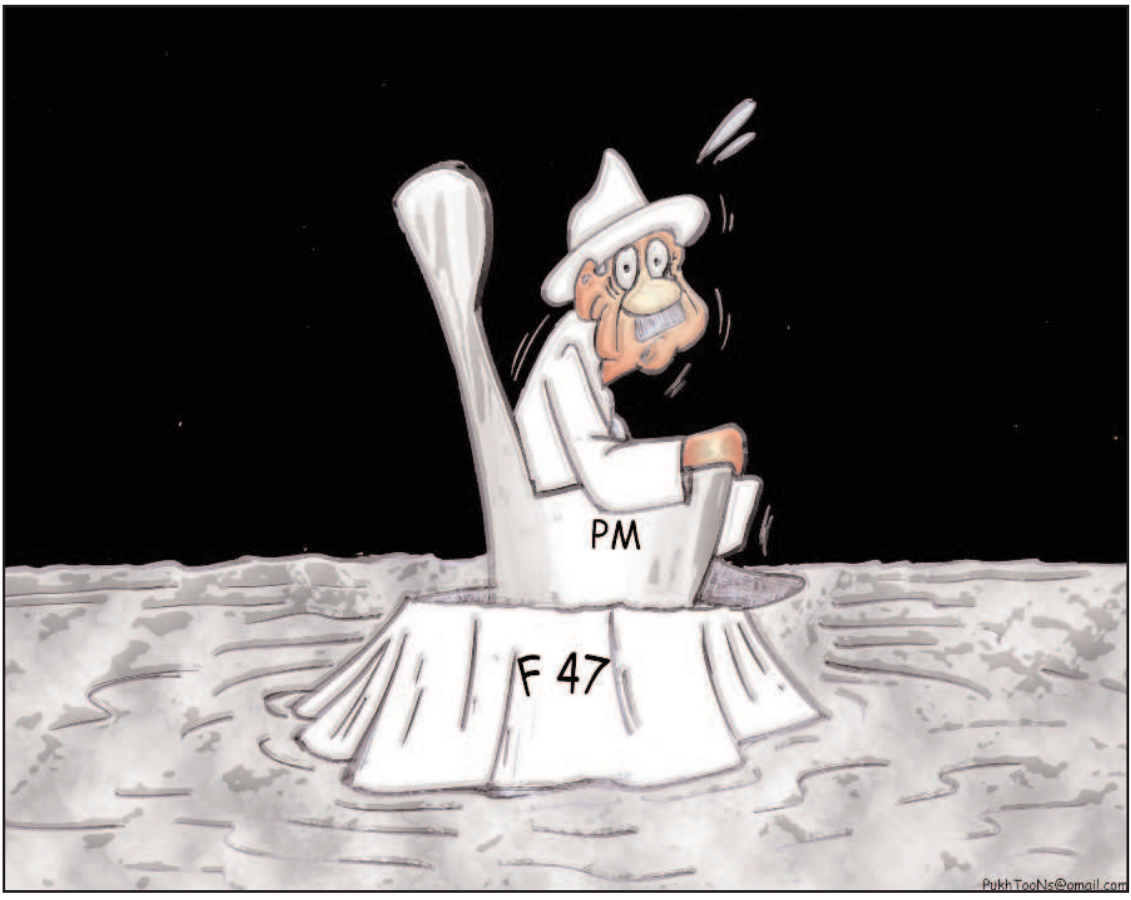
Israel's war crimes against innocent Palestinians in Gaza continued since October 8 last year. More than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly women, and children, have been killed and over 70,000 wounded in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched an invasion against Hamas nearly five months ago. Israel's war against Hamas has created a humanitarian catastrophe throughout the Gaza Strip and devastation in northern areas, which are largely cut off from the rest of the territory with little aid entering.

Hunger and severe malnutrition are widespread in Gaza, where about 2.2 million Palestinians are facing severe shortages due to continued blockade and restrictions on the flow of food, medicines, and other humanitarian supplies by Israel.

Recently, aid trucks and a huge crowd of Palestinians waiting for humanitarian relief have come under Israeli fire causing massive casualties and attracting worldwide condemnation. According to the rights experts, there is no reason to intentionally block the passage of humanitarian aid or obliterate small-scale fishing vessels, greenhouses, and orchards in Gaza other than to deny people access to food. The UN Human Rights Defenders and Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food have called for sanctions against Tel Aviv for severe war crimes and inhumane treatment of Palestinians. Surprisingly, the UN Secretary-General, Human Rights Chief, FWO, and General Assembly have categorically admitted Israel's criminality and urged for action against the Jewish State but unfortunately, the UN Security Council and the ICJ are unable to feel and observe grave human rights violations in Gaza. Israel and his resolute supporters have taken control of the vital organs of the global forum as the whole body fell ineffective and lifeless. Against such a high level of discrimination, Muslim nations and the OIC must exercise a symbolic exclusion from highly biased and impotent organization that practically failed in its stated objective. Otherwise, no change is possible in the current situation.

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## We need to talk about water - and fact that world is running out of it

George Monbiot

**THERE'S a flaw in the plan. It's not a small one: it is an Earth-sized hole in our calculations. To keep pace with the global demand for food, crop production needs to grow by at least 50% by 2050. In principle, if nothing else changes, this is feasible, thanks mostly to improvements in crop breeding and farming techniques. But everything else is going to change.**

Even if we set aside all other issues - heat impacts, soil degradation, epidemic plant diseases accelerated by the loss of genetic diversity - there is one which, without help from any other cause, could prevent the world's people from being fed. Water. A paper published in 2017 estimated that to match crop production to expected demand, water use for irrigation would have to increase by 146% by the middle of this century. One minor problem. Water is already maxed out.

In general, the dry parts of the world are becoming drier, partly through reduced rainfall; partly through declining river flow as mountain ice and snow retreats; and partly through rising temperatures causing increased evaporation and increased transpiration by plants. Many of the world's major growing regions are now threatened by "flash droughts", in which hot and dry weather sucks moisture from the soil at frightening speed.

Some places, such as the southwest of the US, now in its 24th year of drought, may have switched permanently to a drier state. Rivers fail to reach the sea, lakes and aquifers are shrinking, species living in freshwater are becoming extinct at roughly five times the rate of species that live on land and major cities are threatened by extreme water stress. Already, agriculture accounts for 90% of the world's freshwater use. We have pumped so much out of the ground that we've changed the Earth's spin. The water required to meet growing food demand simply does not exist.

That 2017 paper should have sent everyone scrambling. But as usual, it was ignored by policymakers and the media. Only when the problem arrives in Europe do we acknowledge that there's a crisis. But

while there is understandable panic about the drought in Catalonia and Andalusia, there's an almost total failure among powerful interests to acknowledge that this is just one instance of a global problem, a problem that should feature at the top of the political agenda. Though drought measures have triggered protests in Spain, this is far from the most dangerous flashpoint.

**Only when the problem arrives in Europe do we acknowledge that there's a crisis. But while there is understandable panic about the drought in Catalonia and Andalusia, there's an almost total failure among powerful interests to acknowledge that this is just one instance of a global problem, a problem that should feature at the top of the political agenda. Though drought measures have triggered protests in Spain, this is far from the most dangerous flashpoint. The catchment of the Indus river is shared by three nuclear powers - India, Pakistan and China - and several highly unstable and divided regions already afflicted by hunger and extreme poverty.**

The catchment of the Indus river is shared by three nuclear powers - India, Pakistan and China - and several highly unstable and divided regions already afflicted by hunger and extreme poverty. Today, 95% of the river's dry season flow is extracted, mostly for irrigation. But water demand in both Pakistan and India is growing rapidly. Supply - temporarily boosted by the melting of glaciers in the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush - will, before long, peak and then go into decline. Even under the most optimistic climate scenario, runoff from Asian glaciers is expected to peak before mid-century, and glacier mass will shrink by about 46% by 2100. Some analysts see water competition between India and Pakistan as a major cause of the repeated conflicts in Kashmir. But unless a new Indus waters treaty is struck, taking falling supplies into account, this

fighting could be a mere prelude for something much worse.

There's a widespread belief that these problems can be solved simply by enhancing the efficiency of irrigation: huge amounts of water are wasted in agriculture. So let me introduce you to the irrigation efficiency paradox. As better techniques ensure that less water is required to grow a given volume of crops, irri-

run dry. Water from desalination plants typically costs five or 10 times as much as water from the ground or the sky, while the process requires masses of energy and generates great volumes of toxic brine. Above all, we need to change our diets.

Those of us with dietary choice (in other words, the richer half of the world's population) should seek to minimise the water footprint of our food. With apologies for harping on about it, this is yet another reason to switch to an animal-free diet, which reduces both total crop demand and, in most cases, water use. The water demand of certain plant products, especially almonds and pistachios in California, has become a major theme in the culture wars, as rightwing influencers attack plant-based diets. But, excessive as the watering of these crops is, more than twice as much irrigation water is used in California to grow forage plants to feed livestock, especially dairy cows. Dairy milk has much higher water demand even than the worst alternative (almond milk), and is astronomically higher than the best alternatives, such as oat or soya milk.

This is not to give all plant products a free pass: horticulture can make massive demands on water supplies. Even within a plant-based diet, we should be switching from some grains, vegetables and fruit to others. Governments and retailers should help us through a combination of stronger rules and informative labelling. Instead, they do the opposite. Last month, at the behest of the EU's agricultural commissioner, Janusz Wojciechowski, the European Commission deleted from its new climate plan the call to incentivise "diversified" (animal-free) protein sources.

Regulatory capture is never stronger than in the food and farming sector. I hate to pile yet more on to you, but some of us have to try to counter the endless bias against relevance in politics and most of the media. This is yet another of those massive neglected issues, any one of which could be fatal to peace and prosperity on a habitable planet. Somehow, we need to recover our focus.

The Guardian

## Lack of rate cuts could scupper Tory election strategy

Liam Halligan

**THE Conservatives election strategy, to the extent they have one, is to go long. Downing Street has signalled for months that the general election will take place in October or November, just weeks before the January 2025 deadline. With inflation expected to keep falling, pushing real wages up, Rishi Sunak's team hopes an improving economy will help eat into Labour's 20-point opinion poll lead.**

And if the Bank of England announces two or three interest rate cuts over the spring and summer, boosting consumption and investment, that could spark an all-important feel-good factor, helping the Tories at least make a fist of trying to stay in power. Central to this "go long" strategy is taxation. Total tax revenue is poised to exceed 37pc of GDP during 2024, a 70-year high. This is the year we "throw off our pessimism about the UK economy", said Chancellor Jeremy Hunt in December - a message since dented by news that the UK entered recession in 2023, with GDP shrinking for two successive quarters. All the more reason, many would argue, for the Tories to cut taxes on Wednesday, when Hunt delivers his make-or-break spring Budget. It's a statement that needs to galvanise the Conservative Party, boosting its poll rating and stabilising Sunak's leadership, if the Tories are seriously to challenge Labour this autumn. In January, Hunt lowered the main rate of employee National Insurance from 12pc to 10pc - saving workers an average of £450 a year. More tax cuts are planned for Hunt's statement on Wednesday. The Tories have rightly dampened speculation the inheritance tax threshold will be raised from its current rate of £325,000, frozen until 2028.

Doing that would, rightly or wrongly, be widely viewed as a further tax break for already relatively wealthy families - given that only around one in 20 estates incurs inheritance tax. And the effective threshold is already £1m if a couple leaves their main residence to their children or grandchildren. It makes more sense to cut taxation in a way that helps as many people as possible. In April 2021, the then chancellor Sunak froze the tax-free personal allowance at £12,570 - with Hunt extending that freeze, again until 2028. Had that threshold risen with inflation, as normal, it would now be around £15,620.

Instead, this ultimate stealth tax has raised an additional £540 per worker - for someone on £20,000, that's an 11pc rise in their annual income tax bill. Hunt should now be bold and lift the personal allowance from £12,570 to £20,000 a year, while keeping the basic rate at 20pc. That would be progressive, helping poorer households much more, while lifting one in five taxpayers out of tax altogether. The trouble is that Whitehall types - including the Office for Budget Responsibility - pursue their lips at such radical measures, pointing to

the "on paper" cost. Yet the extra activity and spending such a move would generate, and the benefit payments spared, means almost doubling the personal allowance would, in my view, more than pay for itself. But Hunt and Sunak are too consensual and unfortunately lack the guts. What I think will happen on Wednesday is a further drop in National Insurance Contributions. Lowering NIC payments is "cheaper" than cutting income tax - because pensioners pay income tax, but not National Insurance. Plus, while Scotland has a separate system of income tax, a lower headline NIC rate applies right across the UK, including North of the border, where the Tories are particularly keen to limit Labour's gains. That's why Sunak spent part of last week in Aberdeen, dropping hints the Tories could lower the 75pc windfall tax on companies drilling for oil and gas in the North Sea. Around half the 320 active North Sea fields are due to cease production by 2030. Yet the UK still relies on domestic production for four fifths of the oil we use and over half the gas. Hydrocarbons combined account for no less than 75pc of Britain's energy needs - and will continue to remain vital, even if we do manage to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. So either we use our own oil and gas, or pay the higher financial and carbon costs of importing hydrocarbons from overseas. This argument - this factual reality - is starting to resonate with much of the public, not least in Scotland, where the oil and gas industry remains a major employer. That's why I think the Tories may soon grasp the nettle and lower the 75pc North Sea windfall tax, while highlighting Labour's plans to raise it even more. The centrepiece of Downing Street's pre-election strategy, though, is to hope the Bank of England lowers its main interest rate from 5.25pc, where it has been since last summer, at least twice before polling day. Yet that may now not happen. Inflation has fallen sharply from over 11pc in the autumn of 2022 to 4pc in January - and it may fall again when the February figure is published in a few weeks' time.

But inflation for now is double the Bank of England's target and there are signs it could rise again this summer. Attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping heading for the Suez Canal are driving up inflation for imported goods. The oil price has surged 15pc over the last three months, to around \$85 a barrel, amid ongoing hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. The UK's 10-year gilt yield has meanwhile risen sharply, up 80 basis points to 4.25pc since January. Traders now doubt the Tories' precious multiple-rate-cut scenario. Yes, house prices are up, as homebuyers take on bigger mortgages, keeping their fingers crossed much lower borrowing costs are just around the corner. But they may not be. And, if they're not, the Tories' election strategy is toast.

The Japan Times

## Trump effect takes Europe

Mark Leonard

As the war in Ukraine nears the end of its second year with no end in sight, Trump's candidacy is focusing European minds about what victory and defeat might entail. Everyone's ideal outcome is for Ukraine to recover all its territory. Watching the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, take the stage in Munich hours after learning of her husband's death last month, it was impossible not to recoil at the thought of giving Vladimir Putin even one square inch of Ukraine. But as the war of attrition grinds on, it makes less and less sense to consider the matter only in territorial terms. After all, an even bigger threat to Ukraine than territorial losses would be a Trump peace plan that both cedes territory and demilitarizes the country, thus leaving it condemned to a perilous state of neutrality. Europeans are waking up to the fact that Ukraine can

pursue its European and Western ambitions only through dual accession to NATO and the European Union. As Ivan Krastev argued recently, it may be time to start considering a "West German scenario."

Trump has also unwittingly lent urgency to the ongoing European debate about defense and security. During the conference in Munich, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen promised to hand over her country's "entire artillery" to the Ukrainians. More broadly, Europeans have already been contributing more aid (military and otherwise) to Ukraine than the United States has. Ahead of NATO's summit in Washington in July, 20 of the 22 EU members of the alliance (including Germany) are on track to spend at least 2% of their gross domestic product on defense. True, most of this shift is the result of Putin's

revanchism. But Trump's recent comments encouraging the Russians to "do whatever the hell they want" with NATO members that refuse to "pay up" have raised the ante. Europeans must not only invest more but also change how the money is spent, not least by overcoming the old psychological divisions between NATO and the EU.

But perhaps Trump's biggest contribution has been to Europe's political unity. After he was elected in 2016, many feared the rise of an "illiberal international" that would have brought far-right populist parties in Europe into close alignment with Trump's White House and Putin's Kremlin. But if Trump is elected a second time, polling by the European Council on Foreign Relations (to be published soon) shows that he would not be welcomed enthusiastically in most

European countries, including even Hungary. One striking consequence of the war (and of Brexit) lies in the repositioning of many right-wing parties. Most notably, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has carefully moved away from her previous Euroskepticism and made a point of cutting all of Italy's ties with Putin. In Poland, Donald Tusk's return to the premiership has united a traditionally skeptical electorate behind the idea of a more cohesive geopolitical Europe. The European Parliament elections in June may well result in a sharp turn to the right; but in many countries, the Trump threat could mobilize voters and help candidates who are rallying behind European sovereignty. Nor are these dynamics confined to the EU. The United Kingdom will probably elect a new government before the end of the year. In Munich, the Labour Party's impressive shadow foreign secretary,

David Lammy, made it clear that he would push hard for the closest possible relationship with Europeans on security and defense issues. But nobody summed up the Trump effect better than (outgoing) Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who implored Europeans to "stop whining and moaning about Trump," and start focusing on getting their act together. Given the long-term trajectory of US domestic politics, Europeans would need to do this either way, regardless of who wins this November.

Should disaster be averted in this time around, a second-term Joe Biden administration could count on a much better partner in Europe. As many US watchers have noted, Trump is both the biggest threat to American democracy and the most powerful mobilizer of Democratic Party voters. It is a risky business, but there is a chance that the Trump effect could leave the trans-Atlantic order stronger than it has been for a long time.



# We know Gaza is being ethnically cleansed, because Israel told us

Baria Alamuddin

**WHAT is Israel's objective in systematically starving and bombing Palestinians? Total depopulation of Gaza and ultimately the West Bank. How do we know? Because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's regime warned us. Last week's slaughter of over 100 desperate and starving Palestinians in Gaza is just one further example of this grim policy agenda.**

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said in October: "I have ordered a complete siege of the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel. Everything is closed." National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir declared: "The only thing that needs to enter Gaza are hundreds of tonnes of explosives from the Air Force. Not an ounce of humanitarian aid." Netanyahu himself said: "If we want to achieve our war goals, we give the minimal aid." Israel may have made little progress toward the goal of eradicating Hamas, but the process of eradicating Gaza is well under way.

Israel's apologists frequently raise the rhetorical question of why, if Arab states care so much for the Palestinians, they don't just open their borders. But that would obviously be the kiss of death to the Palestinian cause, repeating what occurred in 1948, when huge numbers fled to neighboring Arab states - never to return. Netanyahu's extremist stablesmates have repeatedly fantasized about forcing such a scenario. What else do we expect will be the outcome after Gaza's populace has been starved and incarcerated for another few months? Western politicians voice frustration that Israel lacks a clear plan for governing Gaza after

the war, but that ignores the fact that many Netanyahu-aligned hawks envisage a future when there will be no Palestinian Gaza left to govern.

In 2023, Azerbaijan drove the Armenian population out of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh by first besieging and starving them, and then bombing them, causing the entire population to flee. Netanyahu's murderous regime seeks to replicate this ethnic cleansing case study in Gaza. Extremist settlers and security forces have embarked on campaigns of land theft, blockades, violence and repression throughout the West Bank, toward the same ultimate goal of stealing the land in its entirety. This isn't fear mongering - it's all there, brazenly advertised in the manifestos of governing political parties.

Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of using "starvation as a weapon of war." In late January, Ben-Gvir ordered police to allow Israeli protesters to close the main Kerem Shalom border crossing. Netanyahu also sought to demonize and block international aid for UNRWA, which with its distribution centers and 13,000 staff in Gaza is the only entity logistically capable of distributing essential supplies. So the latest massacre and the worsening mass starvation are the direct, predictable result of calculated policies by Netanyahu's regime, engineered to starve an entire population into non-existence. Children are already dying of hunger. According to UNICEF about 10 percent of children in Gaza under 5 are acutely malnourished.

It has long been Israeli official

policy to lie, deny, blame others, block access for journalists and flood the media with its version of events until the news agenda moves on. But the millions on social media who witnessed last week's massacre as starving Palestinians scrambled for food from an aid truck near Gaza City are not stupid. The footage wasn't shocking only because of the dozens of scattered bodies, but also because of the despair, trauma and humiliation in the faces of emaciated survivors who had been living these horrors for the past five months.

Even Western politicians have become less willing to mindlessly parrot self-evidently nonsensical versions of events as related by Netanyahu's officials: his senior adviser Mark Regev initially claimed there were no Israeli troops present at the scene of the massacre, and had to be swiftly corrected by the military. But vacuous Western statements of "concern" and "condemnation" merely add insult to injury. Why no withdrawal of ambassadors, or the kind of punitive measures that would have been routinely implemented if any other country in the world had perpetrated such obvious war crimes in plain sight?

While US aid drops are welcome, Oxfam devastatingly remarked that they served mostly to relieve the guilty consciences of senior US officials, whose policies are contributing to the ongoing atrocities and risk of famine."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told Congress last week that Israel had killed more than 25,000 women and children in Gaza, although his own office immediately backpedaled and dismissed

this statistic as an estimate from Gaza's Health Ministry. This jarred awkwardly with Austin furthermore informing Congress that the US had provided 21,000 "precision guided" munitions to Israel since the start of its war. He failed to say whether these munitions had been deployed with the intended levels of precision.

A temporary ceasefire, if it happens at all, would only prolong the agony, particularly if no hope is offered for Gaza's bereaved people to begin rebuilding their shattered lives, let alone seek compensation for their losses. US President Joe Biden should instead exert the massive leverage at his disposal to compel an immediate and permanent cessation of the killing, before the blood of tens of thousands more is on his hands.

If it looks like genocide and has the effect of genocide, then it probably is genocide. MP and former Likud Minister Galit Distal Atbaryan called for "erasing all of Gaza from the face of the Earth ... Gaza needs to be wiped out." Former Likud MP Moshe Feiglin urged the Israeli army to "completely destroy Gaza before invading. I mean destruction like what happened in Dresden and Hiroshima."

When Netanyahu's closest allies have loudly and unambiguously advocated starvation and genocide, they don't have a leg to stand on when the international community and even the International Court of Justice take such vile incitement with the seriousness it deserves. Let us not feign surprised outrage in the months to come if Gaza's remaining population has been scattered to the four winds. We were warned. By Israel's own leaders.

Arab News

## Britain can boom. That's the story Chancellor must tell

Nick Timothy

**ALL budgets are political, and budgets in election year are especially political. This is true regardless of the Chancellor or party in government. For even the most technocratic budget would be met with political scrutiny from the Opposition, MPs and the media.**

Politics - that much maligned art - only really stands for the representation of competing values and interests. The idea that we can reach optimal outcomes if only we put the right data into the right impact assessment is commonplace among officials and wonks, but it is completely wrong. The choices we face reflect our circumstances, and the choices we make reflect our values, interests and understanding of the world.

Conservative chancellors will therefore make different decisions to Labour chancellors, and it will be perfectly reasonable for Jeremy Hunt to draw out this week the contrasts between the Tories and Labour. More than that, he has to tell a broader story - of Britain's economic strengths and weaknesses, of the world around us, of the events of the last five years, and of the future we can have if we follow his plan. Amid the reams of papers produced examining our economic difficulties, we sometimes neglect our strengths. Britain is the sixth biggest economy in the world. London is one of the richest cities on Earth, and alongside New York the City remains one of the two world centres of global finance.

We are the world's third trillion-dollar tech economy after only the US and China. We have the largest life sciences sector in Europe, which produced a Covid vaccine that saved six

million lives and a treatment that saved a million more. Our creative industries are growing at twice the rate of the economy overall. And following the introduction of the super-deduction tax change nearly three years ago, investment is growing at the second highest rate in the G7. But our structural weaknesses and longer-term challenges are clear. Whatever the success of London and the South East, some of the poorest places in Northern Europe can be found here. Our manufacturing base is still too small, having fallen from 27 per cent of economic output in 1970, to 17.4 per cent in 1990, to less than ten per cent today. We have a hollowed-out labour market with too many low-paid jobs. Our infrastructure is inadequate, our energy costs too high, and we do not train enough people with the technical skills the country needs. Dependent on consumption for growth, too many are too poor to consume without credit. Personal debt stands at 126 per cent of household income.

Outside the pandemic we have run trade deficits every year since 1998, which is both a product and a cause of our problems. A product, because it is the result of our failure to make, do and sell enough of what the world needs. A cause, because it creates a current account deficit, which puts pressure on Sterling. To compensate for this, we encourage the sale of assets to foreign investors - including even land and housing stock, pushing up prices - and build up external debt, which leaves Britain more exposed to changing investor attitudes and increases in international interest rates. From the financial crash

through to Covid, we got hooked on ultra-loose monetary policy. Super-low interest rates and quantitative easing increased asset prices to the extent that historically normal interest rates have become unaffordable for many families, and house prices out of reach for millions. Monetary policy also gummed up the wider economy, by reducing incentives for banks to lend to businesses and slowing the circulation of money. It limited investment, competition and growth by keeping zombie companies alive and encouraging leveraged buyouts and share buybacks. And it lowered savings and returns for pension investments, reducing financial resilience and future consumption.

Because of pensions regulation, the British refusal to follow the protectionism of other countries, the sheer scale of US equity markets, and perhaps because of poor corporate performance here, the UK equity market is struggling badly. Ours is the only country in the world where the pensions industry invests less in domestic than international equities. As the economist Simon French explains, every major pension industry in the developed world is overweight in domestic equities by an average of 2089 per cent, but Britain is underweight by 41 per cent. These strengths and weaknesses have been applied through a succession of huge global events. We have been through the great financial crash and its long effects, an unprecedented global pandemic, the biggest war in Europe since the days of Hitler and Stalin, and now trouble in the Middle East. China is responding to its economic

problems by subsidising industrial production and seeking to increase exports. With geopolitical tensions across continents, which might for example cause energy price spikes or interfere with food exports, the need for resilience as well as growth is greater than ever.

These international trends have a very real effect on the job security, wages, rent and mortgage payments, living costs and future prospects of every family in Britain. But while the Government told this story of complexity and interconnectedness well during the Covid pandemic, and immediately after Rishi Sunak replaced Liz Truss, its economic narrative has since grown messy. On Wednesday the Chancellor needs to tell his story culminating in a plan, action now and later, and a vision for the future. No doubt he will say that the Government has taken the tough action necessary to bring inflation under control, which will allow him to announce some tax cuts that might also be followed by reductions in interest rates.

But then he also needs to set out how the Conservatives can overcome Britain's long-term weaknesses and withstand the swirling winds of world events. Fiscal prudence and sensible monetary policy are the macroeconomic platform that makes possible the investment and microeconomic reform we desperately need. And Hunt can compare his plan to the inevitability that a Labour government would risk inflation and unemployment by spending, borrowing and taxing too much - as they always do. Budgets, after all, are about choices, and choices are political.

The Telegraph

# ‘Our country is sinking into darkness’

Oleg Orlov

**ON the day this trial began, Russia and the world were shocked by the terrible news of Alexei Navalny's death. I was shocked, too. I even considered not making a final statement at all. What is there to say when we are still reeling from the shock of the news? But then I thought: Actually, these are all links in one chain - the death, or rather the murder, of Alexei Navalny; judicial reprisals against other critics of the regime, including me; the stifling of freedom in the country; and the deployment of Russian troops in Ukraine. These are all links in the same chain. And so I decided to say my final word after all.**

I have not committed a crime. I am being tried for a newspaper article in which I called the political regime in Russia today totalitarian and fascist. The article was written more than a year ago. At the time, some of my acquaintances thought that I was exaggerating. But now it is quite obvious that I was not exaggerating at all. The government in our country controls not only social, political, and economic life, but it has also taken complete control of culture and scientific thought and it interferes in private life. It - the government - is taking over everything. We see it happening.

In the slightly more than four months since the end of my first hearing in this court, many events have taken place that show how quickly, and how much more deeply, our country is sinking into darkness. I will very briefly list a variety of events that differ both in scale and tragedy: books by a number of contemporary Russian writers are banned in Russia; the non-existent "LGBT movement" has been banned, which in essence means brazen government interference in the private lives of citizens; Higher School of Economics applicants are banned from citing "foreign agents."

Now applicants and students must study and memorize lists of "foreign agents" before studying their subjects; Boris Kagarlitsky, a well-known social scientist and left-wing publicist, was sentenced to five years in prison. For what? For a few words he said about the events of the war in Ukraine that differ from the official position; and, finally, when the man whom propagandists call "Russia's national leader" spoke about the outbreak of World War II, he said the following, and I quote: "After all, the Poles forced them. They played around too long and forced Hitler to start World War II with them. Why did the war start with Poland? Poland was uncooperative. Hitler had no choice but to start with Poland in order to carry out his plans." End of quote.

So what should we call a political system where all that I have just listed is happening? I think the answer is clear. Unfortunately, what I wrote in my article was correct. It is not just public criticism that is banned, but any independent judgment. People are punished for acts that seem to have nothing to do with criticism of the government and politics.

There is no artistic genre where free artistic expression is possible; there are no spheres of academic humanities that are free; there isn't even private life. Let me now say a few words about the nature of the charges brought against me and those made in many similar trials against those who, like me, oppose the war. At the opening of this trial, I refused to participate in it, and so I had the opportunity to read a book, "The Trial" by Franz Kafka, during the hearings. The current situation in our country and the situation in which the main character finds himself in the book have features in common: absurdity and arbitrariness - arbitrariness that masquerades as formal compliance with pseudo-legal procedures.

For example, here we are accused of discrediting [the military] without explaining what it is and how it differs from legitimate criticism. We are accused of disseminating deliberately false information without bothering to prove that it is false - just as the Soviet regime declared criticism, any criticism, a lie. And our attempts to prove the veracity of this information becomes criminal activity. We are accused of not supporting the system of views and the worldview that have been proclaimed correct by the leadership of our country. And this is happening despite the fact that the Constitution does not permit any state ideology in Russia. We are convinced that our country is sinking into darkness.

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victed for doubting that an attack on a neighboring state has the goal of maintaining international peace and security. This is absurd. Kafka's hero did not know until the end of the novel what he was accused of, but regardless, he was convicted and executed. In Russia we hear the formal announcement of the accusation, but it is impossible to understand it within the framework of law and logic. Unlike Kafka's hero, however, we understand why we are actually detained, tried, arrested, sentenced and killed. We are being punished for taking it upon ourselves to criticize the authorities. In today's Russia, this is absolutely forbidden. Of course, deputies, investigators, prosecutors and judges never say it openly. They hide it under the absurd and illogical formulations of the so-called new laws, indictments and sentences. But this is the truth.

Now Alexei Gorinov, Alexandra Skochilenko, Igor Baryshnikov, Vladimir Kara-Murza and many others are being slowly killed in prison camps and jails. Why are they being killed? They are being killed because they protested against bloodshed in Ukraine, because they want Russia to become a democratic, prosperous state that does not pose a threat to the outside world.

In recent days, people have been detained, punished and even imprisoned just because they went to monuments to the victims of political repression to honor the memory of the murdered Alexei Navalny. A remarkable man, brave and honest, who under incredibly difficult conditions did not lose his optimism and faith in the future of our country. Of course, it was murder, regardless of the specific circumstances of this death. Now the authorities are even at war with the deceased Navalny. They fear him, even when he is dead.

And rightly so. They destroy memorials to his memory that were created spontaneously. They do it in the hope that in this way they will demoralize the part of Russian society that continues to feel responsibility for their country. Their hope is in vain. We remember Alexei's appeal: "Don't give up." I would add to that: Don't lose heart, and do not lose optimism. Truth is on our side.

The Moscow Times

## Fighting terrorism to protect global security

Zhang Zhenya

**THE state of rule of law signifies the socio-political progress a society makes, and there is a consensus in the international community that counterterrorism measures should be taken based on rule of law. Like many other countries, China too has figured out its own path to fight terrorism in accordance with the rule of law and in line with its national conditions.**

China faced a serious threat from terrorism, mainly in the form of separatism, religious extremism and mindless violence. Between 2011 and 2014, China suffered a series of terrorist attacks in places like the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, Beijing and Yunnan province, which endangered public and national security. In order to curb the frequent terrorist attacks and spread of terrorist activities, and better safeguard people's lives and property, the government remains committed to building a legal system that will help security officials plan and execute counterterrorism work.

In this regard, Article 1 of the Anti-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, the main body of China's anti-terrorism legal system, says "this Law is formulated in accordance with the Constitution", and Article 6 makes it mandatory for "anti-terrorism efforts to comply with the law, respect and protect human rights", which is consistent with Article 33 of the Constitution. Article 1 also makes it clear that the "State respects and safeguards human rights". Terrorism poses a serious threat to peace and stability, both within and outside China's borders. To strengthen counterterrorism work and maintain global peace and stability, the United Nations, its specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency have jointly formulated a series of conventions on counterterrorism, indicating the international community's basic position on combating terrorism and making counterterrorism work part of the rule of law.

China has been following the UN's norms, and improving its anti-terrorism law by learning from global counterterrorism principles, concepts and practices. China upholds the common values of humankind, supports the UN playing a leading role in the global fight against terrorism, and strictly follows the UN Charter and other international laws and conventions on counterterrorism. Besides, China has been advocating regional cooperation to better combat terrorism and promote the formulation of a series of counterterrorism documents under the framework of the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Border Cooperation Agreement. Also, the country has acceded to 12 global anti-terrorism conventions and implemented the anti-terrorism resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council through legislation and other means. For example, to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1373, it included the crime of providing financial support to terror-

ist organizations in the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China in 2001. In drafting anti-terrorism laws and rules, China complies with not only national laws and administrative regulations on counterterrorism at the national level, but also the local laws and regulations as well as local government rules based on the specific needs of different regions. In terms of law enforcement and judicial practice, China has taken measures to ensure human rights are not violated in the course of counterterrorism work.

It has taken measures to protect the rights of not only the victims and their families but also suspects, defendants and other stakeholders. In its effort to eradicate terrorism, China has not only cracked down on terrorist outfits and their members, but also implemented measures, in accordance with the law, to prevent the spread of terrorism. China remains committed to better safeguarding national security and people's safety and security, for which it has strengthened publicity and education in order to eliminate the breeding ground for terrorism, and increase its capability to combat terrorism.

The country will continue to improve and update anti-terrorism laws, regulations and practices. China's legislation on anti-terrorism benefits not only China and its people, but also the international community. China has drafted its anti-terrorism laws and regulations in a way that promotes the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and is willing to work with other countries to strengthen the fight against terrorism.

The China Daily

## How Biden can win State of the Union

Dean Obeidallah

**THE adage "show, don't tell" sends the message that it's far more convincing to make a point with one's actions than with words. That lesson was also underscored this week during the opening sketch of "Saturday Night Live." The show lampooned the myriad allies of President Joe Biden who have defended him vociferously against critics who suggest he may be too old to run again for the highly demanding job of US president. Some of those voicing concerns have said they worry in particular about Biden's cognitive abilities after a series of verbal stumbles.**

But members of Biden's team have insisted that when he's not in the spotlight, the president is as sharp as a tack - an assertion that "SNL" took to humorous excess on Saturday. "Behind closed doors, Joe is incredible," said cast member Michael Longfellow playing the role of California's Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, in response to an interview question from CNN anchor Dana Bash - played by Heidi Gardner - about mounting public concern over Biden's age.

"SNL" presented a litany of Biden defenders including White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre (SNL's Ego Nwodim) and US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas (Marcello Hernandez). Nwodim as Jean-Pierre - who in the skit describes Biden as "the most vigorous man I've ever known" - displays what is supposed to be the president's packed daily schedule, including a 7 a.m. entry for a SoulCycle class, adding, "And I'm not talking about taking one. He leads it."

This is a Joe Biden, we learn, who when outside of the public eye is quickly dispatching all comers in speed chess, besting NBA player Draymond Green ("SNL"'s Devon Walker) of the Golden State Warriors at pickup basketball and trouncing the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a pushup contest. The SNL sketch makes the same very good point that comedian Jon Stewart raised during the first show following his return to hosting duties at "The Daily Show" last month.

Stewart played a clip of Vice President Kamala Harris assuring an audience that in closed-door meetings Biden is "smart ... on his game ... and on top of it all." Stewart - in a tone of voice that was as playful as it was incredulous - responded: "Did anyone film that? ... That would be good to show to people." Again, show - don't tell. And this week, Biden will have the opportunity to do just that. On Thursday, he takes center stage at the State of the Union, the perfect vehicle to show his vigor and mental acuity to the American people. With the nation watching, the president can mollify any concerns over his age or cognitive skills while delivering a bold, powerful and at least occasionally amusing address.

That's what Biden did with great success last year. His 2023 State of the Union speech was a master class in which he perfectly handled GOP hecklers. When GOP lawmakers like Marjorie Taylor Green and others booed Biden after he stated that some Republicans wanted to cut Social Security and

Medicare, he didn't become flustered. Instead, he addressed the hecklers directly, saying, "So folks, as we all apparently agree, Social Security and Medicare is off the books now, right?" This prompted a loud cheer from even Republicans. Biden responded, "We've got unanimity," adding jokingly, "I enjoy conversion." A CNN flash poll found that 72% of those watching had a positive view of the speech.

That same command of policy combined with sharp wit and a bit of levity is what Biden needs as the 2024 presidential race gets underway in earnest. We saw Biden do just that last week while appearing on NBC's "Late Night with Seth Meyers." After Meyers asked the "age question," Biden responded by joking, "You got to take a look at the other guy, he's about as old as I am, but he can't remember his wife's name." (Biden was referring to a recent speech where former President Donald Trump appeared to refer to his wife Melania as "Mercedes," a claim debunked by fact-checkers.) After the laughs died down, Biden pivoted to more substantive issues, dismissing age as a major impediment to doing the job of president. "It's about how old your ideas are," he said before lambasting Trump. "Look, this is a guy who wants to take us back. He wants to take us back on Roe v. Wade. He wants to take us back on a whole range of issues that are - 50, 60 years, they've been solid American positions."

That's the perfect approach: Biden delivered a joke addressing his age then quickly turned the focus of the discussion to issues

CNN





## Pakistan Financial Literacy Week: Governor State Bank inaugurates 1st edition

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Mr. Jameel Ahmad has said that SBP fully recognizes access to financial services a fundamental right, and SBP's mission is to empower every citizen by providing them with the tools and knowledge needed to participate fully in the economy. He was delivering his key note address at the inaugural event of Pakistan Financial Literacy Week (PFLW) held today at Learning Resource Centre, SBP, Karachi. The theme for the week is 'Digital Bankari - fori aur asaan'. The event was attended by Presidents and CEOs of commercial banks, senior officials from the World Bank, Alliance for Financial Inclusion and other stakeholders.

The Governor said that an inclusive financial sector is not only important for overall growth of the bank-

ing industry but also augments monetary policy transmission channels and increases its effectiveness. Mr. Ahmad went on to add that SBP has always been working on increasing the availability and utilization of financial services for people and businesses to meet their financial services needs in a fair and dignified manner.

The key initiatives taken for expanding financial services to the unbanked and underbanked segments of the society includes implementation of national level strategies and policies such as National Financial Inclusion Strategy, National Financial Literacy Program and Banking on Equality Policy. He shared that SBP has been implementing a number of initiatives under the national level policies which are uniquely positioned to benefit all segments of population, i.e. RAAST, ASAAN Digital Account, ASAAN

Mobile Account and more recently Digital Banks and specialized schemes to enhance access to finance. The specialized schemes include SME Asaan Finance Scheme (SAAF), Refinance and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs, Line of Credit for MSMEs, and Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme (PMYB&ALS).

After the Governor's inaugural speech, the Excellence Awards were conferred upon various commercial banks that actively participated in the National Financial Literacy Program since its commencement in 2017 and contributed to improving financial literacy among the beneficiaries.

The second session of the event included a panel discussion, where experts and thought leaders explored the future landscape of digital finance.

The discussion delved into emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the rapidly evolving digital financial ecosystem. Panellists, representing diverse sectors, shared insights on how technology is reshaping the financial industry and discussed strategies to ensure a secure and inclusive digital finance landscape.

SBP in collaboration with stakeholders, actively shapes an ecosystem that embraces technological advancements. This collaborative effort ensures financial stability and sustainability, critical components in the nation's journey towards a digitally empowered and financially inclusive society. As financial literacy week progresses, a wide range of programs and activities, both on-ground and online have been designed to raise awareness and educate citizens on the importance of financial literacy in the evolving digital era.



KARACHI: Deputy Governors SBP Dr. Inayat Hussain and Saleemullah giving away Financial Literacy Awards to executive of winning bank at launch of Pakistan Financial Literacy Week at SBP Auditorium.

### Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Six ships namely, Lotus-A, Xpress Salween, MSC Martina, Star Sind, Monax and Kamome Victoria, carrying Containers, Palm oil, Chemicals and Mogas, berthed at Container Terminal, Liquid Terminal, Engro Terminal and FOTCO Terminal respectively.

Meanwhile four more ships, Melody, Torm Integrity, San Nicolas and Al-Rayyan scheduled to load/offload Rice, Gas oil, Coal and LNG are also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim during last 24 hours.

A total of ten ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a containers ship, MSC Martina left the Port on today morning, while four more ships, X-Press Salween, Lotus-A, Monax and BBC Zoe are expected to sail on same day.

Cargo volume of 122,592 tonnes, comprising 74,058 tonnes imports cargo and 48,534 tonnes export cargo carried in 3,916 Containers (1,424 TEUs Imports and 2,492 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 11 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, Medi Chiba and Al-Rayyan & another ship, MSC Rida carrying Canola Seed, LNG and Containers are expected to take berths at FAP, EETL and QICT respectively on Monday, while two more container ships, Maersk Pittsburgh and MSC ABY are due arrive at Port Qasim on Tuesday.

### FBR disburses Rs65b refunds to exporters

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued all outstanding refunds to exporters amounting to Rs 65 billion as on March 03, 2024.

According to an FBR press release issued on Monday, the refunds were issued after directives given by Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, during his first speech on the floor of the National Assembly on 3rd March 2024 after being elected to the office of the prime minister.

The refunds issued to exporters will lead to better exports and an increase in the forex reserves of Pakistan.

Trade bodies and export-oriented sectors have welcomed the move by the prime minister and said that the move will lead to economic prosperity and the creation of more jobs in the textile industry.

### RCCI inks MoU with WELDO

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) inked an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Women Empowerment Literacy and Development Organization (WELDO) here on Monday.

President Saqib Rafiq, on behalf of RCCI and Manager Finance Mr. Umer Waqas from WELDO inked and exchanged the MOU documents.

RCCI President Saqib Rafiq assured all kinds of support, close cooperation and assistance through the chamber platform.

He said that the prime focus and mission of WELDO was to provide impartial returns and reintegration services to returnees coming back to Pakistan through health, social, economic, and psychosocial support measures.

Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Mr. Faisal Shahzad, Former President Mr. Najam Rehan, EC member Abdul Rauf and Hussain Ali Marwat (Reintegration Manager) witnessed the MOU ceremony.

## PSX stay bullish, gains 626.04 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Monday, gaining 626.04 points, a positive change of 0.96 percent, closing at Rs 65,951.73 points against 65,325.69 points the previous trading day.

A total of 472,862,687 shares valuing Rs16,282 billion were traded during the day as compared to 344,227,410 shares valuing Rs 13.385 billion the last day.

Some 355 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 184 of them recorded gains and 150 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 21 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Kohinoor Spinning with 67,438,500 shares at Rs 5.68 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 60,210,704 shares with 1.37 per share and K-Electric 36,839,432 shares at Rs 5.02 per share.

Mari Petroleum witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 68.45 per share price, closing at Rs 2,530.50, whereas the runner-up was Bhanero Textile Limited

with a Rs 55.62 rise in its per share price to Rs1,050.00.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 213.38 per share closing at Rs 8,636.72, followed by Philips Morris Pakistan Limited with Rs 40.33 decline to close at Rs 731.67.

**Rupee sheds 07 paise against dollar**

The Rupee on Monday weakened by 07 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.26 against the previous day's closing of Rs 279.19.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.2 and Rs 282.1, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.04 to close at Rs 303.09 against the last day's closing of Rs 302.05, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs185, whereas an increase of Rs1.15 was wit-

nessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 354.02 compared to the last closing of Rs 352.87.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 02 paise each to close at Rs 76.03 and Rs 74.46 respectively.

**Gold rates up by Rs 900 per tola to Rs 221,200**

The price of per tola 24 karat gold increased by Rs 900 and was sold at Rs 221,200 on Monday compared to its sale at Rs 220,300 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 771 to Rs 189,643 from Rs 188,872 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs 173,840 from Rs 173,132, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten-gram silver remained constant at Rs 2,600 and Rs 2,229.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$03 to \$2,106 from \$2,103, the Association reported.

## Nikkei index ends above 40,000 for first time

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Japan's key Nikkei index closed above the 40,000 mark for the first time on Monday, following gains on Wall Street.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index added 0.5 percent, or 198.41 points, to end at 40,109.23, but the broader Topix index slipped 0.1 percent, or 3.14 points, to 2,706.28.

The dollar stood at 150.28 yen, compared with 150.11 yen seen Friday in New York.

"The US high-tech sector including chips rallied on the back of falls in US long-term yields, which prompted purchases" of

high-tech equities in the Tokyo market, IwaiCosmo Securities said.

Tokyo and other major global shares have steadily gained since last year, and analysts predict the Nikkei should gain even further, lifted by rallying Wall Street, robust corporate earnings and strong hopes for AI technologies.

On February 22, the Nikkei finally broke through a record high set just before an asset bubble in Japan catastrophically burst in the early 1990s.

After the Nikkei climbed above the 40,000 mark during Monday's trade, "profit-taking sales grew and

capped the upward movement", Daiwa Securities said. Among major shares, high-tech investor SoftBank Group added 0.3 percent to 8,934 yen.

Semiconductor shares rallied, adding to recent strong gains.

Tokyo Electron roared 2.4 percent to 39,290 yen and Advantest surged 3.7 percent to 7,380 yen.

Toyota dropped 0.5 percent to 3,662 yen. Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing slipped 0.5 percent to 44,170 yen. Shipping firm Kawasaki Kisen dived 6.7 percent to 7,232 yen on a weak Chinese indicator for container freight.

## Stocks rise on US gains ahead of key policy meeting

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets mostly rose Monday following US gains and ahead of a Chinese legislative session where Beijing's annual growth target and other key policies will be announced.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 index surpassed the 40,000 mark for the first time, with analysts predicting it could advance even further, lifted by Wall Street rallies, robust corporate earnings and optimism over artificial intelligence.

In New York, the S&P 500 and the tech-rich Nasdaq ended Friday at all-time highs off continued momentum for AI-linked equities, especially chip-maker Nvidia, which finished with a valuation above \$2 trillion for the first time.

Taiwanese chip giant TSMC rose to a record high Monday, gaining 5.2 percent on the global rally in semiconductor stocks, and helped Taipei's Taiex index add nearly two percent.

The solid performance of global markets provides "favourable trade winds for Asian markets as the new week begins", Stephen Innes of SPI Asset

Management said in a note.

Hope for US interest rate cuts, indications of cooling inflation and a soaring passion for AI within the tech sector have driven investor sentiment, he said.

"These factors collectively contribute to the positive tone in global markets, which is expected to bolster Asian markets," Innes added.

While the US Federal Reserve is now expected to begin trimming rates later rather than sooner this year, due to recent hotter-than-expected inflation data, markets have been boosted by stellar earnings results from big tech firms in recent weeks.

Investors will be looking this week to the release of US jobs figures and Fed boss Jerome Powell's testimony to Congress.

"We don't expect the chair to stray very far from the Fed's recent messaging -- officials are in a 'wait-and-see' mode as there's still a lot of ambiguity in the data," John Briggs, global head of desk strategy at NatWest Markets, said in a note.

Hong Kong finished flat on Monday and Shanghai

closed higher ahead of the start of China's annual legislative conclave, with officials expressing concern over the nation's struggling economy and youth unemployment as they ready to present policies for the coming year.

Later Monday, another official said China's leaders had "ample confidence" that the economy would rebound.

The rubber-stamp parliamentary meeting is expected to see leaders set an annual growth goal of about five percent for 2024, said Innes, following a reported GDP expansion of 5.2 percent last year -- the lowest in decades, excluding the pandemic years.

"The announcements and policies unveiled during the parliamentary session will provide crucial insights into China's economic priorities, strategies, and potential market developments," he added.

While analysts have called for stronger interventions from Beijing to boost the economy, Innes said more measured moves are likely as a "big bang" stimulus could pose long-term risks to stability.

## 25th anniversary celebrations: Emirates Airlines supports local charity in Capital



### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In its 25th year of operations in Islamabad, Emirates Airline has stepped up to support children in the local community by teaming up with SOS Children's Village Islamabad. The airline collaborated with the charity organisation to provide much-needed blankets to the orphaned students and their caretakers.

Emirates' charitable initiative, led by Salem Al Mana, Emirates' Regional

Manager - Pakistan and other members of its local sales team, reflects the airline's ethos of giving back to the communities in which it operates.

In addition to donating the blankets to the orphanage's management at its premises in Islamabad, the team also spent quality time with the children, engaging in exciting activities and sharing inspirational stories. By partnering with organizations like SOS Children's Village Islamabad, Emirates con-

tinues to uphold its values of enriching the communities it serves and supporting disadvantaged children.

"We believe in not only providing material support but also in fostering personal connections and uplifting spirits," said Salem Al Mana. "Our team had the privilege of spending time with the children of SOS Children's Village Islamabad, sharing stories of perseverance, courage, and determination. Emirates is grateful to have been given the opportunity

to bring some cheer to the children. It was a humbling experience for all of us."

SOS Children's Village is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a loving home and family-like environment to orphaned and abandoned children. The blankets donated by Emirates will undoubtedly provide comfort for the children under its care, especially during the cold winter months.

Emirates has been operating in Pakistan since 1985, with Karachi being its first destination when the airline launched. Emirates currently operates 53 weekly flights between Dubai and five points in Pakistan, conveniently connecting travellers to over 140 cities globally, via Dubai.

To meet the diverse needs of passengers, Emirates serves regionally-themed cuisine to cater to their taste on board, as well as movies and other content in Urdu, featured amongst 6,500 channels on the airline's multi award-winning in-flight entertainment system ice.

## SBP International Banking Course participants visit LCCI

LAHORE (APP): Twenty-one participants of the 52nd International Banking Course, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), from 11 countries including Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran and Maldives, visited the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on Monday.

On this occasion, LCCI President Kashif Anwar gave an overwhelming analysis of the economic scenario at domestic and global level, besides answering various questions by the delegation members. SBP Deputy Director (Islamabad) Muhammad Tabraiz, SBP Deputy Director (Lahore)

Saima Laiq and Ugur Salih from Finance Ministry also spoke on the occasion.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that all the foreign bankers who have visited Pakistan for this course would be feeling great and having excellent time. He said that Pakistanis are peace-loving nation and are famous for hospitality and affection for all the nationalities across the globe.

He said that Lahore is the second biggest commercial and industrial hub of the country with a contribution of around 11 percent in the national GDP and around 20 percent in exports. Lahore is playing a significant role in domestic production and exports due to the presence of important industries like textiles, pharmaceuticals, food processing, auto parts, engineering, plastics, chem-

icals, paper & board, electronics, iron & steel and packaging etc.

The LCCI President added that Lahore is also the Information Technology leader of Pakistan. It is a city with excellent road & transportation infrastructure and a city that houses the best education institutes in the country. Lahore also has the presence of many Industrial Estates including Quaid-e-Azam Industrial Estate, Sundar Industrial Estate and Quaid-e-Azam Business Park. The Government is making concerted efforts to develop Lahore as a leading business hub of the region with the important initiatives like the development of Central Business District (CBD) and establishment of Business Facilitation Centre.

Kashif Anwar said that the glorious history of the Lahore Chamber dates back to 1923 when it was established under the name of Northern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Today, it stands out as the premier business support

organization of the country having the largest membership base with around 35,000 members representing a cross section of trade and industry.

He said that the primary function of LCCI is policy advocacy. Through its Research and Development Department, the Chamber identifies the prevailing issues and their viable solutions with the input of standing committees focused on the various sectors of the economy. These issues are taken up at the highest forums of government for their early resolution.

Kashif Anwar said that Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry prepares comprehensive budget proposals and sends them to government for consideration so that tax anomalies could be rectified and private sector representatives may be encouraged to take new business initiatives.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Samina Sehara Civil Judge XIII/JFC-II, Bannu. Suit No. 45/FC Institution No. 31-05-2023, next date of hearing 11-03-2024, case title Mst. Nighat Bibi Vs. Shah Zeb Khan, Notice to Mr. Shazeb Khan S/o Gul Tiaz R/o Mir Wali Kala Near New Sabzi Mandi Tehsil & District Bannu. Presently House No. 3/A Street No. 15 Kualalampur, Malaysia. Whereas in the above case titled the service of above defendant(s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore, you defendant(s) is/are informed through this publication that on 11-03-2024 at 8:00 AM. You has/have to appear before this Court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Shafqat Qadeer Civil Judge XIV Bannu. Suit No. 355/1, Institution No. 18-10-2023, next date of Hearing 19-03-2024, case title Khawar Zaman etc. Vs. Wali Zaman etc. Notice to (2) Farooq Zaman (3) Rashid Zaman (4) Sadiq Zaman Sons Sakhi Zaman R/o Ghorri Wala Teshil and District Bannu. Presently abroad. Whereas in the above mentioned case the above mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8:00 AM on 19-03-2024, the proceedings will be taken ex-parte.

### Court Notice

In the Court of Ahmed Ihsanullah Qureshi, ADSI-Topi, Swabi, Muhammad Ameen Vs. Wasal Khan etc. Suit No. 27/CR, Institution date 07-12-2022, hearing date 30-03-2024, Subject Revision Notice to Murad Ali S/o Waris Khan R/o Topi, presently in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The service through ordinary means is difficult, so you are informed to attend the Court on 30-03-2024 personally, through counsel or attorney to avoid ex-parte proceeding.





## In brief

## PCB to observe cancer awareness days

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is set to make use of the platform of HBL Pakistan Super League, as part of its corporate social responsibility, to raise awareness regarding breast cancer and childhood cancer. In this connection, match between Peshawar Zalmi and Multan Sultans scheduled on March 5 at the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi will be marked by the Pink Ribbon Day creating awareness regarding breast cancer, said a news release issued here on Monday. The teams will wear pink ribbons and pink caps while the commentators will also put on pink ribbons. Meanwhile messages regarding breast cancer awareness will be displayed on the big screen and also announced during the commentary. On March 12, Gold Ribbon Day will be observed to raise awareness regarding childhood cancer in the game between Quetta Gladiators and Multan Sultans at the National Bank Stadium, Karachi. The venue will turn gold as players and commentators will don gold ribbons and caps. The PCB has also invited four cancer patients on this occasion to attend the Gold Ribbon Day in Karachi and they will be presented with signed shirts from both the teams.

## Cummins to captain Hyderabad in IPL

NEW DELHI (AFP): Australia's Pat Cummins will captain Indian Premier League team Sunrisers Hyderabad in the upcoming edition of the Twenty20 tournament, the franchise said Monday. The 30-year-old skippered Australia to World Test Championship and World Cup triumphs last year. But it will be Cummins' first stint as captain in the IPL, which begins on March 22. He replaces South African Aiden Markram, Hyderabad, who won the title in 2016 under David Warner, announced the news on X, formerly Twitter. The fast bowler Cummins briefly broke an IPL auction record when Hyderabad paid 205 million rupees (\$2.5 million) for his services at auction in Dubai last year. Hyderabad, who finished bottom of the 10-team table in 2023, start their campaign against Kolkata on March 23 at Eden Gardens.

## Kleijn springs surprise as sun shines on Paris-Nice

MONTARGIS (AFP): Dutch sprinter Arvid De Kleijn dominated a mass sprint to win stage two of cycling's Paris-Nice on Monday after the peloton took it easy on a sunny flat run south from Thoiry to Montargis. Once the 29-year-old Tudor Pro rider got ahead on the broad road towards the finish line east of Orleans neither New Zealand's Laurence Pithie in second nor Dylan Groenewegen in third could get up alongside him. But 21-year-old FDJ rider Pithie from Christchurch took the yellow jersey as the new leader of the race ahead of Sunday's winner Olav Kooij and runner-up Mads Pedersen, with the three all on the same time. Stage two over 179km had been designed in the hope of crosswinds on the open agricultural plains south of Paris but in bright sunshine riders took the time to take in the scenery after the peloton awoke Monday with a whiff of spring in the air. The third stage is a team time trial over 26.9km on Tuesday with former winner Primož Roglič and Remco Evenepoel likely to shine as riders are timed individually.



RAWALPINDI: Shadab Khan struck a timely half-century to prop up Islamabad United.

## Nooh Dastgir sets two national records as WAPDA wins powerlifting c'ship

LAHORE (APP): Nooh Dastagir of Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) set two new national records in 120+ KG category by lifting 330 KG weight and 208 KG bench press category with bench pressing of 209 KG which helped his team win the 20th Mens' National Classic Powerlifting and Bench Press Championship WAPDA yet again proved its supremacy as it succeeded in winning 10 Gold and 3 Silver medals with 105 points followed by Sindh with 48 points and Police with 40 points.

The Championship was held at Punjab University Gymnasium Hall under the aegis of Pakistan Power Lifting Federation. The competitions were held in eight different categories. WAPDA's Fahad Butt, Asim Shehzad, Tanvir Haider, Rizwanullah Lodhi, and Nooh Dastagir Butt won Gold medals in 59 KG, 66 KG, 102 KG, 120 KG, and 120+ KG categories respectively.

Apart from this, three

silver medals went in WAPDA's medal tally as its players Arif Ali Bhatti shined in 74 KG, Ashfaq Ahmed in 83 KG and Rana Qasir in 94 KG categories.

In Masters category WAPDA grabbed all four gold medals, while WAPDA also won one gold medal in junior category.

As many as 11 teams participated in the Championship including WAPDA, Police, Punjab, Sindh, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Special Olympics Pakistan and University of the Punjab, the host.

Imdadullah Memon, General Manager sports and President WAPDA Sports board, was the Chief Guest of the prize distribution ceremony who gave away prizes and medals to the winning players.

**Women's Day 2024 weightlifting competition held:** Nida was adjudged the best weight-lifter of the Women's Day 2024 Weightlifting Invitational

Cup tournament was held at the Railway Stadium here on Monday.

90 kg was the heighest weight lifted by Saima in the tournament while Rida lifted 85 kg in the Clean & Jerk category. General Secretary, Pakistan Weightlifting Federation (PWF) Nuzhat Jabeen was the chief guest at the event held to commemorate the international Women's Day 2024.

The weightlifting tourney was held under the auspices of the National Weightlifting Club Punjab Stadium.

Iman Fatima, Hira Niaz, Ayesha Aslam, Farkhunda Mustafa, Anam, Hadiqa Nasir, Rida, Sahar, Arefa, Khadija Yusuf, Noor Tahir, Kiran Iqbal, Anam Iqbal, Madeeha, Noor, Nida, Saima, Neelam, Zainab, Fatima, Fatima Sharif, Araf Fatima, Larib Kamal, Shahzadi Nazer, Muniba Imtiaz, Zara were among the weightlifters who won prominent positions in the tournament. A large number of fans were present on the occasion.

## Pakistani medallist boxer steals money from female colleague's bag in Italy

ROME (Web Desk): In a shocking incident, Pakistan's rising star and Asian bronze medallist boxer allegedly stole approximately 250 pounds (PKR 88,000) from the bag of a female colleague in Italy. Currently, 5-member Pakistan's boxing team is in Italy for the qualifying round of the Paris Olympics, slated to kick start in April.

Secretary Pakistan Boxing Federation (PBF) Colonel (retd) Nasir Baig Tung revealed that Zohaib Rasheed pilfered money from the purse of a female athlete during her absence for training.

According to Baig, the suspect obtained the keys to the female athlete's room from the reception and barged into the room to commit the crime.

He informed that Zohaib had also missed his first fight in the 51-kilogram category, resulting in a walkover victory for his opponent. PBF official further said that the boxer had gone missing after committing the crime, however, the federation has filed a complaint with the Italy police.

It is pertinent to mention here that Zohaib previously secured a bronze medal in the Asian Championship in 2022 and has garnered numerous accolades at the junior level.

## Boston Celtics thrash Golden State Warriors

NEW YORK (Agencies): The Boston Celtics thrashed the Golden State Warriors 140-88 as they extended their winning streak to 11 games. Jayson Tatum, on his 26th birthday, scored 27 points for the Celtics, who are top of the Eastern Conference, and teammate Jaylen Brown added 29 points.

The victory meant the Celtics became the first franchise in NBA history to win three games by 50 or more points in the same season. "It's up there. Great birthday," said Tatum. "Got to do what I love in front of the best fans in the world and get a win."

The hosting Celtics, who now have a 48-12 record, led 82-38 at half-time and both sides rested some of their star players for the second half. "You flush it down the toilet," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr, whose side are ninth in the Western Conference.

"Boston were amazing, we weren't beating them today. They were fantastic. This was a really impressive performance by them at both ends."

Elsewhere, Victor Wembanyama registered 31 points, 12 rebounds, six assists, six blocked shots and a steal to help the San Antonio Spurs beat the visiting Indiana Pacers 117-105.

The Oklahoma City Thunder, who are top of the Western Conference with a 42-18 record, beat seventh-placed Phoenix Suns 118-110. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander recorded 35 points, nine assists, eight rebounds and three steals for the Thunder.

## Aamir Jamal's blitz in vain as Islamabad United edge Peshawar Zalmi

RAWALPINDI (Monitoring Desk): Shadab Khan's all-round performance trumped Aamir Jamal's batting heroics to guide Islamabad United to victory over Peshawar Zalmi in the 20th match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 here on Monday.

Peshawar Zalmi opted to field first and drew first blood as Saim Ayub bowled Alex Hales on the first ball of the innings.

Colin Munro hit Ayub for a six and a four in the next over, but the bowler had the last laugh as he dismissed the batter while attempting for another boundary.

With Islamabad United stranded at 28-2 in three overs, skipper Shadab Khan and Salman Ali Agha joined hands to help the team recover. They knitted a 65-run partnership for the third wicket in 44 balls to push the team's total to 90 in 10 overs.

However, Salman Irshad got Agha caught behind in

the 11th over to break the partnership and force a comeback for the visitors.

Agha went to the pavilion after a gutsy 37 off 25, which featured four boundaries and two sixes.

Khan was joined by Jordan Cox for another brilliant partnership which accumulated 68 runs in 39 balls, dominated by the captain. Khan played a blistering innings and hit 10 boundaries including six sixes on his way to a 51-ball 80 before Luke Wood got the prized wicket with 161 runs on the board.

Azam Khan then played an unbeaten cameo of 29 runs from 14 balls with the help of four boundaries and one six to push the team's total to 196-4 in their allocated 20 overs.

Cox remained unbeaten at 26 off 20, featuring two boundaries and one six.

For Peshawar Zalmi, Saim Ayub led the bowling charts with figures of 2-15, while Wood and Irshad bagged one wicket each.

Meanwhile, Karachi Kings' assistant coach Ravi Bopara on Sunday, threw his weight behind experienced all-rounder Mohammad Nawaz to "come good" for the side in the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9, terming him "credit in the bank".

Bopara addressed the post-match press conference after Karachi Kings' 20-run defeat against leaders Multan Sultans at the iconic National Bank Stadium and opened up on the ongoing rough patch of Nawaz. "Nawaz has been playing T20 cricket for many many years, playing the PSL from the day it started," said Bopara.

"So, he's built, he's credited in the bank. Someone like him, who's played international cricket, you got to give them a run, you can't just drop them after four to five games. They've got to have a long run. They deserve to have a long run when they've played [so] much cricket."

## Shanaka guides Sri Lanka to dramatic T20 win over Bangladesh

SYLHET (Agencies): Dasun Shanaka held his nerve under pressure to take two wickets in the final over, snatching a dramatic three-run win for Sri Lanka in the opening Twenty20 international of a three-match series against Bangladesh in Sylhet on Monday.

Set a target of 207 runs, lower middle-order batsman Jaker Ali took Bangladesh close with his maiden fifty before Shanaka ended his 34-ball innings of 68 with the third ball of the last over.

Shoriful Islam hit a four from the next ball, leaving Bangladesh requiring six from their last two balls.

But the hosts could manage only two runs to be restricted to 203-8, with Shanaka, who also dismissed Rishad Hossain in the first ball of the final

over, finishing with 2-36.

Former skipper Angelo Mathews claimed 2-17 to inflict some early damage on the Bangladesh innings before veteran Mahmudullah Riyad struck 54 off 31 balls to revive the hopes of the home side.

Sadeera Samarawickrama and Kusal Mendis earlier slammed a fifty each to guide Sri Lanka to 206-3 after Bangladesh sent them in.

Samarawickrama struck an unbeaten 61 off 48 balls after Mendis hit 59 off 36 balls as the visitors overcame a slow start to put up an imposing total. Stand-in skipper Charith Asalanka played his part with an unbeaten 44 from 21 balls.

Mendis and Samarawickrama shared 96 runs for the third wicket after Sri Lanka lost their first two wickets for 37 runs. Shoriful removed

Avishka Fernando for four with the second ball of the innings before Taskin Ahmed had Kamindu Mendis caught by Soumya Sarkar at midwicket for 19.

Mendis hit leg-spinner Rishad for a four and two sixes off consecutive balls to race to his fifty off 27 balls. Rishad returned for his next spell to exact revenge as Mahmudullah took a well-judged catch at long off boundary to end the innings of Mendis.

Asalanka joined Samarawickrama to continue the assault, adding 73 for the unbroken fourth wicket, including 24 runs from the last over of the innings bowled by Mustafizur Rahman. The series marks the start of Sri Lanka's month-long tour of Bangladesh, which also includes three one-day internationals and two Tests.



SYLHET: Kusal Mendis and Sadeera Samarawickrama were involved in a 96-run, third-wicket stand.

## Katie Boulter beats Marta Kostyuk to win San Diego Open title

LOS ANGELES (Agencies): Katie Boulter won her first WTA 500 title by fighting back from a set down to defeat Marta Kostyuk in the San Diego Open final.

The 27-year-old Briton won 5-7 6-2 6-2 in the biggest triumph of her career so far. After a close first set, Boulter dominated Ukrainian Kostyuk to secure a victory that lifts her to a career-high ranking of 27th in the world.

"I don't know what just happened," Boulter said after the match. "This week has been very, very special for so many different reasons. This one is pretty amazing, I've worked very hard for it, I played some incredible tennis all week."

"Today was a complete battle, with myself as well,

because I was a little bit nervous. But I managed to get over the line, and that I'm very proud of."

Boulter converted seven of her 11 break points and also saved seven of the 11 that she faced. She recovered from 5-2 down in the first set to get back to 5-5, saving five set points in the process, but Kostyuk took the opener when the Briton double-faulted.

Boulter found her form and dominated from that point, breaking Kostyuk three times in the second set to force a decider. In the final set, she broke serve twice more and served out the match by hitting her first two aces of the match and a forehand winner on championship point.

Boulter was greeted by her boyfriend, Australian

player Alex de Minaur, who flew from Acapulco early in the morning after retaining his title at the Mexican Open on Saturday.

"I want to say a small special thank you to my boyfriend," Boulter added. "He finished last night at midnight and I really want to embarrass him. He got on a 4.15 taxi this morning and six o'clock flight to be here today, so I do appreciate it."

The WTA Tour includes 250, 500 and 1,000-level events - the categories denoting the number of rankings points awarded to the champion.

Boulter has risen 99 places in the rankings since winning her only other tour title at last year's Nottingham Open, a WTA 250 event.

## Mbappe tension overshadows PSG's crunch Champions League date

PARIS (AFP): Paris Saint-Germain's preparations for Tuesday's Champions League last-16 second leg away to Real Sociedad have been overshadowed by coach Luis Enrique's handling of star man Kylian Mbappe.

PSG have suffered numerous humiliating defeats at this stage of the Champions League in recent years but they are ideally placed to advance to the quarter-finals this time after winning 2-0 at home to the Basque side in last month's first leg.

Mbappe scored the opening goal in that game but the following day the superstar striker informed PSG of his intention to leave when his contract expires at the end of the campaign.

Luis Enrique might have been expected to make the most of being able to call on Mbappe until then, but instead he has made a point of reducing his top scorer's playing time.

Mbappe was left on the bench for PSG's next game at Nantes, although he came on to score a penalty in a 2-0 win.

A week later he started as captain at home against Rennes, but was substituted on 65 minutes. His replacement Goncalo Ramos went on to score the equaliser in a 1-1 draw.

Mbappe has made almost 300 appearances for PSG since arriving from Monaco in 2017, but he had only previously been taken off earlier in a game either due to injury or with PSG already winning.

Yet last Friday he was hooked at half-time in a 0-0 draw at Monaco, and once again there was no question of him being injured or even of Luis Enrique trying to save his superstar for the Champions League.

"Sooner or later we are



going to have to play without him, so I am trying to find the best way of doing so," the coach said.

His comments came after he pointedly declared in a press conference last week that PSG would have "a much better team" next season, by which time Mbappe is expected to be playing for Real Madrid.

Punished?

Mbappe, who is PSG's all-time top scorer with 244 goals, appeared eager to make a point that there was nothing wrong with him in Monaco as he emerged from the dressing room after half-time.

Having changed into a tracksuit, he walked around the pitch waving to fans and then took a seat in the stand beside his mother, rather than on the bench next to his teammates.

PSG can afford to experiment in Ligue 1 given they lead the table by nine points from Brest with 10 games left.

However, Luis Enrique's decision to handle Mbappe in this way ahead of such an important European date has been questioned.

"I don't understand. I get the impression that ever since he told the club he was leaving he has been punished by the coach, or maybe the punishment has been imposed by the directors," said Alain Roche, a former PSG defender and sporting director now

working as a pundit for broadcaster Canal Plus.

"I think it is inappropriate to create such a controversy four days before a game as important as the second leg against La Real."

Mbappe has scored 32 goals in 33 games for his club this season, including four in the Champions League.

No other PSG player has reached double figures and Mbappe will surely start in San Sebastian as the French champions look to finish the job.

They have a comfortable lead against opponents who lie seventh in La Liga and have won only once in nine games.

Then again the Parisians are all too familiar with dramatic collapses in Champions League knockout ties.

Two of their most notorious defeats came on Spanish soil in last-16 ties after they had won at home in the first leg.

Two years ago they beat Madrid 1-0 in Paris and then went ahead in the return thanks to Mbappe, only to concede three times in the second half and go out.

In 2017 they hammered Barcelona 4-0 at home only to cave in and lose 6-1 at the Camp Nou.

Another exit this time, against weaker opposition and given Luis Enrique's handling of Mbappe, would be disastrous for coach and club.





## In brief

### Two dacoit gangs busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police here on Monday busted two dacoit gangs and recovered two motorcycles, a mobile phone, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Wah Cantt police held four dacoits, members of two gangs namely Izatullah, Ghulam Saeed, Ali Abbas and Azlan. Police also recovered two motorcycles, a mobile phone, weapons and other items from their possession. The accused have been shifted to jail for an identification parade. Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nisar Nawaz directed police to accelerate the operation to net the lawbreakers.

### AIOU offers academic programs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has offered admissions in more than 40 academic programs for Overseas Pakistani and international students. According to the AIOU, the programs offered include Associate Degree in Arts (B.A.), Associate Degree in Commerce (B.Com) BA open courses, BS Programs in 22 subjects, B.Ed (1.5 Years, 2.5 Years and 4 Years), one-year Postgraduate Diplomas in 10 subjects and certificate courses in 3 subjects. Overseas and International students can apply till March 25, 2024 through online mode only. It is pertinent to mention here that these programs are offered under the online management system. All teaching activities from admissions to examinations will be online. For more details about these programs, students can contact International Collaboration and Exchange Office at +92 51 9572495 or email at overseas@aiou.edu.pk Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, has termed the enrollment of international students a positive step for AIOU. According to Director, International Collaboration and Exchange Office, Dr. Zahid Majeed, more than 1000 international students from 36 different countries were enrolled in the last semester. We have set a target to enroll at least 10 thousand international students, he said.

### Eight outlaws held; drugs, weapons seized

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) apprehended eight outlaws including three professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours also recovered drugs and weapons from their possession. A public relations officer said that, acting on the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCPPO) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, the Industrial Area police team arrested an accused Irfan who involved in drug peddling and recovered 1,165 gram heroin from his possession. Likewise, the Koral police team arrested an accused Farhan who involved in possessing illegal weapon and recovered one 30 bore pistol from his possession. Moreover, the Kirpa police team arrested two accused namely Awais and Muhammad Banaras involved in selling petrol illegally. Furthermore, the Bhara Kahu police team arrested an accused namely Ahsan Irshad involved in possessing illegal weapon and recovered one 30 bore pistol from his possession.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Nilofar Bakhtiar & CEO Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) Nadir Gul Barech distributing Amt ul Raqeeb Awards during National Women Conference in connection with International Women's Day at National Library.

## All-out efforts to be made to provide relief to people: Commissioner

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak on Monday said that all-out efforts would be made to provide relief to the people and all the welfare projects of the city would be completed within stipulated time frame.

The Commissioner along with Regional Police Officer (RPO) Syed Khurram Geelani chaired an introductory meeting with the newly elected 23 Members of Provincial Assembly (MPAs) of Punjab elected from Rawalpindi Division.

He said all the welfare projects of the city would be completed in time along with elected members of provincial assembly.

"Our commitment is to provide relief to the people with the help of the political leaders," the Commissioner said.

The administration and the elected representatives

would play their constructive role to solve the problems of the people, he added. Engr. Aamir Khattak said that the primary responsibility of the administration is to serve the people. The suggestions of the newly elected members of the provincial assembly would also be utilized for the completion of all the projects including Rawalpindi Ring Road and Dadocha Dam projects, the Commissioner informed.

He said that practical steps would be taken in the light of the orders of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. All the stakeholders were playing their practical role in the implementation of the public welfare projects, he said adding, no negligence would be tolerated in this regard.

The Commissioner said that every officer had been instructed to give a timeline on the files coming to him. It should be ensured that

there is no unnecessary delay in any work, he instructed the officers.

The newly elected representatives should also be part of the process to ensure transparency of the Ramazan package, he said. He urged the MPAs to go to the field and monitor distribution of the Ramazan package and in case of any deficiency, the issue could be brought to the notice of the administration so that the problem could be addressed immediately.

The meeting also discussed the cleanliness arrangements in the city, measures to eliminate littering and encroachments.

The MPAs on the occasion said that all-out efforts would be made for the public welfare while fully cooperating with the administration. Earlier, the Commissioner congratulated the newly elected MPAs and expressed his best wishes for them.

## ANF recovers 128 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover more than 128 kg drugs and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 40 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Jeddah at Peshawar Airport.

63 kg hashish was recovered from Zakhakhel Khyber area and 58.8 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects rounded up near National Highway Hyderabad.

In fourth operation, 4.8 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested from Noor Shah Road Sahiwal.

1.2 kg hashish was recovered from the accused netted near G.T Road Suhawa Jhelum.

Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

## Six bills adopted by Senate to amend ordinances

ISLAMABAD (INP): Six different bills were adopted by the Senate on Monday and sent to the concerned committees for further deliberations.

Senator Mohsin Aziz, introduced a bill to further amend the Provincial Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1965 (The Provincial Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2023) which was adopted and sent further to the concerned committee.

A bill to further amend the State Bank of Pakistan Act, 1956 (The State Bank of Pakistan (Amendment) Bill, 2023) was introduced by Senator Mohsin Aziz, which also adopted by the upper house and sent further to the concerned committee for deliberations.

Senator Mohsin Aziz, introduced another Bill to further amend the Factories Act, 1934 (The Factories

(Amendment) Bill, 2023) which was adopted by the upper house and sent to the concerned committee for further deliberations.

A bill to further amend the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 (The Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Bill, 2023) was introduced by Senator Mohsin Aziz.

(Amendment of section 376 of PPC) was sent to the concerned committee for deliberations.

Senator Mohsin Aziz introduced a bill to amend the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 (The Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2023) which after the adoption sent to the concerned committee for further deliberation.

Senator Sania Nishtar introduced the Pakistan Integrity in Public Life Bill, 2024 which was sent to the concerned committee for further deliberations.

## Special Secretary Education call for consensus to ensure uniform policy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Secretary Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Mr Mohyuddin Wani has said that a consensus should be reached with all the stakeholders to ensure that a uniform policy on education can be made which addresses the need of the hour. He was chairing a high level meeting of National Advisory Committee to formulate National Education Policy took place on Monday.

He said that all stakeholders including the health ministry should also be added in this forum. He said that the policy has to be all encompassing and should address all facets of skill education, vocational and professional training.

Special Secretary Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Mr Mohyuddin Wani said that it should include a com-

prehensive strategy and an actionable plan to progressively diminish and ultimately eliminate the number of out of school children (OOSC), within next five years. Simultaneously, implement a program for mainstreaming.

TVET education with flexibility for students to transition into alternate technical streams. Special Secretary said that the curriculum should be in accordance with international learning standards, prioritizing a reduction in syllabi for compulsory subjects.

Embrace concept - based learning with a focus on creativity and real-world application, encouraging diverse sources of information and digital content aligned with global standards.

Furthermore, the forum agreed to include a strategy for extending National Educational Curriculum (NEC) to Madrasahs to

ensure main stream education and TVET for Madrasahs students along with due credits for religious education.

In addition there should be a performance audit of schools/teachers and TVET institutes through a third party consultant be carried out for categorization of schools, to include public, private, madaras etc.

It was also decided that a joint working group would be formulated to ensure that work on the formulation and implementation starts immediately. The meeting included all provincial stakeholders in addition with representatives from HEC, NAVTTC, NCC, FDE, SIFC, DGRE etc.

The meeting was chaired by the Special Secretary of Education, and it was decided that further involvement of public and private partners including other ministries is also needed.

## Govt committed to ensure TB-free Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Secretary of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination Iftikhar Ali Shallwani on Monday said the government has taken decisive steps towards eradicating tuberculosis, reaffirming its commitment to a TB-free nation.

He was addressing the event held to observe World TB Day 2024 organized by Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, the Common Management Unit (CMU) for AIDS, TB, and Malaria, in collaboration with JSI and Dopasi foundation.

The secretary reaffirmed the Government of Pakistan's commitment to

combating tuberculosis (TB) by ensuring free diagnostic and treatment facilities across public and private health institutions.

He said with Pakistan ranking fifth among high burden countries globally, the country witnesses approximately 608,000 new TB cases and 15,000 drug-resistant TB cases annually. To confront this challenge, the government provides free TB diagnostic and treatment services in over 1500 public and private facilities, involving more than 15,000 general practitioners in TB control efforts, he added. Emphasizing the scale of the challenge, Shallwani addressed the task of finding and treating 2.2 million

individuals affected by TB, including children and those battling Drug-Resistant TB.

Additionally, the government aims to administer TB Preventive Treatment to over 1.2 million people, reaffirming its dedication to preserving lives and safeguarding communities, he added. Dr Razia Kaniz Fatima, National Coordination for Co-ordination Management Unit, AIDS, TB, and Malaria, emphasized this year's World TB Day theme, highlighting the necessity for collective action, innovation, and collaboration to accelerate progress towards eradicating TB as a public health menace.

## 378,496 deserving families to be provided Negahban ration bags in Rwp division

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak here on Monday said that as many as 378,496 deserving families would be provided Negahban Ration bags and the monitoring of the preparation of the ration bags for Negahban Ration Ramazan package was being conducted.

He said that the distribution of Negahban Ration Ramazan package of the Punjab Government would be started from March 05.

Ramadan ration package would contain 10 kg flour with two kg each, rice, sugar, ghee and gram flour, he said adding, the Punjab government had taken a significant step towards providing maximum relief to the public amidst rising inflation.

For this purpose, he said the Punjab government had devised a Negahban Rashn program, a Ramazan relief package, he added. The verification process of 67,628 households in Rawalpindi district, 45,181 in Jhelum, 5,541 in Murree, 74,624 in Attock and 64,654 in Chakwal district had been completed, he said.

The control rooms had also been set up in Deputy Commissioner Offices to monitor the process of distribution of Negahban Rashn Package, he said and informed that the quality and quantity of the essential items included in the ration bags were being checked. The final lists were being prepared, verifying the data of the beneficiaries of the entire division, the

Commissioner informed.

He said that the authorities had been directed to ensure the quality of the essential items for the ration package which would be given to the deserving families.

The DCs were also instructed to monitor the packaging of the ration and ensure that there should be no compromise in the specified quantity and quality of items in all packages.

Engr. Aamir Khattak said that the DCs were also directed to finalize the transportation and security plan. Transparency should be ensured during the verification of the lists, he said.

The Commissioner ordered that the people in the list who were no longer eligible for this package and a separate list of non-verified should be prepared. All processes should be monitored by establishing control room in the DC Offices.

There are 378,496 households across the division who are eligible for the package, Engineer Aamir Khattak added.

So far, a total of 68 percent verification had been completed across the division, he informed and directed that regarding the distribution of ration bags, the concerned departments should complete all their arrangements on priority basis. All-out efforts should be made for timely and efficient distribution of the ration bags.

He further directed that arrangements should be made to deliver the ration bags to the homes of the deserving families.

## PPAF, NCSW celebrate International Women's Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), in collaboration with the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture Division, the Ministry of Human Rights, and the Punjab Government, hosted a National Women's Conference on Economic Empowerment in Islamabad to commemorate International Women's Day.

The conference emphasized the vital importance of investing in women's potential and acknowledging their invaluable contributions to society and sustainable economic growth. A prominent highlight of the event was the awarding of the annual PPAF Amtul Raqeeb Awards to female community leaders from marginalized areas across the country, celebrating their resilience and inspirational leadership within their communities.

Additionally, four special accolades were given to outstanding individuals for their exceptional commitment and innovation, setting the stage for further progress and excellence in their respective fields.

The event was attended by representatives from government institutions, the donor and diplomatic community, academia, civil society, and students from educational institutions. During a welcoming address,

Nadir Gul Barech, CEO of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), underscored the essential link between gender equality and sustainable development goals, including good governance, human rights, and environmental sustainability. He highlighted the central role of women and girls in PPAF's initiatives, noting the significant impact that empowering women has on their lives and communities.

Barech detailed PPAF's efforts in enhancing women's access to financial resources, providing assets, interest-free loans, and technical and financial training to reduce poverty and promote inclusion. He emphasized the importance of giving women a voice, including them in decision-making processes, and removing barriers to their participation in development, reinforcing the organization's commitment to women's empowerment.

Nilofar Bakhtiar, Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and the chief guest of the conference, stressed the importance of inspiring a new generation of women to break free from fear and pursue their dreams by equipping them with the skills necessary to become leaders who can significantly contribute to Pakistan's social and economic well-being.

Bakhtiar stated, 'We cannot achieve true development without equal opportunities for women in education, health, and employment.' She underscored the need for equal opportunities and skill development for women, citing them as both a moral and practical imperative. She envisioned the event as a beacon of optimism, signaling a shift towards a future where women lead the narrative of Pakistan's development and prosperity. Bakhtiar also shed light on the significance of national narratives 'Paigham-e Pakistan' and 'Dukhtar-e-Pakistan,' initiatives that promote unity, peace, social cohesion, and the empowerment of women.

The audience also heard from former Inspector General of Police, Helena Iqbal Saeed, Dr Amena Hasan, Dr Saima Afzal, and Dr Bakhtawar Khalid, who shared their journeys to success despite facing adversities.

They emphasized that success is a journey requiring continuous effort, perseverance, and dedication. Girl students from various colleges in Islamabad and Rawalpindi impressed the audience with their performances themed around the Economic Empowerment of Women, earning accolades from a panel of judges for their creativity and insight.



ISLAMABAD: CDA gardeners spreading fertilizer for planting saplings at roadside greenbelt.



### Invest in homeland: Azizi

KABUL (Pajhwok): The acting minister of commerce and industry has urged Afghan entrepreneurs living abroad to invest in their homeland. Nooruddin Azizi, during his visit to Ashgabat, attended the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Business Forum and visited a joint Turkmen-Afghan exhibition. According to Bakhtar News Agency, he called for Afghan businesspeople to take advantage of the facilities and opportunities available in Afghanistan.

## The Frontier Post

# AFGHANISTAN

Shabaan 23, 1445 — Tuesday, March 05, 2024

### Bilateral trade growing

KABUL (TOLOnews): Yadgar Shadmanov, Uzbekistan's ambassador to Afghanistan, in the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan business connectivity meeting, said that Tashkent's relations with Kabul are developing in the areas of trade and economy. Shadmanov added that Tashkent has had necessary cooperation in the sectors of economy, trade, transit, transport, energy, and humanitarian aid for the people of Afghanistan.

## Death toll rises to 39 due to recent heavy rains

KABUL (Khaama Press): The recent heavy snowfall in the country has led to the loss of 39 lives in different provinces, while 30 more people have been injured. The recent heavy snowfall has blocked several communication routes in provinces and districts, leading to the tragic loss of 39 lives. Janan Sayeg, spokesman for the Ministry of Disaster Management, stated that thousands of livestock have also per-

ished due to the snowfall. He added, "The recent snow and rain have completely or partially destroyed 637 residential homes and claimed the lives of 14,000 livestock." Meanwhile, the heavy snowfall in the country has brought joy to citizens as it contributes to increasing surface water for agriculture. It's worth mentioning that after four days of snowfall and blizzard, the Salang Highway reopened

today, Monday, to passenger vehicles. These events highlight the importance of crisis management and proper anticipation, as a lack of preparedness can exacerbate damage to people's lives and properties. The aftermath of the recent snowfall underscores the need for improved infrastructure resilience and disaster response mechanisms to mitigate future risks effectively.

## Employment opportunities for 170 women

JAWZJIAN (Khaama Press): Sangi Mah, a fifty-year-old woman in Jawzjan province, has created a wool weaving workshop, providing job opportunities for 170 other women in the province.

On Monday, the Bakhtar News Agency, controlled by the interim government, shared on its social media platform X that a woman has established a wool weaving workshop for Afghan women. According to the head of the Industry and Commerce Department of Jawzjan province, "Currently, 4,500 women are engaged in 18 industrial sectors in this province, and efforts are underway to further support them."

Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and several other human rights organizations have emphasized the economic empowerment of women in Afghanistan.

According to the UN Development Programme, over the past two years, they have supported thousands of female entrepreneurs in Afghanistan, ultimately empowering more women and creating a cycle of empowerment and opportunity for them.

Earlier, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) had announced the launch of a project to empower 75,000 female entrepreneurs in Afghanistan. According to this organization, adapting projects strengthens Afghanistan's economy and enables female entrepreneurs to manage businesses.

## Darya startup support plan kicks off

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Darya program marked a significant milestone in Afghanistan's economic development by launching its inaugural cohort of 35 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Aimed at accelerating business growth across various sectors, including education, agriculture, energy, food, healthcare, handicrafts, technology, jewelry, livestock, carpets, and manufacturing, this initiative represents a comprehensive effort to bolster the Afghan private sector.

According to a press release sent to Khaama Press, Sanzar Kakar, the Entrepreneur in Residence at Darya, inaugurated the program, emphasizing the critical role of SMEs in sustaining the economy and the unique challenges they face in Afghanistan. "SMEs are the backbone of every economy. Afghanistan's future lies squarely on SMEs successfully blossoming," Kakar stated. He highlighted the high global failure rate of startups and the particularly challenging business environment in Afghanistan, underscoring Darya's mission to support Afghan SMEs in becoming leading examples of business success.

Funded by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and implemented by Moore Afghanistan in partnership with PHC, Darya offers a beacon of hope for Afghan entrepreneurs through a suite of services designed for business growth in challenging economic conditions. These services aim to equip businesses with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate market complexities, foster innovation, and achieve scalable growth.

The program's participants, representing a cross-section of vital economic sectors, share a unified goal of overcoming the economic downturn and identifying innovative growth strategies. Reflecting on the program's potential, one business owner shared, "In Afghanistan, having a business is hard. Darya's program promises to give us the tools and knowledge we need to overcome these challenges and achieve our business goals."

## IEA's PM says world trying to discredit Islamic system



KABUL (Ariana News): The Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, said in an inter-departmental coordination meeting that the world does not see the current oppression of the Palestinian people and instead seeks to discredit the Islamic system under

the name of human rights. Akhund added that at this critical time, the protection of Islam and religion is on their shoulders and the eyes of the entire Islamic world are on them, and this is a divine responsibility. He asked all government officials to fulfill their responsibilities properly for the sake of the survival and

strengthening of the Islamic system. He also stated that in order to do better, everyone should understand their responsibilities, treat the people well and take care of their work in a timely manner. Experts meanwhile believe that the progress of the country depends on the commitment and efforts of

government officials, and the work of government departments should be accelerated so that people's problems can be addressed as soon as possible. The prime minister also asked officials to be fair and exercise caution in doing their work and to pay serious attention to the protection of the treasury.

## Islamic Emirate Spokesman: UNAMA ineffective over past year

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Islamic Emirate's spokesperson said that UNAMA's activities have not been effective over the past year. Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said that UNAMA's reports were exaggerated and not based on facts on the ground. According to Mujahid, UNAMA has the responsibility to help Afghanistan reestablish diplomatic ties. "They have to be more active, they have to

strengthen Afghanistan's relations with other countries. There is still a vacuum, they have to create trust," said Mujahid. Mujahid accused the UN of being affected by major world powers, saying that its decisions about Afghanistan have been doubtful. "The United Nations decisions about Afghanistan have been doubtful and the organization is under the shadow of major powers of the world.

The UN has met the expectation of nations about serving justice," said the spokesman. TOLOnews was not successful in reaching UNAMA for comments about the statements. Political analysts have their own view about the coordination of UNAMA and the Afghan government. "UNAMA is trying to melt the Islamic Emirate into the international liberal system, especially in the

areas of political, social, economic and cultural areas," said Aminullah Ehsas, a university lecturer. "UNAMA is sharing all political issues of Afghanistan with the UN and is ensuring Afghanistan's relations with the world," said Aziz Maarij, a former Afghan diplomat. UNAMA's mandate ends on March 17 this year and the UN Security Council is expected to hold a meeting about the issue.

## 15 affected villages in herat lack schools

HERAT (TOLOnews): Residents of the Zindajan district in Herat said that 15 earthquake-affected villages in the north of this district have never had a school.

Safed Sang village is one of the 15 earthquake-affected villages where no school has been built during this period.

This village is more than 80 kilometers away from the city of Herat, and according to some residents of this village, their youth have remained illiterate due to the lack of school and access to education.

"We couldn't study, it's too late for us, but the future hope of Afghanistan is in our young generation. When these youths don't study, what do you think should be done?" said Ghulam Nabi, a Zindajan resident.

"We don't have a clinic, there are many health problems here. When we get sick, we have to rent a car to go to the city," said Mehr Del, another resident.

While their homes are being built, these residents are also asking the authorities to build schools for them.

"In this village, there is no school, clinic, school, or even a mosque. They sit in tents, which is the biggest problem of this village," said Wali Mohammad, another resident of Zindajan.

"In the twenty years of the republic, we didn't have any school in this village, and even in the two years since the Islamic Emirate, despite our efforts, there is still no school in these fifteen districts of Zindajan in the north of Herat," said Mohammad Hassan, another

resident.

Local officials in Herat also confirmed that there are still no schools in some remote areas, and children are deprived of education.

"In many deprived areas, schools have been built, but there are still areas that are deprived of educational coverage. We are trying to ensure these areas also benefit from the light of education," said Nesar Ahmad Ilyas, the spokesman of Herat's governor.

In many of the earthquake-affected villages of the Zindajan district where schools had been built, the school buildings were destroyed in the earthquake.

Residents of these villages are concerned that due to the lack of schools, their children will be deprived of education and grow up illiterate.

## Chinese investors for talks with IEA



KABUL (Ariana News): The acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum Shahabuddin Delawar met with a number of Chinese investors in his office in Kabul to discuss investment opportunities.

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum said in a post on X, that in this meeting, Chinese investors expressed their satisfaction with the favor-

able environment for investment, created by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and said they were specifically interested in investing in marble mines.

## Key UN agency gets only 'small budget' for Afghanistan this year

KABUL (Ariana News): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) expresses concern that the international community has provided only a small budget for the continuation of aid programs in Afghanistan for the current year, and the lack of funds has threatened to suspend the continuation of most programs.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published a report on Sunday and said that more than \$3 billion was requested for the continuation of humanitarian programs in Afghanistan in 2024, but

only a small part of it has been provided so far.

This United Nations agency said: "In 2023, humanitarian partners in Afghanistan provided assistance in some way to at least 32.1 million people. But in 2024, only \$87 million of the \$3.06 billion budget was received for the plan to meet humanitarian needs, which has put the continuation of many programs at risk."

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that last year due to budget cuts, the organization was forced to stop providing food aid to 18 million Afghans. OCHA said in the report

that from January to December 2023, humanitarian aid donors provided food and alternative livelihoods to 26.3 million Afghans and health services to 16.5 million people.

The United Nations has announced that a total of 32.1 million people received aid in 2023, with 27.6 million directly benefiting.

The organization has spent \$1.47 billion in 2023 for its programs, including \$850 million from the 2022 budget.

Prolonged settlement, widespread presence of explosives, continued restrictions on women's rights and freedoms, increased gender-based

violence, child labor, early marriages, climate change, especially earthquakes and droughts, the return of millions of migrants from Pakistan and internally displaced persons, OCHA said, Afghanistan remains primarily a security crisis, the agency said.

According to the United Nations humanitarian aid plan in 2024, more than half of Afghanistan's population will need humanitarian aid in some way.

The United Nations has emphasized that among all the needy, 17.3 million of the most vulnerable people, including those with disabilities, are covered by the aid mission.



# Zardari, Achakzai vie for presidential contest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The presidential election in Pakistan is scheduled for March 9 when Asif Ali Zardari, the co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Mahmood Khan

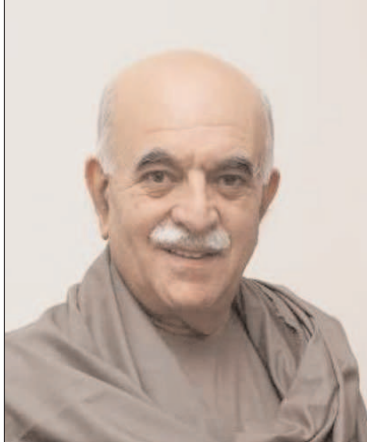
However, Mahmood Khan Achakzai's nomination papers have not been approved yet, as reservations have been raised against them.

Asif Ali Zardari has also called Khalid Maqbool Siddique, president of Muttahid Muttahida Quami

to 4 pm. The nomination papers' scrutiny is being held on March 4, whereas the final list of candidates for the presidential elections will be displayed on March 5 at 1:00 pm. Sources privy to the development said, Asif Ali Zardari telephoned MQM-P's Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, a day earlier, to seek his party's vote in the presidential election. Siddiqui said he will respond after consultation with the party, the sources said.

Meanwhile, it is also being said PPP delegation will meet MQM-P soon to seek support. Separately, Asif Ali Zardari's nomination papers for the presidential elections were approved as no objection was raised over his nomination. "We have required numbers to win the election, Asif Zardari will be elected the president again," Farooq H. Naik said. Earlier, the lawyers of Asif Ali Zardari and Sunni Ittehad Council's presidential candidate Mehmood Khan Achakzai reached the election commission for scrutiny of presidential nomination papers.

Meanwhile, the Awami National Party (ANP) has announced its support for PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari in the upcoming presidential election scheduled for March 9. This announcement was made during a meeting between former president Asif Zardari and Aimal Wali Khan, the president of ANP's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter, who led a delegation to meet the former. Details reveal that during the meeting, Zardari and Aimal Wali exchanged views on the current political situation. Zardari expressed gratitude to the ANP leadership for their support in the presidential election.



Achakzai, the chairman of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), will vie for the prestigious office.

National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq has called for a joint session of Parliament on March 9. The National Assembly secretary has issued a notification of the joint session.

The scrutiny of nomination papers for candidates vying for the role of president was held on Monday. The final list of eligible candidates will be released on March 5 (Tuesday).

Asif Ali Zardari's nomination papers have been approved after scrutiny, making him eligible to contest for the coveted presidential seat.

Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), for the support in presidential election. However, the MQM-P will decide about the matter after consultations. The voting for the presidential position will be conducted simultaneously in the Senate, National Assembly, and four provincial assemblies. The voting will take place from 10am to 4pm on March 9.

PPP co-chairman and nominee for president, Asif Ali Zardari 'sought' Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's (MQM-P) support for the presidential election.

According to the ECP schedule, polling for the presidential election will be held on March 9 from 10 am



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff, Syed Asim Munir shaking hands with Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari during oath taking ceremony of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## SC reserves verdict in ZAB reference

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A nine-member larger bench of the Supreme Court (SC) on Monday reserved its verdict in a long-pending presidential reference, seeking to revisit the 1979 'controversial' death sentence awarded to former prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

The larger bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa heard the case. The bench was also comprising Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Amin Ud Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi, and Justice Musarrat Hilali. The SC bench reserved its verdict after the completion of arguments from both sides. "Not today, but we will announce our verdict soon," the CJP remarked. In the last hearing, CJP Justice Qazi Faez Isa remarked that Martial law is not imposed by the army as an institution. Some people act as individuals. Sometimes there has to be a new beginning, so isn't this an opportunity.

"Isn't it an opportunity for institutions to be indifferent to them by blaming for wrongdoings on the same individuals". The presidential reference was moved by Asif Ali Zardari under Article 186 of the Constitution, seeking to revisit the trial of the PPP Founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's murder trial.

## LHC moved to remove Sanjrani

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Lahore High Court (LHC) on Monday moved to remove the Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani from his post.

As per details, a citizen named Mashkoor Hussain filed a plea in Lahore High Court seeking the removal of Sadiq Sanjrani as Senate chairman. The plea stated that Sanjrani has been elected as a member of the Balochistan Assembly and he cannot retain both seats at the same time. Hence, the court should bar him from performing duties as Senate chairman and order to vacate his senate seat, the plea stated. Earlier, Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) candidate and senate chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, obtained 19,748 votes and won from the PB-32 constituency in the general election 2024.

# KP rain related death toll surges to 35

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, at least thirty-five people have died and forty-three other injured in the recent rains related incidents during three days.

According to a report on Monday, seven people died and two others injured when a roof of their house collapsed in Matta area of Swat. All the dead bodies and injured have been rescued from the rubble. The

injured have been shifted to the nearby hospital.

According to a report issued by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority, a total of forty-six houses were completely damaged while three-hundred and forty-six houses partially damaged due to heavy rains in the province.

Meanwhile, on the special directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, the food and other necessary items have

been distributed in the rain affected areas of the province. Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has announced the compensation package for the affectees of rain and snow-fall in the province.

In a statement in Peshawar, he directed the Secretary Relief and Rehabilitation to collect the details of losses from the concerned districts so that the affectees could be compensated accordingly.

# US SC rules Trump can remain on primary ballots

WASHINGTON: The United States Supreme Court has rejected an effort by Colorado to remove Donald Trump's name from the state's Republican primary ballot, delivering the former president a major victory as he seeks his party's nomination.

The justices on Monday unanimously reversed a December 19 decision by Colorado's top court to kick Trump off the ballot under the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution, which includes a section that prohibits individuals from holding public office if they have participated in an insurrection. Trump's critics have accused him of

inciting and supporting the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in an attempt to subvert the 2020 presidential election, which Democrat Joe Biden won and Trump lost.

"BIG WIN FOR AMERICA!!!" the ex-president and frontrunner in the Republican presidential nomination race wrote on his Truth Social platform after the US Supreme Court's decision. The ruling ends efforts in Colorado, Illinois, Maine and elsewhere to kick Trump off the ballot because of his attempts to undo his loss in the 2020 election to Biden, whom he is likely to face again in

November's presidential election.

The ruling comes a day before Super Tuesday, the day when the largest number of states hold their presidential primaries and caucuses. The 14th Amendment bars people from holding US office, including the presidency, if they "have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof". But the Supreme Court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, said on Monday that only Congress can enforce the provision against federal officeholders and candidates.

# PM directs for preparing action plan to revive economy

ISLAMABAD: (APP):Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, a few hours after swearing in on Monday, chaired an hours long meeting regarding the rehabilitation of the country's economy and issued important instructions to prepare an action plan on emergency basis to streamline the overall economic situation of the country. "We have got the mandate to improve the economy and this is the top priority of our government," the prime minister said. The government would work hard to promote investment in the country and provide facilities to the business community. The Finance Secretary gave a detailed briefing to the prime minister on the country's overall economic situation. The meeting was told that soon after the

prime minister's instructions, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had cleared tax refunds of Rs 65 billion. PM Shehbaz directed for immediate initiation of talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding its Extended Fund Facility. He underlined that the taxpayers, who were working for enhancing exports and value addition in the country's economy, were the most important people for the government. Such taxpayers would be encouraged at the government level. Shehbaz Sharif also directed to start work on the automation of FBR and other institutions immediately, saying that automation was inevitable to bring transparency in the Federal Board of Revenue. He said the loss-making state-

owned institutions would be privatized so that they might not become a burden on the economy. The prime minister also issued directives for forming a committee to devise a clear strategy for reducing the privileges of members of boards of state-owned institutions. He directed to prepare a plan for the transition of power and gas sectors to smart metering in order to reduce line losses. PM Shehbaz asked all the banks and financial institutions to prepare strategies for the promotion of small and medium businesses so that the youth could be helped stand on their own feet. He also directed to work out a strategy to reduce the size of the government by merging or closing down such institutions that were no longer needed.

# SIC members call for urgent PA session

Hassan Naqvi

LAHORE: The Punjab Assembly members belonging to Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf (PTI) backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) on Monday in a requisition addressed to the Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab Malik Ahmed Khan have requested the summoning of a Punjab Assembly Session to address pressing concerns facing the province.

Citing constitutional provisions under Article 54(3) read with Article 127 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, the members have urged for immediate action to convene the session in the Assembly Chambers, Lahore.

The issues slated for discussion encompass the following urgent matters:

**Deteriorating Law and Order:** The SIC members express grave concerns over the deteriorating situation of law and order prevailing across the province of Punjab. "Incidents of violence and unrest have escalated, warranting urgent attention from the legislative body," the requisition read.

**Price Hike:** They stated that the rampant escalation in prices of essential commodities has sparked distress among the populace. The SIC members highlight the need to address this issue to alleviate the burden on the citizens. **Political Instability:** The SIC members claimed that the aftermath of the General Elections held on 8th February 2024 has resulted in a state of political instability. The members underscore the necessity of deliberating on measures to address and mitigate the prevailing political uncertainty. The requisition was accompanied by a list containing the names and signatures of the members of the Punjab Assembly, emphasizing the collective urgency and importance attached to the proposed session.

Speaking to *The Frontier Post* (TFP),

SIC legislator Nadia Farooq Khair said that The call for summoning the Punjab Assembly Session reflects the commitment of elected representatives to address critical challenges confronting the province, with a focus on fostering stability, prosperity, and well-being for the people of Punjab.

Agreeing with her, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MPA Amina Hassan Sheikh told TFP that after taking oath the ultimate aim of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz is to address the issues faced by common people be it price hike, better health facilities etc. "If the opposition members' demand for summoning the PA session is justified and also fulfills the constitutional requirements then the PA Speaker must summon the session at the earliest," she concluded.

**Resolution submitted expressing concern over rise in pneumonia cases:** Earlier on Monday, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) legislator Hina Parvez Butt also submitted a resolution in the Punjab assembly expressing concern over the escalating cases of pneumonia in Punjab.

"The House voiced apprehensions over the rapid increase in pneumonia cases among children in the province, with an additional five children succumbing to pneumonia in Punjab, bringing the total to 464 cases reported in the past 24 hours, including 98 new cases in Lahore alone," the resolution read. She maintained that Punjab has witnessed 456 deaths from pneumonia last year, with 36,000 cases reported. In Lahore, 73 deaths and 8085 cases have been reported during the same period. The resolution calls for immediate measures on an emergency basis to prevent children from falling victim to pneumonia. "The House urges for a government-led campaign to address this issue at the official level," the resolution concluded.

# Resolution seeking ban on social media withdrawn

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Resolution seeking ban on social media from the upper house of the Parliament was withdrawn by Senator Bahramand Tangi on Monday.

During the Senate session held under the chair of deputy chairman, the resolution of Senator Bahramand Tangi seeking a ban on social media to "save the young generation from their negative and devastating effects" was widely criticized after which he withdrew his resolution. He was of the view

that tabling a resolution on any matter was the right of the members of the upper house of the Parliament, however, he was withdrawing the resolution.

At this juncture, the opposition tried to comment on the issue, but the deputy chairman denied the permission by saying the resolution was withdrawn, hence, no discussion could be held on it. Earlier, the Senator, in his resolution, expressed concern over the use of such platforms against the "interests of the country through negative and malicious propaganda against the armed forces of Pakistan".

He observed that such platforms were being used by vested interests for spreading fake news about various issues and try to create and promote fake leadership in the country to hoodwink the young generation. "The Senate of Pakistan, therefore, recommend to the Government to put a ban on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter (X) and Youtube to save the young generation from their negative and devastating effects," the resolution stated.

# Hamas says it presses on with Gaza truce talks without Israelis

CAIRO/RAFAH (Reuters): Hamas said on Monday it was pressing on with talks on securing a ceasefire in Gaza despite Israel's decision not to attend, while Washington appeared to take a tougher line in demanding its ally Israel ease the plight of suffering civilians.

The ceasefire talks, which began on Sunday in Cairo, are billed as a final hurdle to establish the first extended ceasefire of the five-month-old war, in time for the Ramadan Muslim fasting month which is expected to begin on Sunday. Israel has declined public comment on the Cairo talks or its decision not to attend. A source had earlier told Reuters Israel would stay away because Hamas had refused its request for a list of names of all hostages it is holding that are still alive, information the militants say they will provide only once terms are agreed.

"Talks in Cairo continue for the

second day regardless of whether the occupation's delegation is present in Egypt," a Hamas official told Reuters on Monday. Washington, which is both Israel's closest ally and a sponsor of the talks, says a deal remains close, with an agreement already effectively agreed by Israel and only awaiting approval from Hamas.

"Hamas claims it wants a ceasefire. Well, there is a deal on the table. And as we have said, Hamas needs to agree to that deal," Vice President Kamala Harris said on Sunday. "Let's get a ceasefire. Let's reunite the hostages with their families. And let's provide immediate relief to the people of Gaza." In a speech signalling an apparent change of tone from the administration of President Joe Biden toward its ally, Harris also used unusually forceful language to call for Israel to do more to alleviate the humanitarian plight of the Gaza Strip.

"People in Gaza are starving. The conditions are inhumane and our

common humanity compels us to act," she said. "The Israeli government must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses." A Palestinian official close to the talks disputed the US contention that Israel had agreed to the ceasefire deal and Hamas was holding it up, saying the position appeared aimed at deflecting blame away from Israel should the talks collapse.

"The Palestinian resistance, led by Hamas, has shown the flexibility needed, but at the same time they are determined to defend their people and achieve a deal that is acceptable to the Palestinian people," the official said. The proposal being discussed is for a ceasefire of around 40 days, during which militants would release around 40 of the more than 100 hostages they are still holding in return for around 400 detainees held in Israeli jails.

Israeli troops would pull back from some areas, more humanitarian aid would be allowed into Gaza, and res-

idents would be permitted to return to abandoned homes. But the deal does not appear to address directly a Hamas demand for a clear path to permanently ending the war. Nor does it resolve the fate of more than half of the remaining hostages — Israeli men excluded from both this and earlier agreements covering women, children, the elderly and the wounded.

Israel says it will not end the war until Hamas is eradicated. Hamas says it will not free all its hostages without a deal that ends the war. Mediators have indicated they hope to overcome the standoff with promises to resolve further issues in later phases.

The Gaza war erupted after Hamas fighters who control the enclave burst into Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and abducting 253 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israel has sealed off the coastal strip, stormed nearly all of its towns

and pounded it from the sky. Palestinian authorities say more than 30,000 people have been confirmed killed, with thousands of other bodies unrecovered. Most of the population has been made homeless, and the United Nations says hundreds of thousands of people face famine.

An agreement to halt fighting by Ramadan would effectively head off a threatened Israeli assault on Rafah, the last town on the southern edge of Gaza, where more than half of the enclave's population are now sheltering, mostly in makeshift tents. The final days leading up to that deadline have been particularly bloody. Residents have described heavy fighting since Saturday just north of Rafah in Khan Younis, the main southern city, where Israeli forces have released video showing buildings obliterated in airstrikes.

In Rafah itself, airstrikes on homes have been killing families nightly as they sleep. At least 14 corpses of a

family killed overnight were laid out at a hospital morgue in Rafah on Monday morning. One of the body bags was partially unzipped so weeping relatives could stroke the hair of a dead child. Israel's Channel 14 News reported on Monday that several officers in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson's unit were leaving their jobs, including chief international spokesperson Lt. Col. Richard Hecht. It said the large number leaving at once at a time of war was unusual.

The military denied media reports that chief spokesperson Rear-Admiral Daniel Hagari had resigned, but did not directly comment on reports of other officers leaving the unit. "The IDF Spokesperson's Unit continues to fulfil its mission of sharing the truth with transparency and accuracy, while countering misinformation — including baseless claims such as these," it said in a statement.