

PPP delegation calls on PM  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Pakistan Peoples Party led by former President Asif Ali Zardari and party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif wherein they assured the government of the party's support for the country's economic stability. The delegation congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on assuming the office of PM.



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GAWADAR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif consoling the affectees of torrential rains at a relief camp.

## Shehbaz announces relief package for rain-hit areas

### PM directs formulation of proposal to cut govt spending, reform economic structure

F.P. Report

GAWADAR / ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday unveiled a relief package for people of the rain-hit areas of Balochistan, announcing Rs 2 million each for the families of the deceased, Rs 0.5 million for the injured, and Rs 750,000 for those whose houses were completely damaged.

The prime minister who arrived here the very next day of his oath, told the media after visiting the rain-affected areas that the government would also give Rs350,000 compensation to the families whose houses were partially damaged in the stormy rains of February 26.

Accompanied by Chief Minister of Balochistan Sarfaraz Bugti, and parliamentarians including Atta Tarar and Jam Kamal Khan, he assured that the government would not leave the suffering people alone unless they were resettled in their homes. In the briefing, he was told that five people were killed in the rain-related incidents across Balochistan, though no casualty was reported in Gwadar.

The prime minister sympathized with the bereaved families and assured that the compensation package would be implemented within four days. The prime minister lauded Sarfaraz Bugti for his efforts as he rushed to the affected areas soon after his oath and supervised the relief and rescue operations.

"This is not a favour. This is the duty of the newly-elected government and me as the prime minister. This is neither any favor nor any show-off," he remarked. Prime Minister Shehbaz also appreciated the personnel of the Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy, Coastal Guards, PDMA and NDMA for their efforts and recommended the Chief Minister to award them medals and commendation certificates.

He recalled that following the 2022 floods, that time coalition government had distributed Rs 100 billion among the affected people across the country. Earlier, the prime minister also distributed cheques and relief goods including food items, blankets, water coolers and others among the affected people.

Interacting with the victims, he said, "You are our brothers and sisters. I am here to assure you that the government will not

leave you alone. We are with you. How could I sit in Islamabad when you are homeless." The prime minister was told that water was receding and the situation in the cities was improving. It was told that water filtration plants had been set up and medicines have been available for the homeless people.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed the authorities concerned to formulate proposals for reducing government expenditures and overhauling the country's economic structure.

He also directed to immediately initiate the process of complete digitization and automation of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), which he himself would oversee. Chairing a high level meeting at the Prime Minister House soon after his return from Gwadar, PM Shehbaz said that the world's best model should be adopted for the digitization of FBR to ensure transparency in its system, increase tax collection, halt tax evasion, corruption and smuggling, and also to bring convenience to the general public and the business community.

The large taxpayers and the best performance officers of the FBR would be encouraged and the black sheep would be brought to justice, he added. FBR Chairman Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana briefed the meeting about the steps taken to enhance tax collection; refunds' payment to the exporters; expanding the tax net; automation process; stopping tax evasion, institutional corruption and smuggling; and provision of quality services to the people.

The prime minister, expressing dissatisfaction over the briefing, directed to immediately initiate process of complete digitization and automation of the FBR as per the international standards. "We should go ahead by learning lessons from the past as nothing can be changed by merely lamenting the mistakes," he said. "We have to take up the challenge and find a way out to steer the country out of the debt trap." He said that the country had no dearth of capable people. "If we start our journey now, we can ultimately achieve the goal of prosperity and development." PM Shehbaz announced that efficient, honest and professional officers would be rewarded.

## Matthew adamant on terming Maryam as CM a milestone

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: State Department Spokesperson, Matthew Miller termed Maryam Nawaz becoming first female Chief Minister of Punjab as a "milestone" in Pakistan.

The Frontier Post reminded Matthew Miller that Pakistan has had a female Prime Minister in the past, late Benazir Bhutto and asked whether State Department was aware that Maryam Nawaz was caught cheating the Supreme Court of Pakistan by presenting a document which was written in "Calibri" font but when that agreement was signed the Calibri font was not introduced in the market. Matthew Miller replied by saying that it was an internal matter of Pakistan and that "we" consider her appointment as milestone.

While replying to another question by The Frontier Post, whether the US will endorse the demands of UN Special Envoy on human rights in Afghanistan who urged countries to lodge a case against the Taliban regime in International Court of Justice (ICJ) for denying girls the right to education. Matthew Miller replied by saying that the US has said it several times in the past that the treatment of women and girls inside Afghanistan is deplorable.

## SC to announce opinion on ZAB reference today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: After much deliberation on a presidential reference filed in 2011, the Supreme Court is going to announce its opinion on the trial, sentence, and execution — by the apex court — of the late prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on Wednesday (today).

On Monday, a 9-member bench of the top court, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, reserved its opinion on the 2011 presidential reference seeking to revisit the sentence, and execution of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) founder and former premier Bhutto. Bhutto had been hanged to death on April 4, 1979, following a verdict of the Supreme Court in a murder case that his party termed as "judicial murder."

After the filing of a presidential reference, an 11-member larger bench of the apex court, headed by former chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, conducted five hearings in the presidential reference. The hearing was resumed by the current chief justice on December 12 following a decision to fix an instant case under the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act, 2023, taken by a three-member committee comprising CJP Isa, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Ijazul Ahsan.

Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The ECP — in the Sindh Assembly — allocated reserved seat for women to Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and PPP. PPP's Samita Afzal and MQM-P's Fouzia Hameed elected on reserved seats.

Furthermore, PPP's Sadhu Mal alias Surinder Valasai secured minority seat in Sindh Assembly. The ECP allocated three reserved seats for minorities to PML-N, PPP and JUI-F — which were claimed by Sunni Ittehad Council. PML-N's Neelam Meghwar, PPP's Ramesh Kumar and JUI-F's James Iqbal were elected on the minority seats.

PTI candidates contested the elections as independents after the Supreme Court upheld the election supervisor's decision, considering its intra-party polls "unconstitutional" and revoked its claim on the electoral symbol of 'bat'. As per the Constitution, the reserved seats are allocated to the political parties on the basis of the number of their lawmakers elected on

the general seats. For their allocation, the ECP had already received the priority list of candidates from the parties before the Feb 8 polls.

The situation this year is different from the previous elections as the largest group of lawmakers are independents, who cannot have the reserved seats. There are a total of 346 reserved seats for women — 60 in the NA and 66, 29, 26, and 11 in the provincial legislatures of Punjab, Sindh, K-P, and Balochistan.

Similarly, there are 10 reserved seats for minorities in the lower house. Besides, there are eight, nine and three reserved seats for minorities in the Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan assemblies. Sunni Ittehad Council, in its letter, stated that 86 independent candidates of the National Assembly had joined his party, adding that 107 independents of Punjab Assembly, 90 of K-P Assembly and nine independent members of Sindh Assembly now garnered the support of the SIC.

# The Frontier Post

LHC summons secretaries  
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Lahore High Court has summoned the interior secretary on the plea of Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid seeking exclusion of his name from the Exit Control List (ECL). The Rawalpindi bench of LHC consisting of Justice Mirza Viqas Rauf and Justice Sadaqat Ali Khan has summoned the interior secretary 'in person' on Wednesday.

## Army has nothing to do with electoral process

### Army's top brass slams elements scapegoating others for their 'failings' after elections

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) presided over the 263rd Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) held at GHQ, on Tuesday.

Forum paid rich tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhadas including officers and men of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies and the citizens who have laid their lives for ensuring peace and stability in the country. Forum resolved that terrorists, their facilitators and abettors, working on behalf of hostile forces to destabilise Pakistan, will be dealt with full might of the State.

COAS directed commanders to continue consolidating the gains of efforts against terrorism and militancy. The forum expressed concerns over continued repression of Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and condemned the unabated human rights violations by India. Forum reaffirmed that Pakistan shall continue to support Kashmiris politically, diplomatically and morally at all levels.

The Forum also expressed complete solidarity with the people of Palestine and condemned serious human rights violations and war crimes being perpetrated in Gaza. COAS said that "the Palestinian people have unequivocal diplomatic, moral and political support of the Pakistani nation and we will continue to support the principled stance of our brethren for enduring resolution of the Palestinian issue".

Forum appreciated efforts of Civil Administration, Law Enforcement Agencies and security forces for providing all out assistance during General Elections in the light of the Election Commission of Pakistan's guidelines for creating a safe & secure environment for the electoral process, despite overwhelming odds.

Forum noted that the Armed Forces of Pakistan at a great peril to their primary responsibility, provided security environment for the conduct of GE-24 as per the given mandate, and had nothing to do with the elec-



toral process. However, the forum expressed dismay that some vested small segments of polity and media especially social media have been maligning Armed Forces of Pakistan with unsubstantiated allegations of interference which is highly deplorable. It's unfortunate that rather than focusing on real issues such as good governance, economic recovery, political stability and public well being, entire focus of such vested elements is on creating political instability and uncertainty by attempting to scapegoat others for their own failings. Forum emphasised that due legal processes be followed with evidence and proof rather than resorting to unconstitutional and uncalled for baseless political rhetoric and emotional outbursts.

Forum noted with satisfaction the smooth democratic transition of power in the Centre and Provinces. Forum hoped that the post elections environment brings in desired political and economic stability resulting into peace and prosperity for the people of Pakistan. Forum expressed that it strongly believed that democratic consolidation is the way forward for the country.

Forum affirmed that military leadership is cognizant of the full spectrum of the challenges and threats and it remains committed to shoulder its constitutionally mandated responsibilities with support of the resilient people of Pakistan. Forum reiterated to continue providing full support to the government in combating security threats and uplifting the socio-economic growth in the country includ-

ing wholehearted assistance in curbing all illegal activities including smuggling, hoarding, electricity theft, implementation of One Document Regime and respectable & safe repatriation of all illegal foreigners.

In line with the resolve of the honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, the forum committed that planners, instigators, abettors and perpetrators/descenders of Shuhada Monuments and attackers of military installations on 9 May, would certainly be brought to justice under the relevant provisions of the law and Constitution. In this regard, malicious efforts to create distortions, confusion and disinformation are absolutely futile and only part of an organised campaign being launched for narrow political interests, to blur the abhorrent activities that took place.

The forum noted with concern organised misinformation and fake news being spread by certain nefarious elements to sow despondency and divisions within the society, and urged the proud people of Pakistan to remain positive and united and wholeheartedly participate in the progress and development of the country. The participants affirmed that Pakistan Army will continue defending and serving the nation in every possible way; in our journey towards enduring stability, prosperity and security. COAS stressed on field commanders to continue maintaining high standards of professionalism, operational preparedness and motivation during operations and achieving excellence during training of the formations.



RAWALPINDI: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur talking to media persons in front of Adiala Jail.

## KP CM: Imran to decide about reconciliation with establishment

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said Tuesday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan will decide about reconciliation with the establishment.

Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and its leadership believe in supremacy of law, democracy, justice, transparency and provision of rights to the entitled ones. "We want to have such a transparent system in Pakistan that is truly governed by the rule of law and guarantees supremacy of the constitution in all circumstances", he remarked and made it clear that they will continue to strive in line with the manifesto and vision of their party and its leadership.

These views, he expressed while talking to media outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Tuesday. Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on the occasion, demanded that

legal action should be taken against those responsible for May 9 incidents, making it clear that Tehreek-e-Insaf is fighting for the rights of the people; and we have proved by our actions that we are standing for the just and transparent governance system and welfare of the common man in the country.

We want a Pakistan that was dreamed by Allama Iqbal. Our forefathers have made a lot of sacrifices for this country, and that's why it is the first responsibility of all of us to strive for its survival and integrity. Responding to a question on this occasion, Ali Amin Gandapur said that being the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he will raise his voice for the rights of the province because the people have given him a mandate for this purpose. The Chief Minister made it clear that despite ideological and political differences, he will take the matter of provincial rights with the relevant forums at centre, we will not compromise on our constitutional rights and we can

go to any extent for this purpose. In response to another question about current financial crunches in the country, the Chief Minister said that political parties that are now sitting at center are responsible for the economic crisis that the country is facing today.

Responding to a question regarding priorities of the provincial government, the Chief Minister made it clear that maintaining law and order in the province will be the top most priority of his government. However, he added that eradication of poverty, promotion of employment opportunities, and provision of facilities to the common man, supremacy of law and justice, improvement of health, education and other sectors of social services as well as rehabilitation of infrastructure are also among the priorities of his government. The Chief Minister also announced on this occasion that Sahat Insaf Card would be restored in all respects by the 1st of Ramadan this year.

## Facebook, Instagram experiencing outages

ISLAMABAD (Reuters): Social media platforms Instagram, Threads and Facebook experienced outages across the globe on Tuesday, internet monitor Netblocks reported. "Facebook, Instagram and Messenger are currently experiencing outages related to login sessions in multiple countries," it said.

Outage tracking website Downdetector corroborated the outage, saying the websites were down for tens of thousands of users. According to Reuters, the disruptions started around 10am Eastern Time, with more than 300,000 reports of outages for Facebook and about 40,000 reports for Instagram on outage tracking website Downdetector.

Meta's status dashboard showed the application programming interface for WhatsApp Business was also facing issues. There were around 200 reports of outages for WhatsApp on Downdetector, which tracks outages by collating status reports from several sources, including users. The outage was among the top trending topics on X, formerly Twitter, with several users saying they had suddenly been logged out of the Meta-owned social media platforms.

"We're aware people are having trouble accessing our services. We are working on this now," Meta spokesperson Andy Stone said in a post on X social media. Netblocks said the incident was not related to "country-level internet disruptions or filtering". In Pakistan, reports of the platforms' troubles began spiking after 8pm, which when coupled with the government's ongoing throttling of X (previously Twitter), further restricted social media options for internet users in the country.



## Alhamra arranges poetry, qawwali night

LAHORE (APP): The Alhamra Arts Center hosted a captivating evening of poetry and qawwali titled "Azrah-e-Sukhan, Teen Shayar, Aik Qawwal."

Renowned poets Tehzeeb Hafi, Zahid Bashir, and Ikram Arifi graced the event, accompanied by the celebrated Qawwal Khalid Khan, said a press release issued here on Tuesday.

The event, organized jointly by Lahore Arts Council Alhamra and Azrah-e-Sukhan, unfolded with opening remarks by young poets Anas Azam and Khuram Afq, setting the stage for a captivating artistic journey.

The poets skilfully tailored their verses to resonate with the audience's preferences while Khalid Khan's distinctive Qawwali style added a unique allure to the atmosphere.

The programme drew numerous poetry enthusiasts who enthusiastically applauded the poets, creating an ambience of shared appreciation.

Expressing his thoughts on the event, Executive Director Alhamra Tariq Mehmood Chaudhry emphasized Alhamra's commitment to utilizing all available resources to deliver high-quality programmes for the public's welfare and entertainment.

## Patients advised to avoid fried foods in Ramazan

LAHORE (APP): Dean Institute of Public Health Professor Dr. Zarfishan Tahir has urged patients suffering from high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, stomach and liver diseases to avoid fried foods, pakoras, samosas, spicy dishes and cold drinks in Ramazan.

In a statement issued here Tuesday, she advised the patients to be careful in the consumption of meat because excessive use of the foods can lead to an increase in cholesterol, uric acid, blood pressure, and sugar.

She further said that symptoms in liver and stomach patients can also increase which could be harmful to their health. Dr. Zarfishan Tahir mentioned that Ramazan is the month of earning more good deeds and rewards, not eating more and more.

Dr. Zarfishan said that the Institute of Public Health considers that promoting public health and raising awareness among people is its responsibility so that people can protect their health, not only in Ramazan but also the rest of the months.

The Dean Institute of Public Health said that Ramazan is a month of blessings and mercy and provides an opportunity to earn more good deeds and rewards and teaches us patience, therefore, we should also be patient in eating and drinking to keep ourselves healthy and at the end of the month joy and happiness of Eid can be doubled.

## Pakistan Customs seize gold ornaments

KARACHI (APP): The Pakistan Customs authorities have made a significant recovery at the Karachi airport, intercepting a passenger who arrived from Dubai with a haul of gold ornaments.

According to a spokesman for Customs, the Customs staff stationed at the arrival lounge of Jinnah International Airport, intercepted a passenger over suspicion. Upon questioning, the said passenger denied carrying any prohibited items.

Unsatisfied, Customs officials proceeded to conduct a thorough search of the passenger's luggage. Their efforts were rewarded when they uncovered a stash of gold ornaments weighing 49 tola. Despite persistent inquiries, the passenger failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the presence of the ornaments.

Subsequently, the Customs staff confiscated the gold ornaments, valued at 11.047 million rupees. The authorities have indicated that further actions will be taken under the Customs Act to address the matter.

# CM reviews Ramadan Nigahban Relief Programme

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif reviewed the distribution and monitoring of Ramadan Nigahban Relief Programme, here on Tuesday.

Presiding over a meeting, the CM said the process of delivering peoples' right to their doorsteps has begun, adding that distribution of big gifts to the people of Punjab on the occasion of Ramadan has commenced.

The meeting was briefed by the authorities concerned that a fool-proof system has been developed to ensure transparent distribution of the largest Ramadan relief package to the beneficiaries. The distribution is being monitored with the help of a live dashboard and advanced technology. A helpline has been set up which will be formally launched tomorrow. Beneficiaries will be able to register complaints through the helpline.

The chief minister was apprised that data of NADRA (National Database and Registration Authority) and BISP (Benazir Income Support Programme) beneficiaries is being used for the distribution of Ramadan Nigahban relief packages.

It was further briefed that the distribution of Ramadan relief packages will officially start from 2nd of Ramadan, and will be completed by 10th of Ramadan. For the first time in the history of Punjab, Ramadan package is being delivered to every deserving person's home.

The CM directed to ensure high quality of Ramadan package items. "I will not tolerate complaints about the quality of flour, ghee, sugar and other food items," she said.

Stressing the need for talks, she said that the PPP was read for talks for the welfare of the people.

She said that Bilawal Bhutto had said important things in his address on the floor of the house.

Bilawal Bhutto's speech was very balanced one.

Speaking about protest in assembly, she said that the protest was everyone's right but the manner in which the floor of the

National Assembly was waiting to be sworn in after the notifications.

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Bilawal Bhutto's speech was very balanced one.

Speaking about protest in assembly, she said that the protest was everyone's right but the manner in which the floor of the

house was insulted was disappointing.

Marri said that the august forum should be used to solve people's problems. The solution to every problem was not in the privatization of institutions.

The PPP leader said that the performance of FBR was quite poor and time had come to improve it.

The priority of Pakistan People's Party was to solve the problems of the working class and the people, she added.

## Doctors delegation calls on CPWB chairperson

## LESCO detects 356 power pilferers in 24 hours

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 356 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 173rd day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Tuesday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 128 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations.

Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO

chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice.

On the 173rd consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were disconnected and charged with detection units.

Among the seized connections, 08 were commercial, 04 industrial, 04 agricultural and 340 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 342,016 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 14,908 million.

Apprising the media about some major power

pilferers, he explained that LESCO charged Rs 2.1 million detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Lakhhu Der area; Rs 750,000 detection bills to a power pilferer in Kasur district, Rs 200,000 detection bill to an electricity thief in Shad Bagh area, and Rs 122,000 fine in the form of detection bills to a customer stealing electricity in an area around Safdar Abad.

During the 173 days of the grand anti-theft campaign, the spokesman mentioned, the LESCO detected pilferage on 60,062 power connections and 55,252 FIRs have been registered against electricity thieves in the relevant police stations, while 18,700 accused have so far been arrested by the police. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 78,739,442 detection units worth Rs 3,087,508,617 to all the power pilferers.



LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Emir Siraj ul haq addressing a press conference. —INP Photo

# Trees to be planted in city to control pollution

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab Tuesday said that climate change was a big challenge for the world including Pakistan; trees would be planted in the city to control environmental pollution.

He said this while addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Eco Street project launched by PSO at the Pakistan State Oil head office in Clifton.

He said that PSO ECO Street, sustainable plastic road initiative not only beautified our city but also demonstrated environmental responsibility and community engagement.

"We applaud PSO's commitment to sustainability, fostering a greener urban landscape, and inspiring other corporate entities to invest in our community's development, we will make this city developed together," he said.

On this occasion, PPP Parliamentary leader in the city council Najmi Alam, Deputy Parliamentary leader Dil Muhammad, Special Representative of Mayor Karachi for Political Affairs Karamullah Waqasi, Managing Director/CEO, PSO Syed Muhammad Taha and others were also present.

The Mayor said that in parallel with the road construction, PSO ECO STREET had committed to a comprehensive beautification of the surrounding area. The project included the reconstruction and renovation of road

median, walkways, transforming them into welcoming spaces for the pedestrians. These areas now boast newly installed planters, graced with an array of indigenous trees and plants further enriching the local biodiversity.

He said that KMC was working on afforestation and improvement of parks in all districts of the city and solid waste management system was also being developed in the city on modern lines, along with citizens as well as corporate bodies and Associations located in industrial zones had also contributed in this regard and as a result a positive and pleasant change can be seen within the city.

MD & CEO, PSO, Syed Muhammad Taha said that PSO ECO STREET, a sustainable plastic road, is part of PSO's ongoing efforts to reduce plastic waste and promote eco-friendly infrastructure.

He said that this significant initiative had turned approximately 49,428 square feet of traditional road into a symbol of green living, utilizing 5,000 kg of recycled plastic waste, primarily from lubricant bottles and cans collected from PSO's Lubricant Manufacturing Terminal (LMT) location in Karachi. He said that the project's core objective was two-fold: to significantly reduce the plastic footprint that burdens our planet and to demonstrate the viability and benefits of sustainable infrastructure.

By incorporating plastic waste into road construction, PSO ECO STREET was not only repurposing waste but also enhancing the durability of the road, setting a new standard for environmentally responsible construction, he added. Syed Muhammad Taha, MD & CEO of PSO, embodied the ethos of giving back to society.

He emphasized the importance of caring for our surroundings akin to responsible tenants, stating, "This initiative exemplifies PSO's unwavering dedication to sustainability and environmental conservation. We are steadfast in our commitment to pioneering innovative solutions to tackle environmental challenges while simultaneously creating value for our communities."

The culmination of these efforts in a vibrant and green transformation of the road aligns seamlessly with PSO's overarching green initiatives. This venture not only showcases the innovative solutions that reduce plastic and carbon footprints but also fosters an eco-friendly and sustainable infrastructure that serves as a model for future developments.

The company extends its gratitude to all stakeholders, including local authorities, community members, and project partners, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout the implementation of the PSO ECO STREET initiative.

## CM takes notice of BBA student's killing

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah took notice of the killing of a BBA student Larib here on Tuesday.

He directed the IGP Sindh to arrest the killers of Larib immediately and present an immediate report of the incident to him.

The CM said that there was no room for such incidents and students were our valuable assets. He directed to increase police pickets and patrols in areas where robbery incidents were high. The chief minister said that the rise in muggings was a cause of concern.

He said, "I want atmosphere of peace and order to be maintained in the city." There should be such an environment of peace and order that people can freely carry out their daily routine matters, he added.

## KU int'l conference highlights importance of biotechnology

KARACHI (APP): Vice Chancellor of the University of Karachi Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi on Tuesday inaugurated the second two-day long international conference Biocon 2.0 at the Professor Salimuzzaman Siddiqui Auditorium of the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences of the University of Karachi.

The KU Department of Biotechnology organized an event that highlighted the importance of biotechnology in different fields, particularly agriculture, health sciences, and medicines.

Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi said that science and technology play a very important role in human health and social development of society.

He mentioned that with the help of biotechnology and especially industrial biotechnology, the United States and European countries have added billions of dollars to their economy,

and expressed we can do the same with proper planning and dedication.

He observed that it has become essential to increase the production of crops, otherwise, the rapidly rising population would face challenge.

The KU VC Professor Dr Khalid Iraqi said that industrial biotechnology will also help us to deal with the challenges related to food security.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Director of the Defense Science and Technology Organization Dr Saifullah Khan said that biotechnology is being used in every field of daily life, and agriculture and medicine are at the top of the list.

He shared that with the help of biotechnology, genetic changes is being made in an organism. Giving references, Dr Saifullah Khan shared that reversing the age of organs and whole bodies in animals has already been successfully done, and more work is underway in this

regard. Chief Strategic Officer of Science and Technology, Drap Islamabad, Dr Obaid Ali said that the world's top 10 biological products are doing business worth US\$100 billion.

The KU Dean of the Faculty of Science Professor Dr Massarrat Jahan Yousuf said that Pakistan is an agricultural country and being an agricultural country we need to apply new trends of technology in the field of agriculture.

On this occasion, the KU Chairman of the Department of Biotechnology Dr Saifullah shed light on the aims and objectives of the conference and said that the world was making full use of biotechnology, especially in the field of medicine and agriculture.

He mentioned that biotechnology has created a revolution which is why we must make full use of it to improve the economy of Pakistan.



LAHORE: A beautiful view of birds flying over at Badshahi Masjid. —APP Photo



### TESCO AUCTION NOTICE

Disposal of redundant Transmission line (66 kV Jandola-Wana) TESCO

As per detail given below

S.No	Item description	Unit	Qty	Open auction date & Time
1	Iron Scrape	Kg	594361	28.03.2024
2	Aluminium Scrape	Kg	44971.2	at 11:30 AM

**CONDITIONS**

- The redundant transmission line can be physically inspected up to 27.03.2024 at site round the clock by the bidders before closing date.
- Time compliance will be strictly observed.
- All sales shall be made to the bidder offering the highest price subject to the approval of Competent Authority.
- The material is sold on the clear understanding that the bidders have inspected and satisfied themselves of the material they are bidding for. No complaints after the sale shall be entertained.
- Bidder will be responsible for dismantling of the redundant line and its transportation to the desired destination.
- Successful bidder will deposit 25% of the bid amount on the spot while after the Final Approval / issuance of Letter of Acceptance, remaining 75% amount is to be deposited within 21 working days. In case of failure to deposit the balance 75% amount within due date, the bid will be deemed cancelled and 25% bid amount will be forfeited.
- All Govt Taxes are included in the reserved price.
- Competent Authority reserves the right to reject or accept bidder's offer by giving or without reasons for rejection or acceptance.
- Disposal will be on "As Is Where Is Basis".
- Place of Auction is Regional Store TESCO Hayatabad Peshawar.

**PID(P)# 068/2024**

**Director (MM) TESCO Room No.206, Wapda House Peshawar Tel: 091-9214106+**





## Governor chairs senate meeting

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali here Tuesday chaired a senate meeting of University of Malakand (UoMU) that discussed approval and legal status of varsity statutes.

The meeting was attended by Vice Chancellor UoM, Dr. Rasheed Ahmad and concerned officials of higher education, law, establishment and finance. The meeting discussed legal aspects of the statutes and concurred to send them to varsity's senate subcommittee to remove legal lacu-

nas in one month period. Participants also discussed extension of contract employees that are working in the university. The meeting was told contract employees have completed three year period but the new appointments were stopped by election commission due to current general elections.

Meeting approved six months extension of contract period and directed to ensure policy of merit while making new appointments.

Addressing the meeting, governor directed UoM

administration to reduce fees and stressed faculty to improve capacity of students keeping in view international standard of education. He said that education must be compatible to contemporary standard adding it would help students to effectively meet challenges of existing scenario.

Later, newly elected Speaker KP Assembly, Babar Salim Swati called on governor and discussed matters including financial position of the province. Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali was also present on the occasion.

## Court grants bail in crypto scam

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Accountability Court Peshawar Judge Younas Khan granted bail to alleged fraudster involved in embezzlement of Rs2 billion 75 corer in the name crypto currency on Rs five million along with two personal sureties, on Tuesday.

The counsel Anim-ur-Rehman Yousafzai and Maaz Khalil advocates informed that the Riaz Khattak is behind the bars in allegation of alleged embezzlement of Rs2 billion 75 corer in the name of crypto currency.

He added that the petitioner has no link with the scam but arrested on the allegation that his book's shop was used as office in the embezzlement.

National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had already arrested main culprit of the scam and have no evidence to link relation of the petitioner with the financial scam, the lawyers stated. They added that money is also transferred to another account and reached to the main accused.

Accountability Court Peshawar Judge Younas Khan granted bail to Riaz Gul Khattak on two personal sureties along with Rs5 million after conclusion of arguments.

## MPA submits privilege motion

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz female lawmaker Sobia Shahid on Tuesday submitted a privilege motion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly against her humiliation in the House.

She submitted that PTI workers threw pitchers, shoes, Niswar and mobile chargers from the visitors' gallery at her in the House when she came to take oath as elected MPA.

The people in the visitors' gallery also used abusive language for PMLN leadership and her, which was violation of her privilege. She requested to refer the matter to the privilege committee.

## Salim congratulates PM Shahbaz

PESHAWAR (APP): Senior politician, former federal minister Salim Saifullah Khan has congratulated the newly elected Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif and expressed the hope that under his leadership the country will overcome all challenges and put the country on the track of progress and development.

In a statement issued here on Tuesday, he said that under the dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif political and economic stability will be established in the country and a new era of business and development will usher in the country.

He was further confident that Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif while taking steps for the abolition of corruption, price-hike and peace & security in the country, beside guaranteeing transparency will also begin a new era of the public service and improvement in the foreign policy of the country.



PESHAWAR: Additional Chief Secretary Information Department Abid Majeed presiding over 8th meeting of provincial task force.

## Protest against illegal police raid organized

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has launched a series of protests across the province condemning the illegal police raids on the residence of their party chairman and Presidential candidate, Mehmood Khan Achakzai.

Dr. Mohammad Ali, the provincial President of PMAP KP, strongly condemned the police raids on the home of PMAP's Chairman and presidential candidate, Mahmood Khan Achakzai. Dr. Ali termed the move deeply troubling and stated that such underhanded state tactics cannot deter Achakzai's commitment to the democratic struggle. He emphasized the need for all democratic

forces to unite and struggle for civilian supremacy.

Hamayoon Khan, the provincial Information Secretary of PMAP, expressed concern over the recent police intrusion into Mehmood Khan Achakzai's home, labeling it as a concerning escalation of authoritarian tactics.

Niazbeen, the provincial Deputy Secretary of PMAP, addressed the protests in Peshawar, highlighting Achakzai's courage in speaking out against military interference in Pakistani politics just two days ago.

Niazbeen emphasized that targeting political dissent through police raids is unacceptable and that Achakzai's unwavering commitment to democracy deserves respect, not intimidation tactics.

Arshad Khan, senior Deputy chairman of PMAP, joined the protest in Swabi and denounced the raid on Achakzai's house, stating that such actions are unacceptable. He emphasized that targeting individuals for their political beliefs goes against the principles of democracy and that the establishment should refrain from interfering in politics.

Provincial Deputy Secretary of PTI, Irfan Saleem, also joined the PMAP protest, condemning the recent raid on Mehmood Khan Achakzai. The PMAP party urges authorities to respect democratic rights and cease harassment against political leaders.

They vow to continue their peaceful protests until justice is served.

## Jhagra alleges historic seat sale in Peshawar elections

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Timur Saleem Jhagra has leveled serious allegations of election rigging in Peshawar, asserting that seats were allegedly sold for millions.

Addressing the media on Tuesday, Jhagra lamented the lack of transparency, citing the failure to provide Form 45 by the election commission as evidence of foul play.

Expressing determination for justice rather than revenge, Jhagra announced plans to rally fellow party members to petition the Chief Minister for a judicial inquiry into the matter. He underscored the significance of Form 45, stressing that its temporary upload

by the Election Commission followed by deletion warrants a thorough investigation, with perpetrators held accountable through a judicial probe.

Furthermore, Jhagra hinted at forthcoming developments within the provincial cabinet, hinting at the inclusion of Ali Amin Gandapur and the PTI founder.

However, he emphasized that if his electoral loss is legitimate, he relinquishes any claim to cabinet membership.

These allegations come in the wake of Jhagra's prior correspondence with the Election Commission, where he highlighted discrepancies in the conduct of

District Returning Officers (DRO) and Returning Officers (RO), alleging violations of electoral norms. The letter underscored the urgency of addressing rigging allegations, citing unprecedented irregularities that tarnished the electoral process.

Amidst mounting calls for transparency and accountability, voices of discontent continue to resonate, underscoring the need for swift and impartial investigation into the alleged electoral malpractice. As the political landscape in Peshawar remains embroiled in controversy, PTI's demand for justice reverberates, signaling a pivotal moment in the quest for electoral integrity.

## Peshawar Zalmay provides transport facility to fans



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Zalmay has provided transporta-

tion facility to the fans to enjoy match at Rawalpindi. According to details, Peshawar Zalmay has been

provided buses to transport the fans and media personnel for enjoying matches at Rawalpindi stadium.

## Names proposed for KP Cabinet

PESHAWAR (INP): The party leadership has proposed names of candidates to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur for inclusion in the provincial cabinet, however the latter has decided to finalise the names after consultation with the party's central leadership.

According to party sources, there was a proposal of adding four members from Peshawar in the cabinet including former KP Finance Minister Taimur Jhagra, Fazal Elahi, Meena Khan Afridi and Qasim Ali Shah.

The name of Meena Khan was considered for Higher education, Fazal Elhi for Transport, Qasim Ali Shah for Health Department. Khaliqur Rahman and Mian Umar from Nowshera were likely to join the cabinet.

Former KP Assembly speaker Mushtaq Ghani was a potential candidate for senior minister for local government department. Dr Amjad from Swat would once again join the cabinet, while young MPA from Kohat Shafi Jan or Aftab Alam would also be included.

The other candidates proposed for the KP cabinet included Akbar Ayub from Haripur, Zahir Shah Toru from Mardan, Riaz Khan from Buner, Shakeel Khan from Malakand, Shafiullah and Liaquat Ali from Dir, Anwar Zaib and Adnan Qadri from tribal districts.

## Anti-polio drive continued

PESHAWAR (INP): The five-day anti polio vaccination and eradication drive continued on third consecutive day in specific districts of the province.

During the campaign, more than 7.4 million children would be administered polio drops, said the Health Department here Tuesday adding that the campaign was being conducted in all districts of Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan divisions simultaneously.

It added that due to snowfall the campaign was temporarily suspended in Malakand and Hazara divisions, however restarted from Tuesday, Match 05. More than 35,000 teams were constituted to administer polio drops, while over 55,000 police personnel were deployed for security of health teams.

In the provincial capital as many as 901986 children under the age of five would be vaccinated against crippling polio disease for which 2506 teams were formed with adequate security arrangements.

## Academia leadership visits Fort Balahisar



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Vice-chancellors, educators and religious scholars from various universities and colleges across Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Swat and Dir districts convened at Balahisar Fort in Peshawar.

The delegation paid homage at the Martyrs Memorial, laid wreath and offered fateha. Inspector General Frontier Corps

North, Major General Noor Wali Khan, extended a warm welcome to the delegation. In his address, he emphasized the pivotal role of education in fostering development and prosperity.

Major General Noor Wali Khan underscored the collective responsibility of society, including parents and educators, to promote both religious and secular education.

He highlighted the

importance of religious scholars in combating terrorism by imparting accurate understanding of Islamic teachings and ensuring youth are shielded from misinterpretations leading to un-Islamic practices.

The delegation commended the Frontier Corps North's efforts in fostering peace and development in KPK and presented constructive suggestions for further advancement.

## KP Task Force on Energy: 16 feeders load shedding free declared

PESHAWAR (APP): Following the declaration of Peshawar as electricity load shedding free district, the provincial task force has announced to declare 16 feeders across the city as load shedding free.

In the next few days, most of the feeders in other districts wherein targeted recovery has been made from the non-paying consumers and the use of illegal electricity has been eliminated will also be declared load shedding free.

This was announced by the head of Provincial Task Force on Energy, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Home & Tribal Affairs, Muhammad Abid Majeed, while presiding over the 8th session of Provincial Task Force here on Tuesday.

Besides, all Divisional Commissioners and Regional Police Officers (RPOs), Deputy Secretary Energy Department Ijaz Khan and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) Engineer Akhtar Hameed also attended the meeting.

The task force has so far recovered Rs. 1.5 billion

from the defaulting consumers in Peshawar during a short period of 4 months. Furthermore, the efforts of Commissioner Peshawar Division, Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar and PESCO chief were appreciated conducting successful operations and declaring of the 16 feeders of Peshawar as load shedding free.

Meanwhile, the CEO PESCO Engineer Akhtar Hamid has said that the provincial task force created for the recovery of dues from the consumers in KP and to stop the misuse of electricity has recovered billions of rupees in a short period of 4 months. He said that beside imposition of heavy fines FIRs have also been registered against power pilferers.

He said that a campaign is in progress in 78 out of 99 feeders of Peshawar for recovery and elimination of power theft. During the campaign Rs. 1.5 billion has been recovered from the defaulters while line losses have been reduced by 5% and recovery has been increased by 13%.

He said that 16 feeders located in different areas of

Peshawar have been declared free from Tuesday March 05, 2024.

During the meeting, despite improvement in the recovery in Mardan, concern was expressed about load shedding on 17 feeders of the district.

On this occasion, orders were issued to the police to find out the reasons for load shedding in Mardan. Similarly, the officials of the Tribal Electric Supply Company (Tesco) assured to cooperate with the police and district administration for recovery from commercial consumers in Mula Gori area of Khyber district.

In his concluding speech, the Additional Chief Secretary Home and Tribal Affairs, Abid Majeed commended the team of the task force for declaring 16 feeders of Peshawar load shedding free.

He warned the people to continue paying electricity bills and stop illegal consumption of electricity so that the entire province including Peshawar would be declared load shedding free, otherwise loss-making feeders would have to face load shedding.

## Rule of law — II

Khwaja Wajih-ud-Din

Work ethics are an important component of the working as a team. The inculcation of work ethics was the reason for success of the team of an unprecedented level. Exercise of discretion was eliminated. Each and every decision taken by the decision makers, especially writing of the PERs, disciplinary actions were properly documented and were minute to avoid chances of manipulation later. It was noticed that previously the minutes just mentioned PERs to have been written without actually specifying the assessment to be good, very good and average or below average. This practice was abhorred by the district judiciary. The complaint was that it was manipulated, later on, and it gave a lot of discretion and the officers of the court.

Hence proper documentation eliminated chances of exploitation and mismanagement of all involved.

Division of labor was followed in the letter and spirit. It not only increased efficiency, but also resulted in quick and time bound disposal of routine matters. It also helped in capacity building of the team members. Regular press conferences to apprise media about court policies and performance were held to ensure transparency, impartiality and openness. I was told that it was the first time that the registrar of any court addressed the media regularly.

On the human resource management, establishment of sessions and civil courts in the newly created district Kohistan Lower, Kolai Palace and Chitral Upper were made and additional human resource of 33 persons was sanctioned from

the government. 93 posts of various categories were created in the Peshawar High Court. 253 posts including 22 senior civil judges were created in the District Judiciary. 34 posts of Additional District and session judges were created in the District Judiciary. 907 posts for erstwhile FATA including seven district and session judges, 14 additional District and Session Judges seven senior civil judges and 24 civil judges were created in addition to that 63 posts for Child Protection courts including seven additional District and session judges were created. Unprecedented promotions were made since July 2 018 to 2021. 55 additional District and session judges, 76 senior civil judges and

112 Civil Judge got promoted, addressing a serious concern of the judicial officers. The concept of senior Civil Judge admin was introduced for smooth running of affairs of the court along with their job description. Job description prescribed under the law was made of other officials working in the court like computer programmer, computer operator, budget and accounts assistant, CCTV operator etc. organizing workshops, online trainings was a regular feature

Regular interaction through video link with the district judiciary was made to discuss different topics like human resource management, training need assessments for capacity building, operational activi-

ties of human resource including postings and transfers leave management and non-no objection certificate etc. A comprehensive report on human resource gap analysis was prepared and shared with the district judiciary.

To help the authority in making different important decisions profiling of judicial officers on scientific lines was initiated. Through this step positivity and negotiatives of the concerned judicial officers was made part of the program for help of the authority in decision making.

For maintaining the rule of law monitoring and evaluation along with automation and digitization are sine qua non.

Establishment of data analysis wing was one of

the achievements that we are really proud of. It helped in planned, efficient and effective monitoring and evaluation standards.

Pendency of cases and existence of backlog continues to be one of the major problems in Pakistan. For addressing this issue a flagship program of two performance years was followed by five years monitoring and evaluation policy from 2020 till 2025. Dependency in the District Judiciary showed substantial decrease due to the criteria's laid down. Annual inspection parameters were laid down through inspection performers and same were made known to the entire district judiciary beforehand so that they may be able to know the standard of the perform-

ance to be evaluated. A total documented and authentic inspection data of each of the judicial officers was placed before the admin committee for assistance while evaluating their performance

Work ethics are an important component of efficiency. Illegal exercise of discretion doesn't further the interest of justice and FairPlay. It had to be eliminated for promoting merit. There was perception that each and every file including the routine matters has to reach the top. The concept of division labor was followed in the letter and spirit. It not only increased efficiency, but also resulted in quick and time bound disposal of routine matters resulting in capacity building of the team members.

In the words of the late Chief Justice Hon'ble Mr. Justice Qaiser Rasheed Khan, The compilation

reflects the performance of the Peshawar High Court. Peshawar during the period i.e. July 2018 to July 2021 in achieving certain goals. Team work indeed promotes the work place synergy, the results of which have been explained in detail in the report. Perusal of the report shows that it covers the performance of the Peshawar High Court in the field of administration, human resource, monitoring & evaluation, automation & digitization, rule making & drafting, financial management, planning & development, research and publication, court and record management media and FATA integration. These achievements augur well for the administration of Justice and would indeed open a new era of progress in the years to come. (The writer is Ex-Registrar of Peshawar High Court) — Concluded





## In brief

### Policeman shot injured F.P. Report

**TAKHTBHAI:** Unidentified armed men opened firing over police personnel, resolutely caused bullet injuries to one of them when they were escorting a polio team in Pirsadu area of Tehsil Takhtbai, the police sources told here on Tuesday. The officials of relevant police station Shergar told that the injured police constable was identified as Zubar. They told that the injured police personnel with serious injuries was taken to nearby hospital for treatment. The Shergar police station officials told that they had registered FIR against unknown assailants. They told that a big contingent of police had rushed to spot following by search operation in the area concerned to trace out an arrest the alleged attackers. Besides, the authorities concerned told that police security and checking had been alerted and boosted up on the different entrance and exit points of Mardan district. They told that polio drive had been started in the district that was why the police personnel were asked by DPO Mardan to be vigilant and alerted so that to avoid further untoward incident in the district.

### Three killed in Swabi incidents F.P. Report

**SWABI:** Three persons were killed in two incidents of road mishap and violence occurred in various areas of the district, police said here on Tuesday. In first incident that happened in Manerai Bala, a man, Irfan Ali Khan was shot dead by unknown assailants. The reason behind the killing has not been ascertained yet. Meanwhile, a man was killed in a collision between two loader tri-wheelers near Karnal Sher Khan Interchange. In another incident, a man Zamar Ali sustained injuries in a collision between motorcycle and tractor on bypass road. The injured succumbed in hospital later. Cases have been registered and investigation was underway.

### Official dies falling from pole F.P. Report

**HARIPUR:** Wapda line-man Tuesday lost his life when he was slipped from the electricity pole while performing maintenance work in Khablat Haripur. According to reports, Tashfeen Shah was working on an electricity pole in Khablat, Haripur, utilizing an old ladder without proper safety equipment. Tragically, he slipped and fell, sustaining critical injuries. He was immediately shifted to the Trauma Center Haripur. However, due to the severity of his injuries, he was later referred to Ayub Medical Complex Abbottabad. Despite efforts to save him, Tashfeen Shah succumbed to his injuries during the transfer from Haripur to Abbottabad. Sources claimed that the absence of adequate safety equipment provided by Wapda. Tashfeen Shah's use of an old ladder, which was unable to bear his weight, led to the unfortunate accident. People have urged Wapda and other authorities to investigate the incident and take necessary measures to prevent such tragedies in the future.

### Couple held

**SARGODHA (INP):** Police arrested a couple for torturing and killing a maid. District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran while addressing a press conference on Tuesday said the accused, Jawad Bhatti of Jalalpur Bhattian had employed a girl, Aisha Bibi, two months ago.



GAWADAR: Pakistan Navy rescue teams distributing ration among flood affectees.

## Students contribution crucial in education

### F.P. Report

**KARAK:** Khushal Khan Khattak University (KKKU) Karak Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) organized a one-day seminar about role of students in ensuring quality in higher education. The seminar, held on Tuesday, featured Assistant Professor Muhammad Shah Din from the Management Sciences Department as the guest speaker.

Muhammad Shah Din, an expert in his field, delivered an insightful presentation emphasizing the crucial contribution of students to maintaining and enhancing the quality of higher education. He discussed various online procedures for quality assurance and introduced attendees to online QEC surveys, aiming to equip them with the tools and knowledge necessary for effective participation in the quality assurance process.

The seminar was attended by the Registrar of Khushal Khan Khattak



University Karak, Dr. Rafiullah Khan, the Director of QEC, Dr. Muhammad Anwar and Assistant Director of QEC, Nasir Iqbal Khattak. Dr. Rafiullah Khan, the Registrar, expressed his appreciation for the initiative taken by the Quality Enhancement Cell in organizing such an informative seminar.

Registrar KKKU highlighted the university's commitment to ensuring the highest standards of education and commended the efforts to engage students actively in the quality assurance process.

Dr. Muhammad Anwar, Director of QEC, appreciated Assistant Professor Muhammad Shah Din for

his insightful presentation and acknowledged the importance of involving students in maintaining and improving the quality of education. Assistant Director QEC Nasir Iqbal Khattak extended appreciation to all the participants and emphasized the university's dedication to fostering a culture of quality assurance through collaborative efforts.

The seminar provided a platform for meaningful discussions, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among faculty, administration, and students, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the continuous improvement of higher education at KKKU.

## Snowfall causes closure of roads in Kurram F.P. Report

**PARACHINAR:** Heavy snowfall in Kurram district has caused closure of link roads in Parachinar including the Central Kurram for the last couple of days.

According to the district administration, three to five feet of snowfall has been recorded in the area adding that the main Dand Paide Road in Central Kurram was closed for the last five days.

Due to the closure of roads, locals have been stranded in their homes appealing to the district administration to immediately start work on clearance of roads from snow so that routine life could be started. People said they have exhausted their food items and were faced with hardships.

Due to the situation, schools in the area were also closed while people faced great difficulties in shifting their patients to the hospitals. The district administration said work on clearance of roads has been started however it would take some time to clear all the link roads from heavy snow.

## Admn commits to enroll 1700 children in govt schools F.P. Report

**SHERANI:** 'Education is the fundamental right of every child and under article 25-A, providing free and compulsory education to children aged 5-16 is the responsibility of the government. A target has been set for the academic year 2024 to enroll around 1700 children in public sector schools across the district,' said Deputy Commissioner Azeem Jan Dumar while addressing a press conference to formally inaugurate the students' enrollment campaign in all public sector schools.

He was accompanied by the District Education Officer Taza Khan Nasar, District Program Manager Education Support Programme (ESP) Raziq Jan Akdar, District Chairman Kadir Dawood Khan Sherani and representatives of teachers' union. A banner displayed before the officers reads: 'Let's Enroll Every Child In School', urging the parents to enroll their loved ones at government-run schools.

The deputy commissioner further said that preparations are completed and the distribution of free textbooks is underway at all the clusters. Moreover, walks and seminars will be organized and mass announcements will also be made in mosques through loudspeakers at the district level, he said.

'In those areas lacking schools, Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) learning centers are being established with the financial support of UNICEF. All-out efforts would be made to enroll the maximum number of children at schools,' he vowed. DC highlighted the shared responsibility of teachers in ensuring children's education, with teachers holding a pivotal role in far-off areas. He also asked the political and social figures, religious scholars, media persons, notables and people of all walks of life to support the enrollment campaign, allowing the students to unfold their dreams, talent and desires through education.

## Journalist community playing decisive role in supremacy of law

### F.P. Report

**LOWER DIR:** Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) elected from PK 17 Lower Dir Ubaidur Rehman visited the Jandol press club at Munda and appreciated its members for impartially reporting during the electioneering campaign.

The press club president Waheed Khan Tajik, general secretary Noor Zaman and other members welcomed the visiting lawmaker. Speaking on the occasion the MPA-elect Ubaidur Rehman said that Jandol had become a hub of civic issues where roads were in dilapidated condition, schools were classless and hospitals were short of doctors. He said the tehsil municipal administration was doing nothing to resolve issues faced by traders at Munda, Mayar and Samarbagh. He said that traffic jams at these bazaars had become a routine while prolonged and unscheduled power outages had paralyzed life in upper parts of Jandol.

The lawmaker said that he had prioritized those issues and would try his best to resolve them soon. He also complained about the slow pace of work on construction of the Jandol grid station and demanded the relevant authorities to expedite the work on it.

He said that most of the hilly areas had no link roads while the residents also faced a shortage of clean drinking water. He said that he was aware of the problems and he would try to mitigate people's grievances during the next five years. Lauding the role of local journalists for raising local issues in the media, the lawmaker promised to resolve the issues faced by the Jandol press club.

**Technical education need of the hour:** The assistant district officer planning and development Dr Mahboob Raziq has said that getting technical education for students was the need of the hour and students should focus on science and technical education. He was addressing a prize distribution function at a local seminary as chief guest at Mian Banda.

The district education officer Lower Dir Mahboob Ilahi, JUI-F district chief Sirajud Din, Ikram Khan, Malik Muhammad Sher and other guests distributed shields, trophies and certificates among the position holder students of the seminary.

The students presented speeches, patriotic songs and Naat on the occasion and got applause from the audience. The managing director of the institution Qari Habibul Hassan, Mufti Abdul Wahab, Dr Mubarak

Zeb, Principal Abdul Karim, Syed Naik Muhammad and others also spoke on the occasion.

Dr Mahboob Raziq said that the main cause of the Muslims' downfall was their distance from modern education. He said the British under a conspiracy divided the education in the name of religious and contemporary education that proved harmful for the Muslim across the subcontinent. He said that getting education was a lost asset for the Muslims. He said the religious seminaries should also impart contemporary education to its students in order to prepare them for all challenges ahead of them.

**Admin closed school due to heavy snowfall:** The Lower Dir deputy commissioner Wasil Khan ordered the closure of about 153 specified schools in the district owing to bad weather conditions, heavy rains and snowfall.

Earlier under another notification the DC had ordered to close all government and private schools in the district but later partially modified the previous notification. Under the fresh notification a total of 153 schools falling in the snowfall areas were closed for two days. According to the notification, the rest of the schools in the district would remain functional.

## ECP must provide reserved seats to SIC: PTI

### F.P. Report

**MARDAN:** The Election Commission should stop rigging the presidential and senate elections as part of an organized conspiracy, the Sunni Unity Council has deprived 77 specific seats of the national and provincial assemblies, which is a complete injustice and after this decision, we will not accept the presidential and senate elections.

Until the final decision of the judiciary regarding the specific seats, the Senate and presidential election cannot be held. The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demand that the presidential and senate elections be postponed. He said that he hopes to get relief from the High Court while he also has the right to go to the Supreme Court in this regard.

**PMDFC, PLG joint delegation visits Integrated Resource Center:** A delegation of Punjab Municipal Development Fund Company (PMDFC) and Punjab Local Government (PLG) Officers here on Tuesday visited Water and Sanitation Services Company Mardan (WSSCM) and its Integrated Resource Recovery Center (IRRC).

The delegation led by Syed Zahid Aziz Managing Director PMDFC while General Manager Mahmood Masood Tamana, Deputy Manager Suhaib Raafecq, Sanam Irshad Advisor GiZ) and others were included. Manager Planning and Projects Imran Zaman, Manager HR & Admin Rahatullah and Deputy

Commissioner should not remain in office by giving an illegal and unconstitutional decision. He said that under a well-thought-out conspiracy, the Sunni Unity Council has deprived 77 specific seats of the national and provincial assemblies, which is a complete injustice and after this decision, we will not accept the presidential and senate elections.

Manager Solid Waste Management Muhammad Ishaq briefed the delegates on WSSCM operations and conversion of organic waste into organic fertilizers.

While speaking to the delegates Imran Zaman said that beside the limited resources WSSCM is providing efficient and phenomenal sanitation services to the citizens of Mardan. Our mission is to make Mardan a model city in terms of cleanliness and safe drinking water. He highlighted that the company has formulated a comprehensive strategy to make Mardan city clean.

The delegation was informed that with the support of German International Cooperation (GiZ) WSSCM has installed a SCADA system in six tube wells and fuel sensors in ten vehicles for the efficient use of energy.

Managing Director Punjab Municipal Development Fund Company Syed Zahid Aziz stated that it is our top priority to build better liaison with Local Government Institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He lauded the performance of WSSCM and said that both the institutions will work closely for knowledge sharing. He appealed to the citizens of the entire country to reduce the use of plastic so that environmental pollution can be reduced. He also appreciated the efforts of German International Cooperation (GiZ) for bridging the gap between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab Local Government Institutions.

## Distribution of ration kicks off

### F.P. Report

**HAFIZABAD:** Distribution of ration under Neghiban Ramzan Program of Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz worth Rs. 64 billion have been started in district Hafizabad. As many as 64 thousand poor people would get benefit from this program.

While reviewing packing and distribution process Rashan, Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad has said that on the directions of the Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, under Neghiban Ramzan Program Rashan bags of Rashan consisting of ten kg flour, two kg sugar, two kg rice, two kg ghee and two kg gram flour was being given to the masses at their

doorsteps first time in the history of the country which is revolutionary and poor friendly steps of the government.

She said that Rashan was being provided to the masses at their doorsteps in respectable manners so that ego of the poor could not be hurt. She said that special teams of revenue staff were constituted for provision of Rashan to the masses at their doorsteps transparently according to criteria set by the Punjab government. She said that special teams of Punjab Food Authority would be checked quality of edible items on daily basis.

**Dynamic change in curriculum necessary for students:** Principal government Associate College for Women (Eastern) Nasreen Akhtar said that promotion

of co-curriculum activities is essential for physical and mental growth of students. She was addressing inaugural ceremony of Fun Fair arranged at the college in connection with celebrating 'Jashan-e-Baharan'.

Students decorated the college with colourful flags, bunting and balloons while students also setup stalls for highlighting Punjabi Culture and swings and other arrangements for providing amusement to students. Principal Nasreen Akhtar further said that fun fairs, sports galas and other healthy programmes were arranged for providing recreational opportunities to students besides their academic activities so that they could enable to show their worth and talent in practical life.

## UNESCO team visits Moen Jo Daro, archaeological site

### F.P. Report

**LARAKANA:** A team of UNESCO to review the ongoing construction work in some parts of Sindh's archeological site Moen Jo Daro, which was affected due to heavy rains in previous years.

According to the details, a three-member team headed by the female official Naio Hayasi appointed by UNESCO from South Asia from France, including experts representing international organization ICOMOS Italy, representative Jawad appointed in UNESCO Islamabad, Director Archeology Abdul Fattah Shaikh, the UNESCO team visited Moen Jo yesterday to review the construction work started for the restoration of the ancient parts of Moen Jo Daro due to heavy rains during 2022.

The team reviewed the construction work on this occasion former Director Archeology Shakir Ali Shah gave a full detailed

briefing about the work of the conservator appointed at Moen Jo Daro. Various questions were also asked, the UNESCO team was further informed that due to the rains of 2022, water ponds had formed in the vicinity of Moenjo Daro which were drained with the help of modern machinery, which led to Some of the innovative parts of Moenjo Daro were affected, the construction work of which has started while the UNESCO team was decided to review the development work for three days.

Meanwhile Sindh High Court order, 12 police officers were reinstated. Meanwhile The Sindh High Court Karachi has ordered the reinstatement of 12 police officers who were suspended on various charges in Larkana and Sukhar region. Nawab Khan Mako, Khaliq Rehman, Al Hadno, Ahmed Ali, Ghulam Ahad, and Hatim Ali, who have been

reinstated by the Deputy Inspector General Establishment on the court order.

### Abducted child recovered F.P. Report

**MALAKAND:** Malakand Levies on Tuesday recovered a three-month-old child, abducted from Sakhakot tehsil of Malakand district and arrested the abductors.

Police said a three-month-old child, named Ilham, was kidnapped from a wedding party in Sakhakot area and shifted to a house in Charsadda. Malakand Levies, while initiating the investigation on scientific lines and through CCTV footage, traced the abductors in Charsadda and safely recovered the child during a raid. Police said the Levies have also arrested the abductor girl named Spogmai and her parents and recovered the car used in the abduction of the child.





## Tycoon accused of embezzling \$12.5b begins her trial

HANOI (AP): Real estate tycoon Truong My Lan faces the death penalty in a trial that began Tuesday over alleged fraud amounting to \$12.5 billion - nearly 3% of the country's 2022 GDP and Vietnam's largest financial fraud case on record.

The 66-year-old chair of the real estate company Van Thinh Phat allegedly used "thousands of ghost companies," paid bribes to government officials and violated banking regulations, according to a government document. She is accused of illegally controlling the Saigon Joint Stock Commercial Bank between 2012 to 2022 and using it to embezzle \$12.5 billion, the document adds.

Another 85 people are being prosecuted in connection, including a former State Bank of Vietnam official accused of accepting \$5.2 million in bribes. Lan was arrested in October 2022 and could get a death sentence if found guilty. She was escorted to the court by the authorities at around 7 a.m. Her husband Eric Chu Nap-kee, who works in real estate in Hong Kong, was also summoned, state media VN Express reported. VTP was among Vietnam's richest real estate firms and its projects include luxury residential buildings, offices, hotels and shopping centres.

Lan's arrest is among the most high-profile in an ongoing anti-corruption drive in Vietnam that gained momentum since 2022. The so-called Blazing Furnace campaign has seen thousands of officials and business executives come under investigation. It reached the highest echelons of the Vietnamese government in January 2023 with the resignation of former President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and two deputy prime ministers for the "political responsibility" of corruption scandals during the pandemic. But analysts added the anti-corruption drive has also dampened Vietnam's economic outlook and made foreign investors jittery at a time when the southeast Asian nation has been positioning itself as the ideal



home for businesses looking to shift their supply chains away from China. It's the scale of Lan's alleged scam that has been surprising, said Linh Nguyen, the lead analyst for consultancy Control Risks. Lan is accused of disbursing \$44 billion in loans to herself and her allies between 2012 to 2022, and the documents related to the case weigh 6 tons, according to VN Express.

"More than 3% of the GDP is very large," Nguyen said, adding that it also raised questions about whether other banks and businesses had "done the same (and) just haven't been discovered." The anti-corruption drive has also resulted in Vietnam's bureaucracy slowing down with "public officials becoming anxious about being investigated and shirking their responsibilities," according to a report from Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. The most glaring evidence of this has been in the slow spending rates for public investment. As of October 2023, a little over 55% of the annual budget had been spent with \$10.19 billion needing to be disbursed within 35 days, state media Vietnam News reported. These are funds necessary for development

projects - ranging from bridges to highways to airports - and not spending it in time results in long delays. Nguyen said that investors - especially in banking, finance and real estate - are much more cautious now. "It's a more 'let us wait and see' with investors at the moment," she said. The real estate sector in Vietnam has been hit particularly hard - an estimated 1,300 property firms withdrew from the market in 2023, developers have been offering discounts and gold as gifts to attract buyers, and despite rent for shophouses falling by a third in Ho Chi Minh City, many in the city center are still empty, according to state media. Poor global demand and slowing public investment meant that Vietnam's economic growth slowed down to 5.05% last year, compared to 8.02% in 2022, according to government data. In November, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Vietnam's top politician, said that the anti-corruption fight would "continue for the long term." Around that time, Vietnamese authorities said they were investigating two other cases linked to Lan's real estate companies that involved laundering money overseas through real estate.

## Erdogan and Abbas to discuss delivering aid to Gaza

ANKARA (Reuters): President Tayyip Erdogan is set to discuss Turkey's efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during talks this week in Ankara, a Turkish diplomatic source said.

Speaking at a diplomatic forum in Turkey at the weekend, the Palestinian Authority's Foreign Minister Riyad-al Maliki said Abbas would pay a visit to Ankara on Tuesday and meet Erdogan. Turkey, which has harshly criticised Israel for its attacks on Gaza and backed measures to have it tried for genocide at the World Court, has repeatedly called for a ceasefire. But Ankara has no direct involvement in truce talks.

Unlike its Western allies and some Gulf nations, NATO member Turkey does not view Hamas, the Palestinian militant group which runs Gaza and on Oct. 7 carried out an attack inside Israel that prompted the Israeli campaign, as a terrorist organisation. Erdogan and Abbas will discuss recent developments in Gaza as well as the situation in the West Bank, the diplomatic source said. "Turkey has been delivering extensive humanitarian aid to Gaza in coordination with Egypt since the beginning of Israel's attacks... Within this scope, humanitarian aid operations will also be discussed during the meetings with President Abbas," the source said.

## Ships entering Yemeni waters must obtain permit

CAIRO (Reuters): Ships will have to obtain a permit from Yemen's Houthi-controlled Maritime Affairs Authority before entering Yemeni waters, Houthi Telecommunications Minister Misfer Al-Numair said. Houthi militants have repeatedly launched drones and missiles against international commercial shipping in the Gulf of Aden since mid-November, saying they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians against Israel's offensive in Gaza.

The near-daily attacks have forced firms into long and costly diversions around southern Africa, and stoked fears that the Israel-Hamas war could destabilise the wider Middle East. The United States and Britain have bombed Houthi targets in response. "(We) are ready to assist requests for permits and identify ships with the Yemeni Navy, and we confirm this is out of concern for their safety," Al Masirah TV, the main television news outlet run by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement, reported Al-Numair as saying. The territorial waters affected by the Yemeni order extend halfway out into the 20-km (12-mile) wide Bab al-Mandab Strait, the narrow mouth of the Red Sea through which around 15% of the world's shipping traffic passes on its way to or from the Suez Canal. In normal times, more than a quarter of global container cargo - including apparel, appliances, auto parts, chemicals and agricultural products like coffee - move via the Suez Canal. Former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said there "is good reason to doubt" that the Iran-allied Houthis would stop their assaults on vessels if a ceasefire ends Israel's major military operations in Gaza.

"They may decide that they like the idea of controlling the amount of shipping going through the Red Sea, and will continue this for an indefinite period of time," Gates said at the TPM24 container shipping conference in Long Beach, California. Elsewhere, Hong Kong-based HGC Global Communications said that at least four underwater communications cables - Asia-Africa-Europe 1, the Europe India Gateway, Seacom and TGN-Gulf - had been damaged last week in the Red Sea, without stating the cause. It estimated that the damage had affected 25% of the data traffic flowing under the Red Sea, and said in a statement that it had devised a plan to reroute traffic. Al-Numair's ministry blamed US and British attacks for any damage to cables.

## Germany and Russia spar over a leaked audio on missiles for Ukraine

BERLIN (AP): The German government vehemently rejected allegations that Russia's leak of a conversation by high-ranking German military officers was an indication that Berlin was preparing for war against Russia. At the same time, the government sought to contain the domestic fallout from the leak and promised a quick investigation into how a conversation by top German military personnel could be intercepted and published.

"It is absolutely clear that such claims that this conversation would prove, that Germany is preparing a war against Russia, that this is absurdly infamous Russian propaganda," a spokesman for German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters in Berlin. Government spokesman Wolfgang Buechner said the leak was part of Russia's "information war" against the West, and that the aim was to create discord within Germany.

The 38-minute recording features military officers discussing in German how Taurus long-range cruise missiles could be used by Kyiv against invading Russian forces. While German authorities have not questioned the authenticity of the recording, Scholz said a week ago that delivering these weapons to Ukraine is not an option - and that he does not want Germany to be drawn into the war directly. Russia's foreign ministry, however, threatened Germany with "dire consequences" in connection with the leak. It did not elaborate.

"If nothing is done, and the German people do not stop this, then there will be dire consequences first and foremost for Germany itself," foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said. Relations between the two countries have continuously deteriorated since Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago. The audio leak was posted by Margarita Simonyan, chief editor of Russian state-funded television channel RT, on social media, the same day that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was laid to rest after his still-unexplained death two weeks ago in an Arctic penal colony. The recording also surfaced just weeks before Russia's presidential election. In the leaked audio, four officers, including the head of Germany's air force, Ingo Gerhartz, can be heard discussing deployment scenarios for Taurus missiles in Ukraine before a meeting with Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, German news agency dpa reported. The officers then state that early delivery and rapid deployment of Taurus missiles would only be possible with the participation of German soldiers.

The officers said training Ukrainian soldiers to deploy the Taurus on their own would be possible, but it would take months. The recording also shows the German government has not given its OK for the delivery of the cruise missiles sought by Ukraine, dpa reported.

There has been a debate in Germany about whether to supply the missiles to Ukraine as Kyiv faces battlefield setbacks. With military aid from the United States held up in Congress, Germany is now the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the US, and it is further stepping up its support this year. Scholz's insistence last week on not giving Taurus missiles to Ukraine came after Germany stalled for months on the country's desire for the missiles, which have a range of up to 500 kilometers (310 miles) and could in theory be used against targets deep inside

Russian territory. The chancellor reiterated his stance during a visit to a school in Sindelfingen in southwestern Germany. "I'm the chancellor, and that's why it's valid," he said regarding his "no" to the delivery of Taurus missiles, dpa reported. Also, Germany's ambassador visited Russia's foreign ministry in Moscow. While Russia media reported that Ambassador Alexander Graf Lambsdorff had been summoned by the ministry, the German government said his visit was planned well before the audio was published. Germany's defense ministry tried to downplay the significance of the leaked conversation, saying it was merely an "exchange of ideas" before a meeting with the defense minister. The ministry said it was investigating how a conversation by top German military personnel could be intercepted and leaked by the Russians. It promised to report its findings.

Several German media have reported that the officers were in a WebEx meeting when they were taped. Buechner, the spokesman for the chancellor, said the German government would also look into how it "can better counter targeted disinformation," especially from Russia." In the United States, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby declined to address any specifics of the leaked audio, but he called the release "a transparent attempt by Russians to sow discord." The Kremlin said it looked forward to the results of the German government's investigation.

"Mr. Scholz said that a fast, complete and effective investigation would be carried out. We hope that that we will be able to find out the outcome of that investigation," spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

## Gang leader seeking to topple Haiti's govt

PORT-AU-PRINCE (Reuters): Deadly fighting between armed gangs and police escalated in Haiti this week, with gang alliance leader Jimmy Cherizier issuing a call to topple the unelected and largely absent government.

The 46-year-old Cherizier, alias "Barbeque," was formerly an officer of the Haitian National Police force. As a police officer, he is alleged by the United Nations to have played a role in multiple massacres, including the killing of over 70 people in 2018, when over 400 homes in the capital's La Saline neighborhood were set on fire.

Cherizier, who is originally from the Delmas area of Port-au-Prince and often makes public appearances in a beret and camouflage, gun in hand, went on to announce the creation in 2020 of a gang alliance. Headed by him, it brought together nine capital area gangs and is called G9 Family and Allies. In 2021, then-President Jovenel Moise was assassinated, and Cherizier urged protests, accusing opposition leaders and police of masterminding his murder. US prosecutors say there was a conspiracy to replace Moise with a Florida pastor

while a Haiti judge has pointed the finger at Moise's widow.

In the wake of Moise's murder, the security situation in Haiti deteriorated further. Cherizier catapulted the G9 alliance to international notoriety after taking control of Haiti's main fuel port, essentially holding the country hostage as transport was frozen and hospitals lost their energy supplies. G9 ended the blockade over a month later, while Prime Minister Ariel Henry began rallying international support for a "rapid" UN-backed mission to help defeat some 200 gangs of growing influence in the capital. The UN ratified the force a year later, but many countries have been slow to volunteer support, wary of entanglement given Henry's unelected status and a checkered history of international intervention in Haiti.

Meanwhile in Port-au-Prince, gangs were coalescing around G9 and another alliance known as G-Pep, which organized crime analysts say has links with Haitian opposition parties. Despite reports of a G9-G-Pep truce last July, fighting continued between the gangs, as well as with police and vigilante groups formed in the absence of

state protection, forcing hundreds of thousands from their homes. The UN reported that indiscriminate killings were being carried out by gang members, as well as abuses including routine rape, torture, mass ransom kidnappings and arson. The turf wars have expanded out from the capital, notably to Haiti's breadbasket Artibonite region, putting pressure on food supplies, while merchants and aid groups struggle to get food to the people who need it. Crime research groups have warned that Haiti's gangs are increasingly economically independent, allowing them to amass large arsenals of firearms trafficked largely from the United States, while running infrastructure such as schools, clinics and checkpoints, as some leaders live in luxury homes.

Cherizier is one of five gang leaders subject to UN and US sanctions. The effects of these sanctions remain unclear. Gangs are now estimated to control most of the capital. Henry traveled to Nairobi last week to seal a deal for Kenya to lead the proposed UN-backed force, although the UN has yet to publish details on the scale of the force, its funding or possible deployment date.

## ‘Ukraine is Russia’

MOSCOW (Reuters): Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council and an ally of President Vladimir Putin, described Ukraine as part of Russia and said what he called historical parts of Russia needed to "come home." In a bellicose presentation that suggested Russia's military goals in Ukraine are far-reaching, Medvedev, who was Russia's president from 2008-2012, praised the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and said Moscow would prosecute its "special military operation" until the Ukrainian leadership capitulated.

"One of Ukraine's former leaders said at some point that Ukraine is not Russia," Medvedev, a hawk who diplomats say gives a flavour of the thinking inside

the Kremlin, told a youth forum in the Black Sea city of Sochi. "That concept needs to disappear forever. Ukraine is definitely Russia," he said to applause. "Historic parts of the country need to come home." There was no immediate reaction from Kyiv. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly accused Medvedev and other top Russian officials of waging an illegal war of conquest and said Ukraine and its people are distinct from Russia and Russians. Medvedev was speaking in front of a giant map of Ukraine showing the country as a much smaller landlocked rump of land than its internationally recognised territory. The map appeared to depict a scenario where Ukraine would be squeezed up against Poland, with

Kyiv remaining its capital, but Russia would be in control of a swath of Ukrainian cities and its east, south and entire Black Sea coastline. Russia has the initiative on the battlefield and controls just under one fifth of Ukrainian territory, which it claims as its own, but the scenario is sharply different from the situation on the ground. Medvedev, who the West once saw as a liberal reformer, said Russia's "geostrategic space" was indivisible from Ukraine and that any attempt to change that by force was doomed.

"All our adversaries need to understand once and for all a simple fact: that the territories on both banks of the Dnipro River (which bisects Ukraine) are an integral part of Russia's strategic and historical borders," he said.

## China drops ‘peaceful reunification’ reference to Taiwan

BEIJING (Reuters): China will boost its defence spending by 7.2% this year, fuelling a military budget that has more than doubled under Xi Jinping's decade-plus in office as Beijing hardens its stance on Taiwan, according to official reports on Tuesday.

The increase mirrors the rate presented in last year's budget and again comes in above the government's economic growth forecast for this year. China also officially adopted tougher language against Taiwan as it released the budget figures, dropping the mention of "peaceful reunification" in a government work report delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's rubber-stamp parliament, on Tuesday.

Tensions have risen sharply in recent years over Taiwan, the democratically ruled island that China claims as its own, and elsewhere across East Asia as regional military deployments rise. Li Mingjiang, a defence scholar at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore, said that despite a struggling Chinese economy, Taiwan is a major consideration for Beijing's defence spending. "China is showing that in the coming decade it wants to grow its military to the point where it is prepared to win a war if it has no choice

but to fight one," Li said.

Since Xi Jinping became president and commander-in-chief more than a decade ago, the defence budget has ballooned to 1.67 trillion yuan (\$230.60 billion) this year from 720 billion yuan in 2013. The percentage rise in military spending has consistently outpaced the annual domestic economic growth target during his time in office; this year the growth target for 2024 is about 5%, similar to last year's goal, according to the government work report. The defence budget is closely watched by China's neighbours and the United States, who are wary of Beijing's strategic intentions and the development of its armed forces.

Based on data from the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), this year's budget marks the 30th consecutive year of Chinese defence spending increases. James Char, a security scholar at the RSIS, said that despite the defence budget's outpacing GDP growth, it had remained about 1.3% of overall GDP in the last decade and had put no stress on the national coffers. "Of course, the country's longer-term economic fortunes will determine whether this can be sustained going forward," Char said. The purchase of new equipment is likely to take up the largest single chunk of the budget as the

military works to meet Xi's goal of full modernisation by 2035, the IISS said in research published last month. Char said tighter resource management would also be a priority for military leadership after high-profile personnel purges related to weapons procurement. The Central Military Commission, the top body in charge of military matters, last July ordered a "clean up" of the procurement bidding process and invited the public to report irregularities.

The commission has not announced the results of its investigation, but at least nine generals, including four directly in charge of procurement, have been stripped of their title as parliamentarians, a necessary procedure before they can be charged in court. Two former defence ministers, Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe, have also gone missing without explanation, which in China often means they are under investigation. Li had been in charge of military procurement from 2017 to 2022. When asked whether Li would attend the parliament sessions, parliament spokesman Lou Qinjian told Singapore paper Lianhe Zaobao that Li "cannot attend because he is no longer a delegate". In the government work report, China reiterated a call for "reunification" with Taiwan, but added emphasis

that it wants to "be firm" in doing so and dropped the descriptor "peaceful", which had been used in previous reports.

Although it is not the first time that China had omitted the word "peaceful", the change in language is closely watched as a possible sign of more assertive stance towards Taiwan. Taiwan's defence ministry and Mainland Affairs Council did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The island's defence minister had said on Tuesday Taiwan's armed forces would increase the number of missile drills they hold this year. Wen-Ti Sung, a political scientist and non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council, said that the language on Taiwan has "moderately hardened". "Beijing appears to be balancing between projecting increased toughness on Taiwan with stabilising relations with Taiwan's international friends," he said. After the Democratic Progressive Party's Lai Ching-te won the presidential election in Taiwan, the Chinese Communist Party's fourth-ranked leader, Wang Huning, said at a high-level Taiwan policy meeting last month that China would "resolutely combat" any efforts towards Taiwan independence this year. Previous years' statements from the annual meeting only vowed to "resolutely oppose" Taiwan independence.

## Poised for accession, Sweden joins NATO drills in reshaped north

BODOE, Norway/LULEA, Sweden (Reuters): Swedish armed forces joined NATO for exercises, contributing troops, helicopters and fighter jets as the alliance carries out its largest set of military drills since the end of the Cold War. Sweden is poised to join NATO, possibly within days, after gaining the final outstanding ratification last week.

The exercises - involving over 20,000 troops from more than a dozen countries - are taking place in a high north being transformed by the accession of Sweden and Finland, who turned their backs on long histories of non-alignment after Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago. In Bodoe in northern Norway, US and Norwegian F-35s joined Finnish F-18s and Swedish Gripen fighter jets flying low across the sky above Camp Bodin military base, part of a first test of a joint Nordic air operations centre, a key part of the drills. "The new concept

now is that we try to integrate even further and that is possible because of the new NATO membership of Finland and the Swedish NATO membership shortly to come," said Major General Rolf Folland, Norwegian Air Force Chief and head of the new centre. "Then the last hindrance for total integration is taken away and that makes it possible for us to be able to work as one air power in peacetime, crisis and war." More than 300 officers and specialists are working to coordinate and control the aircraft taking part in the exercises, about half of them temporarily operating from Camp Bodin. The drills in the far north of Norway, Sweden and Finland are part of the alliance's overarching Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises rehearsing how US troops could reinforce European allies on NATO's eastern flank and put new regional defence plans to the test. About 90,000 troops are

due to join the wider NATO exercises running through May that include more than 50 ships as well as planes, tanks and other armoured vehicles. Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark agreed last year to begin creating a unified Nordic air defence aimed at countering the rising threat from Russia.

Integrating the Nordic air forces will create a regional fleet of around 250 fighters, on par with that of a military power such as Britain, offering credible deterrence against would-be attackers. "This is going to be a massive contribution in terms of air power and control of the skies over the entire Baltic, Nordic, high north region," said William Alberque at International Institute for Strategic Studies, a leading research center. Sweden, which has not been at war in two centuries, has edged ever closer to NATO in recent decades - in part because its own military was scaled back after the

Soviet Union's collapse - taking part in missions in places such as Libya. "We have a lot of strengths when it comes to operating and connecting our systems together and we can bring that to the Nordic nations and to NATO," said Major General Jonas Wikman, chief of the Swedish Air Force. Among Sweden's strengths are a fleet of Gripens, a rugged fighter that can be readied for new missions minutes after landing and operate from small temporary air strips, a capability generating interest among allies.

"Right now, both NATO and the US are looking quite a bit at Sweden and Finland," Colonel Peter Greberg, commander of the Swedish Air Force's 21st wing, said on the sidelines of a demonstration of the jet in Lulea, in northern Sweden. "I had a NATO general here last week who visited us precisely to look at this concept."



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Executive's credo and public need

THE newly Throne Chief Minister KP, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has recently revealed his manifesto after assuming office as the Chief Executive of the province. Ali Amin Gandapur termed the improvement of law and order as the top priority, vowing not to compromise it at any cost by equipping police and other LEAs with the latest equipment, arms, and ammunition on a priority basis. He noted that without peace, development, and prosperity are not possible because investment and economic activities require a conducive environment. According to him, Poverty Alleviation, welfare of the vulnerable segments of society, and addressing the issue of unemployment will come second, wherein 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. The Chief Minister told the media that he had talked about necessary rectifications in the police system which should not be taken as intimidation for any individual. He did not believe in revenge but rectification and improvement in the system was his duty.

PTI's Stalwart and Imran's most muscular tiger finally reached the top slot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the real birth-place and power hub of Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf since day one. The newly elected Chief Minister KP is one of the most famous characters of the May 9 violence. He remained in hiding for months and is currently on protective bail due to his involvement in numerous cases relating to undermining public safety, disrupting law and order, and attacks against state institutions in the past. Apparently, the KP's public gave the PTI another chance in love and trust for the former PTI Chairman Imran Khan otherwise the party failed to deliver to the public despite two straight victories in the province. Although there were several seasoned, well-educated, and politically mature candidates for the slot of Chief Minister, the White dove sat on the head of Gandapur due to his resolute support and fearless loyalty to the PTI Chairman in addition to his jingoistic personality that might be his strong point in the face of any future political confrontation with the opponents or the federation as well.

During his recent appearance to the media, the KP Chief Minister hinted at bringing reform in the Police Department as the Chief Executive himself and his party perceive that some government servants do not perform their official responsibilities as par with the law and the constitution and arrested PTI leaders and workers during and in the aftermath of May 9 carnage unconstitutionally. Several PTI leaders have openly shared these thoughts while the Pervaiz Elahi-led PTI government in Punjab practically took action against several Police officers and local administrators who arrested PTI workers during protests, road blockages, etc, or refused to comply with unlawful demands of the party. Gandapur termed his proposed measures as rectifications instead of intimidation but keeping the PTI's history in mind and considering Gandapur's personality it seems to be a vandalism with the system in place of rectification.

The nation reached this point after years-long stress, anxiety, and economic hardships due to unceasing turmoil and dogfights of the political groups over the past almost three years. The people of the province trusted the PTI and voted for Gandapur to provide them an opportunity to serve the nation instead of satisfying their personal enmity or the party's tussle with the adversaries. Previously, the party missed the opportunity and could not implement its manifesto in true letter and spirit due to its unceasing confrontation with the center and premature ouster from the government. Historically, the majority of the incumbent political leadership in the center as well as the provinces have faced legal prosecution, suffered incarcerations, and are well-versed in ups and downs in politics. Every sensible leader knows that there is no positivity in confrontation, agitation, and unrest, while the months-long political tussle has brought the nation to the verge of collapse. Hence, civic groups and politicians must think about the country and the masses instead of their politics and power. Public service should be the priority of leaders, that will not only distinguish them from others but pave the path for greater success and victory in the future.

Taliban-China friendship

THE Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum has recently highlighted the ongoing cooperation between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). According to the Afghan Spokesman, several Chinese investors met with the Afghan acting Minister for Mines and Petroleum and expressed their satisfaction with the favorable environment for investment, created by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Chinese investors specifically showed keenness in marble exploration, processing and exports.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has emerged as the single largest economic and business partner of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), since the hardcore Cleric regime regained its control of the South Asian country in August 2021. There had been multiple visits of high level dignitaries of both nations along with frequent interactions of business community and entrepreneurs from both sides to transform their economic relations into a strategic partnership. Amid western sanctions and a reluctance from the Muslim community to forge ties with Kabul, Beijing seems to be eager to fill that vacuum through massive investment in energy and mining projects, security cooperation against Daesh, providing more space to Afghan goods into the Chinese market. Over 40 million strong Afghanistan is the potential market for Chinese tech and industrial giants in the coming years. On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate perceives Beijing as a credible partner and intends to build a strong economic and trade ties with China to shed away the notions about its global isolation and failure.

Historically, Beijing has great concerns about the congregation of terror outfits including Daesh, the TTP, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and multiple others in neighbouring Afghanistan that is not only a serious hazard to regional security but creates a grave risk for its internal security which is already in the global headlines at this time. Beijing intends to defuse this risk through cooperation with the Taliban, so no other nation can use China's backyard for manipulating the situation in Xinjiang. Presently, the bilateral relations between Kabul and Beijing are on upward trajectory causing fear in the Western Capitals about China's recognition of the Taliban that might come at a later stage. There are wide ranging concerns, hopes and scopes regarding Afghanistan-China bilateral engagement. However, the real impact and utility of this relationship would be evident in due course of time.

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How Gaza war has revitalized global solidarity with Palestinians

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

JARED Kushner, a former US official whose relationship to power is that he married the wealthy daughter of a man who was later to become the US president, once attempted to teach Palestinians how to handle their own struggle for freedom.

In 2019, he advised Palestinians to stop "doing terrorism," summing up the Palestinian problem with the claim that "5 million Palestinians are ... trapped because of bad leadership," not the Israeli occupation or US support for Israel. The inexperienced politician, who once bragged about reading 25 books on the Middle East, presented Palestinians with the same cliched rhetoric already offered to them by other ill-intentioned, self-imposed "peacemakers."

Palestinians "have a perfect track record of missing opportunities," he said, rehearsing the condescending language once used by former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban: "If they screw this up, I think that they will have a very hard time looking the international community in the face, saying they are victims." But why bring up Kushner now? Every few years, Americans, at the behest of Israel, peddle ideas such as that the Palestinian cause is finished, that solidarity with the Palestinian people is dead and that the Palestinian people and their leadership should accept whatever political or financial crumbs are thrown their way, courtesy of Washington, Tel Aviv and a few of their Western allies.

Yet, every few years, the Palestinian people prove them wrong: that, despite all the pressures - arm-twisting, sanctions, sieges and relentless violence - they remain strong and not the victims, as they were ignorantly dubbed by Kushner. What Kushner may not know is that there is a critical difference between victim and victimhood. While Palestinians cannot control their victimization, since it is imposed on them from an outside force, Israel - generously financed by the US - they do not seek to be victims.

Victimhood is a different issue. It is the state of perceiving oneself as a perpetual victim, with no aspirations, no agency. While it is true that the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza is one of the greatest crimes of mass killings and ethnic cleansing in modern history, it is also true that no nation has, in recent decades, fought back as ferociously as the Palestinians. This is hardly the behavior of a victim. The Biden administration, like every other US administration, has talked down to Palestinians, declaring them foolish for

genocide in Gaza is one of the greatest crimes of mass killings and ethnic cleansing in modern history, it is also true that no nation has, in recent decades, fought back as ferociously as the Palestinians. This is hardly the behavior of a victim.

The Biden administration, like every other US administration, has talked down to Palestinians, declaring them foolish for

one of the pillars of international solidarity movements worldwide for decades. The phrase "Free Palestine" has been written on countless walls, in every language, in every city, town or working-class neighborhood. Still, that solidarity has not been enough to turn the tide, to achieve the coveted paradigm shift or to reach the critical mass needed to

repeatedly declared that, "if Israel didn't exist, we would have to invent it."

However, things are finally changing and today's new solidarity, ignited by the worst killing campaign in the history of the region, has exceeded the confines of conditional solidarity, ideological solidarity and symbolic solidarity, which, to some extent, had previously defined global solidarity with the Palestinians. This solidarity is now expressing itself at the highest level of political discourses. In his testimony before the International Court of Justice's public hearings last month, Chinese representative Ma Xinmin went as far as defending, while referencing international law, the Palestinian people's right to armed struggle. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia called for sanctions on "those who obstruct humanitarian access to those in need." And many European governments, such as Spain, Ireland, Norway and Belgium, are using unprecedented language to describe Israel's war crimes in Gaza, while demanding real action.

Meanwhile, the Global South is back at the forefront of championing the cause of Palestine as the world's most inspiring national liberation struggle. None of this was created in a vacuum. While the majority of post-Oct. 7 global protests and rallies have been related to Palestine and Israel, 86 percent of them were reportedly pro-Palestine. It is not only the frequency or size of the current protests that matter, but their nature as well. This includes Palestine activists taking over the US Congress building and an American soldier self-immolating out of sheer anger at the culpability of his government in the crimes underway in Gaza.

This is truly earth-shattering. The critical mass for meaningful solidarity has finally been achieved, signaling that, once more, Palestinians have imposed themselves as the guardians of their own struggle, standing proudly at the front line of the global struggle for freedom and justice. This leaves us with the question: Who is truly "having a hard time looking the international community in the face?" Certainly not the Palestinian people.

globalize the struggle for the freedom of the Palestinians the way that the struggle to end South Africa's apartheid system imposed itself as a moral necessity on the whole world.

There should be no illusions that the anti-apartheid struggle of South Africa and the struggle for Palestinian freedom are identical. Back then, the global geopolitical shift made it difficult for South Africa to maintain its regime of racial segregation.

Moreover, the power of that racist government, if compared to Israel and its backers, was minuscule. Washington sees Israel as an integral part of America's global influence. For US politicians, Israel is a domestic as well as a foreign policy issue. Moreover, if Israel ceases to exist in its current dominant form, the US will lose a stronghold in a region teeming with precious resources, strategic waterways and much more. This is precisely why Biden has

*Solidarity with the Palestinian people has been one of the pillars of international solidarity movements worldwide for decades. The phrase 'Free Palestine' has been written on countless walls, in every language, in every city, town or working-class neighborhood. Still, that solidarity has not been enough to turn the tide, to achieve the coveted paradigm shift or to reach the critical mass needed to globalize the struggle for the freedom of the Palestinians the way that the struggle to end South Africa's apartheid system imposed itself as a moral necessity on the whole world.*

not accepting political deals that would fail to guarantee them the most basic of their long-denied rights. While Palestinians sought total and unconditional freedom, Camp David (1979), the Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995), the Road Map (2004) and every other "offer" were political attempts at prolonging the Israeli occupation and denying the rights of the Palestinians. Kushner's proposal was no exception. All of these previous American "peace proposals" were obviously unfair, as they were to Israel's advantage and were designed entirely independent of international and humanitarian laws. All of these pro-Israeli proposals have failed, not due to the international community's ability to challenge Washington, but due to the tenacity of the Palestinian people.

Palestinians defeated the US agenda, but that was not enough to clinch their freedom, simply because they were in this difficult battle alone. Solidarity with the Palestinian people has been

HOW difficult is Gaza. How cruel are the scenes coming from it. Deadly, provocative images. Daggers that attack the eye and the soul. All expressions of anger, all cries, are wasted. How difficult is Gaza. Fields that are designated for massacre. The corpses of its days are mixed with the dead bodies of its children. The world is watching with binoculars. Negotiations are arduous, as they say, and between one scenario and another, homes and families disappear.

How difficult is Gaza. Its loaf is baked in blood. Its days are burned with fire. Neither the roof protects nor the wall deters. The house is a passing station waiting for its ruins. Families are likely to be dispersed and continue to emigrate with their remaining children. Death does not tire. It strikes in the north and in the south, without forgetting the center. The sky that gave birth to stars and clouds changed its habits. It only sends drones.

These are birds of scientific and technological progress. They monitor and strike. They eat children's meat with a fork and knife and the achievements of artificial intelligence. How difficult is Gaza. Every inch is a graveyard project. In recent decades, the Middle East has not been a land of peace. Wars have raged throughout it. We have seen bodies piling up at the borders and at other times in the capitals. But we have never witnessed such an intensity of the killing. Such ingenuity in hunting down civilians and in pushing large crowds into successive murderous migrations on a stage soaked in blood. An Israeli laboratory has released the killing virus on the residents of Gaza and it is an intentional epidemic that is more dangerous than COVID-19.

Israel's aggression is not something new. But this atrocity is setting records. We were under the illusion that the world would not

allow a killing spree that would last for months. A world that is angry because of a Russian oppositionist. Or a Ukrainian inch. The world was mobilized to support "color revolutions" here and there. It was appalled by what it called human rights violations. Suddenly, the world started looking away. It became deaf and blind. It started repeating phrases to lift the blame, while its first duty was to stop the killing. Invoking practices that accompanied the Oct. 7 attack does not cover the open massacre that followed. Moreover, this attack is the result of a long conflict and not its first spark. There is no excuse for the world and no fig leaf for its conscience. The fire must be stopped quickly and permanently, so that the world can see the sea of rubble in Gaza. To remember that the number of new graves is equivalent to the population of a

small city. To see the mothers who are waiting for children who will never return. To smell the scent of anger and despair and what heralds renewed cycles of revenge. Neither can Gaza die nor can the people of Gaza be wiped out. History says that leaving the wounds of a catastrophe inflamed only promises new tragedies for the families of the perpetrators and the victims alike. I was stopped by the sight of American planes throwing humanitarian aid to the residents of Gaza.

The mere occurrence of this constitutes an acknowledgment of the extent of the calamity that is befalling the residents of the Gaza Strip and the size of the crime committed against them by the Israeli army. There is no doubt that throwing aid is useful. But we are not talking here about Austria or Finland. We are talking about the US. About the

Can journalism survive in HK?

Cindy Sui

IN a newsroom, editors tell reporters to not touch politically sensitive stories. Reporters are told to put stories on hold until China's foreign ministry comes out with its statement. Terminology that the government might frown upon is banned from news copy.

Such is the state of journalism, not just in China, but increasingly in Hong Kong, after a national security law was adopted by Beijing for the former British colony in 2020, according to local journalists. "Sometimes we don't feel like we're journalists. We're simply a part of the propaganda machine. We feel all the things we learned from journalism school are wasted because it's not applicable anymore. The morale is really low," said one local journalist who did not want to be named, to avoid retribution.

Once a model of press freedom in Asia, Hong Kong's journalism scene has deteriorated since Beijing enacted the national security law, outlawing secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces, according to journalists and surveys. They also indicate that self-censorship is becoming common, opposition voices are becoming rare, and caution reigns. Prior to passage of the law in 2020, journalists could cover news largely as they liked, as if they were in a democratic country. Now, many fear it will become even more difficult to be a journalist in the city if a proposed new security law - known as Article 23 - is adopted, without safeguards, especially a public interest defense clause, for journalists.

Article 23 would add treason, insurrection, theft of state secrets and espionage, sabotage endangering national security, and external interference as offenses, and would expand the scope and penalties for existing crimes, including sedition. Ronson Chan, chairperson of the Hong Kong Journalists Association - the city's oldest and largest association for local journalists - said many journalists are worried. He said since the Beijing-imposed national security law was passed, journalists constantly must consider the potential dangers of "crossing the redline," especially because the government has not clarified what that line is. "Every day, every moment, you have to consider when you speak anything about the government in some livestream program, what will happen to you," said Chan, who is also the multimedia manager for local news website Channel C.

Many journalists have also either left Hong Kong or the profession, Chan said. The number of Hong Kong Journalists Association journalist members dropped from 800 in 2019 to just 300. While foreign media journalists, especially expatriates, have the protection of a foreign passport and backing from major world media organizations, including CNN and BBC, which have bureaus here, they risk losing their visa and right to continue reporting in Hong Kong if the authorities find problems with their reporting, said the Lee Williamson, president of the Foreign Correspondents' Club. An FCC survey on press freedom last year found 65% of responding journalists said they had engaged in self-censorship either in the content of their reporting or by avoiding certain subjects, and 27% said they had self-censored considerably.

"I can't speak of the motivations, but these numbers do speak to the anecdotal evidence that we do see every day in Hong Kong - journalists who are holding back because they want to make sure they are here tomorrow to continue telling the story of Hong Kong and mainland China," Williamson said. The survey also found 88% of the respondents said sources in Hong Kong had become less willing to be quoted or to speak to reporters about sensitive topics. Perhaps affected on a greater level are local journalists, who may not have a foreign passport, whose long-term home is Hong Kong and who have seen local media organizations closed and their peers arrested. Nonetheless, they are finding ways to continue their work.

"After the national security law was adopted, senior managers give you warm reminders about how our stories should be written. Certain terms cannot be used. For example, we could not use the words 'record low turnout' to describe the recent district council elections and could only say 'turnout rate was as expected,'" said the journalist who requested anonymity. "They even put out a list saying who you cannot interview - such as pro-democracy activists." "No one wants to be the next Stand News, Citizen News or Apple Daily," she said, referring to the three news outlets that have shut down. Self-censorship is not only for self-protection, but to protect sources and colleagues as well, she said. "It's always a struggle. You got a good [quote] and it's anti-government. You, your editor, your newsroom would have to make a decision: Do you want to put that person at risk? I don't think so. Our job is to report the truth but at the same time, you cannot do any harm to anyone," she said. "When colleagues write sensitive sentences, we censor them too. You don't want them to get in trouble. It's a struggle. You're practicing self-censorship but you're saving somebody." The result is that various media's reports are similar, with the same kind of opinion and voices, she said. There's still space to scrutinize government policies and actions, but the journalist who requested anonymity said that was only for politically nonsensitive issues. "It's OK to quote someone saying firework displays are a waste of money since even a lawmaker said it ... [but] after reporting on Article 23 has been very positive," she said. She said she plans to continue as a journalist despite the difficulties, pointing to the need for nonpolitical stories, and the appeal of "doing social impact stories such as those about NGOs working to help others," which, she said were rewarding to do because readers become more interested in the NGOs after reading the stories. "Society is not just about politics," she said. On the bright side, no more journalists have been arrested after the Apple Daily and Stand News arrests, Chan said. He and Williamson agreed that what is encouraging is that there are still passionate journalists trying to report on issues in Hong Kong in the current environment. "What I do believe in is the dedication and the talent of the journalists who are in Hong Kong, both those who were born here and those who have moved here, to continue to do their job in the face of hardship," Williamson said.

VOA

the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The world will commit a great sin if it hastens to forget the horrors of the new Nakba and allows it to produce generations of extremism that will explode within societies and the world, similar to what we witnessed previously, but this time more severely. We say Netanyahu is the architect of the second Nakba because he deserves to be named as such. In his first meeting with Yasser Arafat at the Erez crossing after assuming the premiership for the first time in 1996, Netanyahu was frank. He told Arafat that he was not concerned with the Oslo Accords or any similar renaissances.

During his long reign, he has launched waves of settlements and has been busy weakening the Palestinian Authority and spreading despair among the Palestinians, paving the way for the "Al-Aqsa Flood." The failure to contain the second Nakba heralds nothing but floods, confrontations and arenas.



# 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 stablemates 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 incinerated 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 esti-

mate 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 it. 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

# Why 'my way' won't go away

Richard Galant

**'I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway,' goes the song written for, and made famous by Frank Sinatra. "I did it my way." As mourners looked on, the coffin of Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny was lowered into the ground Friday in Moscow to the sounds of "My Way."**

The lyrics, set to a French tune, "Comme d'habitude," were written by Paul Anka in 1968 and inspired by a dinner he had with Sinatra in Miami. "He told me that he was retiring. ... He was tired. He was being hassled by the FBI and all that kind of stuff." As Anka wrote the song, he tried to channel Sinatra's language, later citing the line, "I ate it up and spit it out" as an example.

"That is the way he spoke," Anka told Ed Masley of the Arizona Republic. It turns out that Navalny's chief antagonist, Russian President Vladimir Putin, is also a fan of "My Way." Anka recalled, "When I went to Russia, he's walking me through the museum and giving me caviar out of tubs, loving 'My Way.'" The song is also hugely popular in the US, where newly inaugurated President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump chose it for their first dance at the Liberty Ball in 2017.

"I faced it all and I stood tall," is one line in the song that seems an apt description of Navalny's crusade for freedom in a repressive system. A year ago, Odessa Rae, one of the producers of the CNN Film "Navalny," told CNN Opinion that "Navalny is fighting for a better, more prosperous, fair and democratic Russia" and that he had released a 15-point plan for Russia after the Ukraine war: "It is like a breath of fresh air."

"My Way" feeds the notion, despite all, that we are in control of the lives we lead, but charting a course isn't the same thing as being able to fully follow it. Trump and President Joe Biden are on course to win their party's nominations for president, yet both faced sizable opposition from voters in the Michigan primary Tuesday. And there were other powerful figures who saw their hopes and plans endangered last week. Special counsel Jack Smith, who's seeking to try Trump in two criminal cases before the November election, could be stymied by the Supreme Court's decision to take up Trump's claim that he should be immune from criminal prosecution for actions during his presidency.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, once the undisputed architect of Republican strategy on Capitol Hill, announced Wednesday that he would step down in November as leader of his chamber's Republicans. McConnell cited the death of his sister-in-law and the fact that he has turned 82 as factors in his decision to leave the post, but historian Julian Zelizer argued that the hostility Trump has expressed to his party's Senate leader is surely a consideration. "The truth is now painfully apparent: Trump and the GOP are one and the same. The anti-Trump coalition within the Republican Party is small and hanging on by a thread, and there is little chance of that changing in the short term. McConnell's decision to cede the leadership position is part of a broad and consistent pattern: Every major figure who tries to take on the Trump-oriented GOP faction ends up losing." And Putin himself gave a bell-curve, two-hour-plus state of the nation address to Russia's parliament Thursday, brandishing Russia's nuclear weapons as a threat against the West, after French President Emmanuel Macron said he couldn't rule out sending Western troops to Ukraine. Putin's need to invoke the nuclear option - and ultimately the "destruction of civilization" - seemed to betray the president's frustration that his two-year-long war has yet to subdue the much smaller nation of Ukraine. It may not go his way, but the failure of Congress to approve more aid to Ukraine likely is giving Putin hope.

Mark T. Esper served as defense secretary for part of the Trump administration, but differs with the former president on aiding Ukraine. "As Russia surges in Ukraine and proxy fights expand across the Middle East," Esper wrote, "one critical question weighs heavily in everyone's minds: Is the United States still a credible ally willing to lead the free world? Whether Congress chooses to provide the continued financial support Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan desperately need will go a long way toward answering this question. And make no mistake, it is not just our allies who are wondering. Our adversaries are paying close attention as well." By agreeing to hear Trump's immunity argument, the Supreme Court has effectively delayed Trump's trial in Washington, DC, on charges of trying to overturn the 2020 election he lost. The high court's brief order was met with outrage and indignation from many - who complained that, by keeping the case from going forward immediately, the justices were almost guaranteeing that the crucially important January 6 case cannot go to trial before the presidential election this November, and that the justices were thus complicit in Trump's transparent efforts to delay accountability," wrote journalist Dahlia Lithwick and law professor Steve Vladeck. The court said it would hear arguments on the case during the week of April 22. While the political clock is ticking, this isn't a legal emergency, they wrote. "We both keep wishing that the Supreme Court would treat political exigencies with at least the same expediency with which it handles the legal ones. But wish as we might, that just isn't in the court's job description, and indeed at its best, the court should try to ignore political clocks as much as possible."

Trump won 68% of the votes in Michigan Tuesday. Biden did even better, garnering 81% of the Democratic votes. Yet commentators noted the relatively large numbers of dissatisfied voters who either went for Nikki Haley or for the "uncommitted" option challenging Biden. "Biden is counting on the specter of Trump to woo young, progressive voters back to the fold," David Axelrod noted. "Expect his campaign to strike a sharp contrast with Trump on a range of issues, including abortion rights, climate change and student loan forgiveness to rebuild this element of his coalition." He also has to win back voters dissatisfied with Biden's handling of the war in Gaza. On the GOP side, Haley's "presence in the race continues to underscore Trump's substantial vulnerabilities. By portraying the former president as a legally-freighted, vengeful chaos machine, Haley is articulating concerns shared by voters, particularly in the suburbs, who Trump will need in November." The population of Rafah in southern Gaza has more than quadrupled since the war began, wrote Catherine Russell, executive director of UNICEF. "Gazans sheltering in Rafah now face the terrifying reality that large-scale military operations could be imminent in the very area where they have fled for refuge. They cannot be pushed farther, however, and there is no safe place to go in the north."

Writing before the deaths of more than 100 people seeking aid Thursday in northern Gaza, Russell added, "Parties to the conflict should urgently implement a permanent humanitarian ceasefire so that our group and other humanitarian agencies can help to roll out the massive, multi-agency operation that is so desperately needed. ... The destruction of Gaza and killing of civilians will not bring peace or safety to the region. That can only be achieved with a negotiated political solution, one that prioritizes the rights and well-being of this and future generations of Israeli and Palestinian children." Talks continue on a possible deal to free at least some of the remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas, in return for a pause in fighting and the release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel. Ofri Bibas Levy, the sister of Israeli hostage Yarden Bibas, is watching closely. Yarden was taken from Kibbutz Nir Or on October 7, along with his wife Shiri Bibas and their two sons Ariel, 4, and Kfir, 1, the youngest hostages held in Gaza. "We, their family members, do not know if the boys are dead or alive, if they are being properly fed, if they are being held with or apart from their mother," Levy wrote. "My

brother Yarden was separated from his wife Shiri and their children on October 7th. He was forced by Hamas to be filmed in a psychological terror video alleging that they were killed by Israel."

"As the months go by, I wonder: Have the mothers and fathers of the world forgotten them? What if Ariel and Kfir were your children, your nephews?" "Has this become the world's new normal? Is it no longer barbaric to take children as hostages? This cannot be acceptable. We demand that, in any hostage deal, the children must be released first." The Alabama Supreme Court ruling that endangered IVF procedures in that state is broadly unpopular with Americans. Roughly two-thirds of Americans disapprove of the decision, SE Cupp noted. Some Republicans have "blocked bills to protect access to abortion, contraception, and now IVF. Overturning Roe, and all of the fallout that came from it, will continue to haunt Republicans, and at the worst possible time - in an election year," Cupp said. "But don't tell them - they seem determined to become utterly irrelevant."

Republicans have chosen a senator from Alabama to give the rebuttal to Biden's State of the Union address next Thursday. Katie Britt opposes abortion but favors protecting access to IVF. Until Elena Sheppard got to college, she knew little about pivotal figures in women's history. "I had sort of learned about the first ladies (but really just because I'd learned about their husbands) and I'd learned about Betsy Ross (whose legacy as the one to sew the first American flag fits right into historic narratives about women's work)," Sheppard wrote.

But what was removed by the pen can be restored by the pen, an approach sources say Biden is already considering. This would at least mitigate Biden's polling drop while also giving border states and blue cities a respite from the migrant influx." As Gabriel noted, "This week, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said the city needs to amend its 'sanctuary city' law so that migrants who commit felonies can be turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement." The suspect in the killing of Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student found dead after jogging on the University of Georgia campus, is an undocumented migrant from Venezuela, Raul A. Reyes noted. Riley's death "has resulted in a renewed firestorm over illegal immigration. Congressional Republican lawmakers have called for an immigration crackdown, and former President Donald Trump has denounced the suspect as a 'monster.'"

"Riley's death is a tragic loss to her family and community. The conflation of her killing with a migrant crime wave, however, is misplaced," he observed. "Study after study has found no conclusive link between immigrants and crime. In 2023 Stanford University researchers found that such a connection was 'mythical' and unsupported by 140 years of data." Wendy's CEO Kirk Tanner stirred controversy when he recently suggested that the fast-food chain would use its new digital menu technology to introduce "dynamic pricing."

"That's a pricing strategy we've all come to know and despise in transportation," wrote Jeff Yang. "The most enraging modern variant of this is the rideshare industry's use of surge pricing, which automatically sends the cost of a pickup from services like Uber and Lyft soaring when the number of exhausted people trying to get home exceeds the number of frustrated drivers trying to meet frenzied demand." Wendy's attempted to calm the waters by saying it doesn't plan to raise prices during peak times but instead is aiming to provide discounts "particularly in the slower times of day."

Yang was not reassured. "Discounts at odd hours might pull in some marginal customers," he observed, "but not knowing how much of a hit your wallet might take when you're craving a Dave's Double adds a layer of unnecessary anxiety to a world that already frequently feels like it's on the brink of the existential abyss, which could push away customers more generally."

CNN

# Sudanese democracy should not be US-made

John Young

**THERE are few peoples in the world who have been as devoted to achieving democracy as the Sudanese people. Although their quest for democracy has been unrelenting, stable democratic governance has so far eluded Sudan, not least because of foreign pressures. In the latest historic episode of revolutionary upheaval, which brought down President Omar al-Bashir in 2019, the political transition failed to keep the country on a democratic path.**

Subsequently, a bloody war broke out between two generals that has sown chaos and destruction. At present, survival is the main priority for the Sudanese people, but once the conflict is over, discussions about the governance and political future of the country will again come to the fore and there must be a clear vision of what that would look like. A democratic transformation is critical to resolving Sudan's many problems, but it must meet the needs of the Sudanese people and not be shaped by outside powers. The United States, in particular, which has tried to influence the post-Bashir transition, not only has a long track record of failure in democracy promotion in Sudan and its neighbourhood, but is also itself failing domestically on key democratic indicators.

For decades now, the US has been promoting its understanding of democracy across the Global South, including in Sudan. American diplomats, think tanks and NGOs have all worked to press foreign governments to hold elections, maintain freedom of speech and uphold human rights. That drive has largely failed to produce any tangible results for two reasons.

First, democracy in the US itself has been on the decline. All three pillars of US democracy promotion have seen backsliding in the US. In the past decade, claims of foreign interference, allegations of "stolen" elections, and political upheaval have raised fears that elections can no longer guarantee the orderly transition of power in the country. Free speech has also been under attack. During the COVID pandemic and then the wars in Ukraine and Gaza,

many people have been deplatformed, defamed, and fired for taking positions that do not conform to official narratives. Book bans are on the rise across the country, as is the censorship of critical voices on social media. The US has also seen a spotty human rights record domestically, which was reflected in a 2023 UN report highlighting the US's failure to abide by many of its obligations under the UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights. On the international arena, the US has continued to support Israel's mass murder of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, despite growing evidence that it is committing war crimes and possibly genocide.

Second, US democracy promotion has been conditioned and shaped by US economic and political interests. Washington demands that countries agree to the Western-controlled IMF and World Bank overseeing their national economies as part of their democratic transitions. It also requires that the foreign policies of countries in the Global South align with its own. But governments which submit to these demands do so often at the expense of the interests of their own citizens. This contradicts the very idea of democracy which is premised on national sovereignty. Indeed, the US's rendering of democracy is foremost designed to ensure US domination, which is why countries in the Global South would be ill-advised to follow its diktats.

The narrow US and Western model of democracy does not have a good track record in Sudan. Every time it has been applied during a period of political openness following the overthrow of a military regime, it has unsurprisingly failed to solve Sudan's daunting problems and has been quickly displaced. In the 2000s, US democracy promotion efforts in Sudan intensified, as the country's second civil war was drawing to a close. The regional peace process - heavily influenced by the US - produced the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government of al-Bashir and the rebel Sudan People's

Liberation Movement (SPLM). The two sides were pressured to agree to a democratic transformation either in a united Sudan or in the resulting components should the southern Sudanese opt for secession in a referendum. Despite the enormous political capital that the US invested in this project, the peace agreement and process served to consolidate al-Bashir's government.

In the following decade, the failure of the Sudanese regime to respond to the demands of the politically and economically marginalized peoples deepened poverty and fed conflicts in the peripheries of Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, southern Blue Nile, and eastern Sudan. Sudan's underdeveloped and distorted market could not meet the needs of the impoverished population even in the core, much less adequately respond to the economic grievances of the periphery. That the state needed to take a leading role in overcoming the country's poverty was not perceived as a priority by Khartoum and by many in the opposition elite whose understanding of democracy was largely restricted to replacing the dictator of the day.

The political opposition was weakened by the suppression of the trade union movement and its replacement with professional groups who were concerned with political reforms rather than addressing the economic discontent of the majority and carrying out the badly needed economic restructuring of the country. This goes far to explaining the failure of the post-2019 transition. Although the transitional government of Abdalla Hamdok came to power as a result of the overthrow of al-Bashir's regime in 2019 and claimed democratic bona fides, it was beholden to the military, framed its economic and foreign policies to meet the demands of the US, and largely ignored the pleas of the revolutionary street that brought it to power. Believing that the market was key to ending Sudan's economic crisis, the government pursued IMF austerity policies which further lowered living standards and led to the loss of

public support.

The Hamdok cabinet was largely made up of bureaucrats with world views steeped in neoliberalism who had few concerns about Sudan becoming a client state of the US. As a result, the US successfully pressured it to reverse its longstanding refusal to recognise apartheid Israel. It also pushed Khartoum to pay \$335m for acts of terrorism allegedly supported by al-Bashir's regime in order to have the debilitating sanctions against the country lifted. However, despite these expressions of fidelity, the US government did not come to the rescue of the Hamdok government when the military overthrew it in October 2022. While claiming to be supporting "democratic efforts" in Sudan, the US had no qualms about undermining the most pro-American government in Sudan's history. As I argue in my book The Poisoned Chalice of US Democracy: Studies from the Horn of Africa, the biggest obstacle to achieving democracy in Sudan has been a limited vision and devotion to constitutional politics by the opposition which has produced governments and parliaments dominated by elites opposed to the transformative change needed.

Ironically the greatest democratic achievements in Sudan's postcolonial history were not made during the brief periods of democratic government, but during the early period of the Jaafar Nimeiri's dictatorship (1969-85). In the early 1970s, Nimeiri managed to bring the country's first civil war to a peaceful end, granting southern Sudan regional autonomy. He weakened Sudan's traditional elites and promoted efforts to construct a Sudanese identity not tied to Arabism or Islam. He pushed for greater public control of the economy and a non-aligned foreign policy. This period of Sudanese history is important to consider as the Sudanese people ponder the future of their country. It is vital that they not just debate how to remove the generals and end the war, but also consider what kind of democratic path they want their country to embark on that is not shaped by US pressures.

Aljazeera

# China excels in pragmatic democracy

Ong Tee Keat

**THE annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee held in March every year remain a captivating event for China's friends and foes alike. They provide the international community with an insight into China's statecraft and hence its governance trajectory.**

While the US-led West continues to make the Chinese polity a bone of contention through its own lens of "democracy", the self-proclaimed "free world" makes no bones about its interest in China's priorities as a rising global power, albeit not lack of ill-intentioned speculations rooted in ideological prejudices.

The "two sessions" - as the annual sessions of the NPC and the CPPCC National Committee are collectively called - remain the mainstay of Chinese democracy and are tasked to chart the way forward for the country with the people's aspirations and well-being taking the centre stage. This is in stark contrast to the normative template of the US, the self-proclaimed "beacon of democracy", where the enactment of extra-territorial legislation to target on adversaries by means of "long-arm jurisdiction" is allowed to dominate the legislative agenda even at the expense of coherent home governance. Having vilified China's

political system as "authoritarian" - an anathema to free trade and economic development - the state actors, alongside the military-industrial-media complex of the West, have indeed been baffled by the compatibility of the Chinese polity with that of the global free trade. The re-emergence of China as a global economic power has best disproved of such mutual-exclusivity.

Yet that does not deter them from incessantly repeating the doom saying of China's imminent economic collapse though China's real economic growth figures have time and again disproved it embarrassingly. Nobody has ever denied that the aspirations and priorities deliberated at the "two sessions" truly mirror the key concerns of China. Given the global relevance of contemporary China, it's no exaggeration that no other legislative body in the world has ever grabbed so much global limelight when it convenes. Indeed, China's whole-process people's democracy and its people-centric development policies are best suited to fulfilling the aspirations of the Chinese people.

The high approval rating - of more than 90 percent in favour of the Chinese leadership's governance - is enough to debunk any "authoritarian" portrayal of the Chinese polity. This is no in-house

propaganda by China but a survey finding by Edward Cunningham of ASH Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, in his opinion poll titled "Understanding CCP Resilience - Chinese Opinion Survey Through Time" (July 2020).

The Harvard survey, which began in 2003, is a barometric measurement of the level of people's satisfaction with the Chinese leadership's governance. The survey encompasses multiple facets of governance, ranging from the election and selection of officials to policy formulation and their implementation, each of which involves people's participation through consultation. This contrasts with the limited role of the electorate after election in the Western countries where the legislative process is very much attuned to party lines. This explains why winning an election at all cost is of utmost importance in the practice of Western parliamentary democracy. This provides fertile ground for breeding populism, in most cases punctuated with mere rhetoric and hubris but devoid of the necessary knowledge and experience of public administration upon the onslaught of impromptu crisis.

The West has the liberty of choice to pursue such a mode of governance and development

model, but it certainly has no right to shove it down the throat of other nations, which have their respective diverse cultures and trajectories of nation building that might appear alien to the West. Similarly, the West has been taking pride of its inclusiveness and inherent checks-and-balances functionality in the practice of multi-party electoral democracy. Though, the norm of "majority rule" may ostensibly allow certain latitude for dissent, however the endgame of its decision-making is "winner takes all" regardless of the margin of majority.

In contrast, the element of consultation dedicated to accommodating minority views in the practice of Chinese consultative democracy is undoubtedly more inclusive in its outlook. However, this does not give China a carte blanche to impose its brand of democracy worldwide. All in all, democracy, a sacrosanct common value cherished by humanity, has no single template to emulate. Over the decades after World War II, nowhere across the world have we ever witnessed the success of democracy transplant under coercion or brutal "regime change" through military intervention. But instead, such hegemonic endeavors cloaked in the outfit of promoting democracy have only added more failed states and humanitarian disasters to the list.

The China Daily





## PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 225 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Tuesday, losing 225.68 points, a negative change of 0.34 percent, closing at 65,726.04 points against 65,951.73 points the previous trading day.

A total of 396,598,408 shares valuing Rs16.591 billion were traded during the day as compared to 472,862,687 shares valuing Rs 16.282 billion the last day. Some 350 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 134 of them recorded gains and 202 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 14 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Kohinoor Spinning with 39,721,000 shares at Rs 5.50 per share, Pak Refinery with 34,045,456 shares with

28.96 per share and PTCL with 24,851,077 shares at Rs 12.22 per share.

Raffhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 252.16 per share price, closing at Rs 8,888.88, whereas the runner-up was Sazgar Engineering Works Limited with a Rs 26.45 rise in its per share price to Rs379.18. Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 700.00 per share closing at Rs 21,100, followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs 192.50 decline to close at Rs 7,677.50.

**Rupee sheds 05 paise against dollar**

The Rupee on Tuesday weakened by 05 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.31 against the previous day's closing

of Rs 279.26.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.3 and Rs 282.3, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 01 paise to close at Rs 303.08 against the last day's closing of Rs 303.09, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs185, whereas an increase of 12 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 354.12 compared to the last closing of Rs 354.02.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 01 paise each to close at Rs 76.04 and Rs 74.47 respectively.

**Gold rates up by Rs223,900**

The price of per tola 24 karat gold increased by Rs2,700 and was sold at Rs223,900 on Tuesday compared to its sale at Rs 221,200 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 2,315 to Rs191,958 from Rs 89,643 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs175,962 from Rs 173,840 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 prices of gold in international market increased by \$26 and was sold at \$2,135 as compared to the last day's \$2,109.

## Nikkei index flat after record close

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo's key Nikkei index closed flat on Tuesday after hitting a fresh record the previous day as chip shares trimmed gains.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index inched down 0.03 percent, or 11.60 points, to end at 40,097.63, while the broader Topix index climbed 0.50 percent, or 13.65 points, to 2,719.93.

The Nikkei index temporarily dropped "following reports that the US government is working to block exports of AI semiconductors to China... amid a sense of short-term overheating" of Tokyo shares, IwaiCosmo Securities said.

While many investors expect the Nikkei to gain further, they are also aware of the short-term risks of overheating after recent rallies pushed the headline index above the 40,000 mark on Monday for the first time.

Market players are awaiting economic indicators and events this week, including US jobs data, congressional testimony from Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, President Joe Biden's State of the Union address and a European Central Bank decision.

The dollar fetched 150.54 yen against 150.51 yen in New York on Monday.

Among major shares, chip-testing equipment maker Advantest tumbled 2.64 percent to 7,185 yen while electronic parts maker Murata Manufacturing, which produces chips, slipped 0.56 percent to 3,005 yen.

Chip-making equipment manufacturer Tokyo Electron, which jumped more than two percent on Monday, added 0.41 percent to 39,450 yen.

## EFU Life partners with inDrive

— introduces an 'In-Ride Insurance Cover'



### F.P. Report

KARACHI: EFU Life has partnered with inDrive, a prominent ride-hailing service provider, to introduce "In-Ride Insurance Coverage" for both their drivers and passengers. This collaboration aims to provide esteemed inDrive customers and dedicated drivers with an enhanced sense of security and reliability during their transportation journeys.

EFU Life offers comprehensive coverage for various unexpected situations, including accidental death, permanent total disability resulting from on-trip accidents, reimbursement for accidental medical expenses, funeral coverage, ambulance costs related to accidents, and a complementary mHealth facility. Moreover, the plan includes a daily payment benefit specifically designed for drivers. These comprehensive insurance benefits are meaningful for both pas-

sengers and drivers.

Mohammed Ali Ahmed, MD & CEO of EFU Life, commented, "I am delighted about our collaboration with inDrive, which signifies a substantial stride in fortifying benefits for gig economy workers and inDrive's passengers. Over the years, EFU Life has consistently prioritized customer segmentation through various digital & inclusive insurance initiatives. Ride-hailing services are an important segment through which we can include a significant number of lives in the insurance net. Through this strategic partnership, our goal is to elevate benefits for both travelers and drivers, helping inDrive to provide value-added services to its internal and external customers and making insurance easy and convenient for the masses."

While speaking at the signing ceremony, Roman Ermoshin, Director of Ride-Hailing (APAC), stat-

ed "The introduction of insurance for our users marks the next step in our service development in Pakistan, with a renewed focus on protections and convenience. Our partnership is set to deliver the highest service quality to our users and will further solidify the position of both companies in the Pakistani market."

This partnership between EFU Life and inDrive underscores the importance of collaboration in driving positive change as a testament to how two industry leaders can unite for innovation and societal betterment. The partnership not only aims to provide enhanced security for inDrive customers and drivers but also signifies a commitment to continuous collaboration for future success. Both organizations are enthusiastic about building on this, working together to achieve even greater milestones in the times ahead.

## IBA Karachi hosts 16th HEC Women's Cricket C'ship 2023-24



### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The department of Sports and Community Engagement at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi commenced the 16th HEC All Pakistan Inter-University Women's Cricket Championship 2023-24 with great enthusiasm and fanfare at the Main Campus.

The event hosted by IBA Karachi, attracted 13 teams from different universities across Pakistan including, University of Punjab; Bahauddin Zakariya Univ-

ersity, Multan; Jinnah Women University, Karachi; Kinnaird College, Lahore; Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Jamshoro; University of Management and Technology, Lahore; University of Karachi; Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi; Lahore College for Women University, Lahore; Deewan University, Karachi; Hamdard University, Karachi; Islamia University, Bahawalpur, and IBA, Karachi.

The ceremony started

with a march past involving all the participating universities. Javed Ali Memon, Director/Incharge Sports, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Karachi graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, while Mr. Moeid Sultan, Director Finance, IBA, was the Guest of Honor. The ceremony was also attended by esteemed guests including Senior Sports Journalist, Syed Yahya Hussaini and International Women Cricket players, Ramim Shamim and Javeria Khan.

During his address, Mr.

Memon expressed his appreciation for the excellent facilities provided by the IBA Karachi for this event. He also highlighted the importance of women's participation in such sports events and the role they play in women empowerment. The other guests also commended HEC and the universities for their efforts in promoting women's sports.

The All Pakistan Inter-University Women's Cricket Championship will span over four days, with the final match scheduled to take place on Friday, March 8, 2024.

## Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, MSC Rida, Medi Chiba and Al-Rayyan carrying Containers, Canola seeds and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Grain Terminal and Elengy Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile another Containers ship MSC Aby also arrived at outer anchorage of the port on Tuesday morning.

A total of eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of a container vessel left the port on today morning and four more ships, Star Sino, African Baza, Medi Chiba and Kamome Victoria are expected to sail on today afternoon.

A cargo volume of 145,757 tonnes, comprising 127,624 tonnes imports cargo and 18,133 tonnes export cargo, including containerized cargo carried in 1,275 Containers (475 TEUs Imports and 800 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 10 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them four ships, MSC Aby, San Nicolas, Torm Integrity and Cetus & another ship Maersk Pittsburgh carrying Containers, Coal, Gas oil and Wheat are expected to take berth at QICT, MW-4, FOTCO and PIBT on Tuesday.

LCs (Letters of Credit).

"Settling down all these problems will definitely spur socio-economic development," he remarked.

He said that Business Facilitation Center is an important initiative of Punjab government under which more than 100 services of 20 government departments are available under one roof, adding that Lahore Chamber supports the BFC and encourages its members to avail the facilities there.

Kashif Anwar said that LCCI and BoI are enjoying good working relations, and the BoI is taking commendable initiatives to promote investment, however, it is more important that local investors must also be encouraged.

The LCCI President said that recently, a new condition is imposed by the government according to which retailers, whose withholding tax under Section 236H

## Turkiye CG, FPCCI discuss ways to boost bilateral trade, investment ties

LAHORE (APP): Turkiye Consul General (CG) Durmus Bastug visited Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Regional Office here Tuesday to discuss the ways and means to boost the bilateral trade and investment relations.

During the meeting, the matters of enhancing cooperation in diverse fields including trade, investment, technology, tourism, agriculture and exchange of delegations were discussed.

Talking to the FPCCI office-bearers and members, he assured that Turkiye would further promote bilateral trade and investment with Pakistan, adding that Turkiye would increase the trade with Pakistan up to US \$ five billion from the existing US \$ one billion.

Turkiye's 20 largest companies were doing business in Punjab, he mentioned and said that Turkiye has excellent scope for energy, infrastructure, construction and agriculture in Pakistan. Business-to-business (B2B) relations with Pakistan would also be strengthened and more joint ventures would be made, he vowed.

Durmus Bastug said that Pakistan and Turkiye are brotherly countries and all possible measures are being taken to promote bilateral trade. He said that Turkish investors and companies are making progress to invest in various sectors in Pakistan, especially Punjab.

FPCCI Regional Chairman and Vice President Zaki Aijaz and Vice President Qurrat-ul-Ain said that Turkiye holds a special place in the hearts

of Pakistanis, not only for its rich cultural heritage but also for its remarkable strides in various sectors including trade, technology, and industry. Similarly, Pakistan offers immense opportunities for Turkish businesses to invest and expand their presence in diverse sectors such as textiles, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and infrastructure development.

They said that over 260 million people in Pakistan ranked as the fifth-most populous country globally. Punjab is Pakistan's largest and most populous province, having 56 percent of the country's population. The province is comprised of 36 districts and highly blessed with agricultural, industrial, mining, and mineral production. Both countries have comparative

advantages like Turkiye has advanced technology. In contrast, Pakistan has raw materials and highly skilled human capital that could be utilized to supply value-added products to other countries.

Zaki Aijaz said that Pakistan especially Punjab is great places to invest because they offer many benefits for foreign investors. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) of Punjab provide particular incentives to investors. "We want partnerships in these SEZs. In the past, government-to-government (G2G) cooperation was the main focus. We aim to shift our attention towards fostering business-to-business (B2B) cooperation. This approach will facilitate companies, allowing for joint ventures," he concluded.

## Gold hits record peak on US rate cut hopes

LONDON (AFP/APP): The price of gold on Tuesday struck an all-time pinnacle, boosted by its haven status ahead of expected cuts to US interest rates amid growing economic gloom.

Shortly after 1330 GMT, gold advanced to \$2,141.79 per ounce, surpassing its prior peak of \$2,135.39 that was struck in early December, before pulling back slightly.

Gold, whose twin drivers are jewellery and

investment buying, has now gained about 15 percent in value since the same stage last year.

"Concerns surrounding global economic prospects, geopolitical tensions, and shifting expectations towards earlier interest rate cuts have fuelled increased demand for the precious metal, leading to its upward price trajectory," said ActivTrades analyst Ricardo Evangelista.

"Of these factors, US

interest rates stand out as the primary risk factor influencing gold prices, with the potential upside constrained by uncertainty surrounding the Federal Reserve's plans to unwind its restrictive monetary policy."

This week's strong advance was partly triggered by weak data published before the weekend.

US manufacturing activity contracted in February more quickly than markets expected, an industry sur-

vey showed Friday, as demand slowed and output eased. The Institute for Supply Management said its manufacturing index stood at 47.8 percent last month, down from 49.1 percent in January.

This was significantly below market expectations, according to Briefing.com, and kept the index below the 50-point marking separating expansion from contraction for the 16th month in a row.

## Over 400 business leaders attend ICCI Conference

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Dubai Business Conference, organized by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), attracted a significant turnout, with over 400 attendees, including investors and business leaders from Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and around the world.

The event was aiming to highlight the trade and investment potential existing in different sectors of the national economy as well as the scope of joint ventures and investment friendly policies to attract foreign direct investment in the country, said a press release.

Addressing the conference Abdul Rahman Al

Muaini, UAE's Secretary of Economic Affairs emphasizing Dubai cosmopolitan nature with a population exceeding 200 nationalities. He attributed the city's attractiveness to its modern business systems, extensive trade opportunities and secure investment environment.

He also appreciated Pakistan's potential for investment, particularly in sectors like agriculture, IT and stressed the need for enhancing bilateral trade and investment cooperation for the mutual benefit of the people of both the countries.

ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari expressed his gratitude for the conference's organization and highlighted the participation of over 170 Pakistani delegates.

He emphasized Pakistan's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and its vast potential for investors.

He specifically mentioned opportunities in real estate, hospitality (five-star hotels and shopping malls), and IT sector in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Ambassador

### Court Notice

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge-II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar, Case No. 209/1, Institution 4/10/2023, date of hearing 20/3/2024. Ismail Shah Vs. Mian Zar Rehman. Notice to No. 2. Azizur Rehman. 4. Ziur Rehman sons of Shamsur Rehman. 21. Samandar s/o Abdul Akbar. 22. Gulyaz Khan s/o Yaqoob Khan. 23. Mohamad Fanas s/o Rahim Shah. 24. Said Zaten s/o Manjavar. 25. Abdul Maten s/o Manjaf. 26. Sahib Zada s/o Palo. 27. Mohamad Khanigul. 28. Ajab Gul sons of Amer Gul. 29. Misal Dad s/o Gul Dad. 30. Usman Ali s/o Azmatullah resident of Kalpani Tehsil Gagra District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9:00 a.m. dated 20/3/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

In the Court of Saima Ehsan Civil Judge-II/Allaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar, Case No. 125/1, Institution 31/3/2021, date of hearing 14/3/2024. Samandar Khan Vs. Javed. Notice to No. 10. Abdul Hakem s/o Sharifullah resident of Sora Tehsil Mandarn District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 9 am dated 14/3/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

## LCCI brings forth strategy to promote investment

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on Tuesday put forth a well-conceived strategy to promote investment in the country.

While addressing a high-profile country-wide delegation from Board of Investment (BoI), the LCCI President Kashif Anwar highlighted the challenges hampering investment in the country. He said that local industry issues should be resolved first to attract foreign investment.

Kashif Anwar said that for the past few years, the business community is facing problems like rupee devaluation, inflationary pressure, high policy rate and high cost of doing business, high energy prices, repeated increase in POL (Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants) prices, MDI charges on closed industrial units, reduction in axle load limit, hike in cargo delivery charges and non-opening of

LCs (Letters of Credit). "Settling down all these problems will definitely spur socio-economic development," he remarked.

He said that Business Facilitation Center is an important initiative of Punjab government under which more than 100 services of 20 government departments are available under one roof, adding that Lahore Chamber supports the BFC and encourages its members to avail the facilities there.

Kashif Anwar said that LCCI and BoI are enjoying good working relations, and the BoI is taking commendable initiatives to promote investment, however, it is more important that local investors must also be encouraged.

The LCCI President said that recently, a new condition is imposed by the government according to which retailers, whose withholding tax under Section 236H

in 12 months is more than Rs 100,000, must be POS integrated, fearing that this would increase the burden on small retailers and make it more difficult to achieve the desired goals. These actions would directly hurt the manufacturing sector.

He said that before this, the government imposed a condition of sales tax registration for shopkeepers with an area of 1,000 square feet. The LCCI had strongly voiced against it and this condition was withdrawn. He mentioned that regulatory, customs duty and additional customs duty should be abolished on the import of essential industrial raw materials and machinery which are not being produced locally.

Kashif Anwar also stressed on the need to reduce the withholding tax rate for the businesses and resolve the issues of pending refunds, bank attach-

ments, enquiries, penalties for late filing of returns and multiple audits. He said that the rate of fines and surcharge should be immediately reduced for the taxpayers.

He suggested that BoI should encourage investment in hydro-power, alternative sources of energy, agriculture, new dams and water reservoirs. He said that Special Economic Zones (SEZs) should be given the status of Special Export Zones. He urged the political parties to get united on the Charter of Economy, and the government should immediately announce a declaration scheme.

The BoI Additional Secretary (Islamabad) Ambreen Iftikhar said that the BoI representatives from all the provinces have come together with the aim to study the model of Punjab which is designed for the facilitation of

investors. She agreed with the LCCI President saying that continuity in policies is a must.

Investment Advisor BoI (Islamabad) Usman Khan said that the board is working on a ReMIT programme with the support of UK government, asserting that the LCCI President has identified issues like import substitution, industrial policy, special economic zones and focus on local investors, therefore, "we want the LCCI to forward its budget proposals to the BoI".

Usman Khan underscored the imminent influx of regulatory measures expected from the EU (European Union) in the light of escalating concerns surrounding climate change. As the spectre of climate change looms ever larger on the global stage, it is imperative for local industries to proactively embrace sustainable prac-

tices and innovate in order to meet these evolving regulatory requirements, he argued.

He added that after climate change and COVID-19, industrial policy has become more necessary. In this regard, the Ministry of Industries and SIFC have given some tasks, the most important of which is the establishment of National Industrial Development and Regulatory Authority (NIDRA).

The delegation included BoI Director Reforms (Islamabad) Mahmood Tufail, BoI Directors (Islamabad) Nadeem Basheer, Mahmood Tufail, and Dr. Qudsia Batul. Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT) Director Dr. Imran Hashmi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade (KPBIT) Director (Business Facilitation) Iqbal Sarwar also spoke on the occasion.





## In brief

## NZC delegation visits Stadium

LAHORE (APP): The New Zealand Cricket (NZC) security delegation on Monday night visited the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi. The delegation comprised CEO New Zealand Players Association Heath Mills, and security consultant Reg Dickason. The delegation was briefed by the PCB and security officials. The NZC delegation will travel to Lahore on Tuesday (tomorrow) afternoon.

## Wapda, PAF win matches

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wapda and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) have earned victories in the 43rd National Kabaddi Championship organized by Pakistan Kabaddi Federation at Jinnah Stadium of Pakistan Sports Complex on Tuesday. In the first match, Pakistan Air Force defeated Higher Education Commission by 52-33 points, while in the second match, Wapda beat Pakistan Army by 41-38 points. The league matches would be played on March 6 and 7, while the championship final and third place match on March 8. In the matches to be played on Wednesday, Pakistan Air Force would face Pakistan Army while Wapda will compete Higher Education Commission.

## Erin Holland enjoys rickshaw ride

KARACHI (APP): Erin Victoria Holland, an Australian singer, tv host, model, and charity worker, added a local touch to her visit to Karachi during the ongoing Pakistan Super League season nine by opting for a ride on a traditional rickshaw. Holland, who won the Miss World title on July 20th, 2013, seemed to relish the experience of navigating Karachi's streets amidst the hustle and bustle of regular traffic while fulfilling her duties as the PSL presenter.

The Australian cricket player Ben Cutting's wife has been actively involved in PSL for several seasons now, serving as a presenter. During this time, Holland's eastern charm has significantly increased her fan following, evident from the viral reception of her rickshaw ride photos shared on Instagram. Captioning her photo with "Let's go," Holland's post quickly gained traction on social media platforms. Her presence and engagement with local culture have been appreciated by cricket fans across the globe.

## Club report

**£119.6m loss**  
LONDON (Agencies): Aston Villa have reported a loss of £119.6m in their latest accounts up to 31 May 2023. The accounts cover a period that saw Villa finish seventh in the Premier League to qualify for Europe. Villa say the figures are "in line with the strategic business plan" and within the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules. PSR rules, introduced in 2015-16, permit losses of up to £105m in a three-year spell. A statement read: "The owners of Aston Villa remain committed to the long-term and sustainable development of the club, and we look forward to continued progress on the delivery of our strategic plan." Investments in infrastructure, the academy, charity foundation and women's football can be deducted from PSR figures. Clubs are also allowed to claim back losses incurred during the two seasons impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Villa made a profit of £300,000 in their 2021-22 accounts, helped by the sale of England midfielder Jack Grealish to Manchester City for £100m.

# Peshawar Zalmi stun leaders Multan Sultans in high-scoring contest

R A W A L P I N D I (Monitoring Desk): A combined batting and bowling effort led Peshawar Zalmi to a narrow four-run victory over leaders Multan Sultans in the 21st match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 here at Pindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday.

Babar's decision to bat first paid dividends for the Zalmi as they racked up 204/5 in the allotted 20 overs against Playoffs-bound Sultans.

Zalmi openers Babar and Saim once again gave the former champions a steady start with a blistering partnership.

Their stand yielded 84 runs before Saim perished in the seventh over off Usama Mir.

The left-handed batter fell agonizingly short of his well-deserved half-century, scoring 46 off 22

deliveries, hitting three boundaries and five sixes.

Tom Kohler Cadmore then partnered briefly with Babar for a cautious 13-run stand before falling victim to Mir in the 10th over. He managed just five off nine deliveries.

Meanwhile, Babar Azam stood his ground firm and carried his bat till the 15th over before being cleaned up by Usama Mir after scoring a brilliant half-century.

He remained the top-scorer for Zalmi with a 40-ball 64 which featured seven boundaries and two sixes.

Babar was also involved in an important 51-run partnership for the third wicket with wicketkeeper batter Haseebullah Khan, who made a brisk 31. His 20-ball knock featured three boundaries and a six.

F o l l o w i n g

Haseebullah's dismissal in the 17th over, Roymann Powell took the reigns of Zalmi's batting charge and played an unbeaten 23-run cameo.

He received notable support from Asif Ali (10) and Aamer Jamal, who scored 12 not out off just five deliveries.

Usama Mir led the bowling charge for Multan Sultans with 3/32, followed by Chris Jordan, who bagged two.

Notably, former champions Multan Sultans have booked their place in the PSL 9 playoffs with a victory over Karachi Kings on Sunday.

Mohammad Rizwan-led side are currently at the summit of the standings with 12 points in seven matches. Whereas, Babar Azam's Peshawar Zalmi are fourth with seven points in as many matches.



**SARGODHA: A view of Handball match playing for third position between Sargodha Rawalpindi Region and Lahore Region during Punjab Handball Provincial League 2024 under Prime Minister's Youth Programme organized by Sargodha University at Sports Gymnasium. —APP Photo**

## Handball Men Provincial League concludes

SARGODHA (APP): The Punjab Handball Men Provincial League organized by the Directorate of Sports University of Sargodha concluded and the prize distribution ceremony was held at Sports Gymnasium Sargodha, here on Tuesday.

The Punjab Handball Provincial League was organized in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and hosted by the University of Sargodha, in which teams from five regions of Punjab participated in the handball competitions, while the team of Faisalabad region performed brilliantly and got first position.

In the closing ceremo-

ny of the league, Vice Chancellor University of Sargodha Professor Dr. Qaiser Abbas participated as the chief guest and awarded the trophy to the winning team.

Addressing the event, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Qaiser Abbas appreciated the initiatives taken by the Higher Education Commission to attract the youth towards sports and congratulated the team of the Directorate of Sports University of Sargodha for organizing the sports competitions in an organized manner.

He said that the University of Sargodha besides providing opportunities for quality education and research, practi-

cal experiences and observations to the youth also engages them in recreational activities so that they remain physically and mentally healthy and achieve success in every field of life.

A large number of players including Chairman Sports Committee Professor Dr. Masood Sarwar Awan, Chairperson of Department of Sports Sciences University of Sargodha Dr. Yasir Iqbal Waraich, Director of Sports Maher Ahmad Khan Haral, Director of Students Affairs Dr. Mahmood Al Hasan were present at the closing ceremony of Handball League.

## Champions League 'getting tougher', says Guardiola

MANCHESTER (AFP): Pep Guardiola said Tuesday it is "getting tougher" to win the Champions League as he targets a second consecutive treble with his all-conquering Manchester City team.

Defending champions City, unbeaten in 19 games in all competitions, take on Copenhagen in the second leg of their last-16 tie at the Etihad on Wednesday, with the cushion of a 3-1 lead.

They beat Manchester United on Sunday to move just one point behind Premier League leaders Liverpool and are through to the FA Cup quarter-finals, where they will face Newcastle.

But Guardiola played down talk of a repeat of last season's heroics at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday.

"It's better to be here having already won the Champions League but as I said it (the treble season)

is finished," he said. "The only target is to try to qualify tomorrow for the quarter-finals," he added. "We are far, far away, talking about these things."

"We didn't say last season until we won the final against United in the FA Cup, so we are at the beginning of March."

Guardiola, who also won the Champions League twice as Barcelona manager, in 2009 and 2011, said the bar had been raised in Europe's top club competition.

"It's getting better and tougher," he said. I had the feeling when I arrived at Barcelona in the first years 'OK we will arrive in the semi-finals'."

"Now, to reach semi-finals is so difficult. The teams are better and managers are better. Everything is even more difficult than when I was a football player. But at the end the better teams

always go through."

But he played down the notion that winning with City last season -- the club's first-ever Champions League crown -- was a bigger achievement than lifting the trophy with Barcelona.

"No, I would not say that, otherwise I undermine what we achieved in Barcelona," he said. "I would not like that, which was really good."

"I am not saying that 'That prize is better than the previous ones'. It's not. Every moment is every moment."

"What I think when I was at Barcelona or Bayern Munich, here, every title you win is different. It's not for granted. "It's not because it's easy. Every step you do is so complicated... you have to be good in the right moments, mentally, physically and the skills and the game plan and many, many things, luck in the right moments."



**RAWALPINDI: Players in action during Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 cricket match playing between Peshawar Zalmi and Multan Sultans at Pindi Stadium. —APP Photo**

## Pakistan players participating in PSL called on Chairman PCB

ISLAMABAD (PPI) Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board Mohsin Naqvi met Pakistan players participating in HBL PSL 9 at a local hotel in Islamabad, according to a PCB information on Tuesday.

Chairman addressed the players and lauded their performances in national colours. COO PCB Salman Naseer, Chief selector Wahab Riaz and other PCB officials were also present on this occasion.

Addressing the players, Chairman said, "Our collective mission is to win and for that, we must be united.

We are committed to bringing merit to our work ethic.

The high performers and quality players will be given ample opportunities to prove their mettle. All of you are good enough and that is why you are here. The board aims to invest more resources in our players.

"I want you to inculcate fighting spirit in your style of play irrespective of the results.

Fans in Pakistan love cricket and they will surely back the team when you put up a fight on the ground.

We will have to make some sacri-

fices for the great cause and look forward to the upcoming challenges in our cricket schedule. The PCB is also planning to upgrade some of the major venues in the country."

Talking about the team's preparation for the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, Chairman stated, "We have a home series against New Zealand followed by away series against Ireland and England before departing to the USA for the mega event. The board has planned a strength and conditioning camp before this challenging international season."

## WAPDA clinches Engro U20 National Volleyball C'ship title

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Wapda clinched the trophy after defeating Pakistan Air Force in the final by 3-0 in the Engro National U20 Volleyball Championship played at indoor hall of the PSB Coaching Center here on Tuesday.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Greens took third position after defeating Pakistan Boards by 3-2 before facing tough resistance in the thrill-packed match witnessed by capacity crowd present on this occasion.

Member Provincial Assembly Syed Qasim Ali Shah distributed the prizes

WAPDA won the Engro National Under-20 Junior Volleyball Championship in the final played at PSB Coaching Center, the score was 25-21, 25-22 and 25-19.

On this occasion, Member of Provincial Assembly Syed Qasim Ali Shah was the special guest along with former Nazim Arbab Asim, Secretary General of Pakistan Volleyball Federation Shah Naeem Zafar, Organizing Secretary and Secretary KP Khalid Waqar Chamkani, Secretary Punjab MB Javed, Secretary Sindh Shahid Masood, Secretary AJK Sardar Farooq, Vice

President of KP Volleyball Association Faqir Muhammad Awan and other officials were present in the final match.

The WAPDA team was completely overshadowed and easily won the straight sets final. In the match for the third position, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa won against the Pakistan Boards team by 3-2. 25-23, 23-25, 21-25, 25-25 and 15-11.

A total of 11 teams participated in this volleyball Championship organised jointly by Pakistan Volleyball Federation and KP Volleyball Association with two teams each from

Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in the Championship while Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan Army, WAPDA and Air Force, Azad Jammu and Kashmir participated fully.

According to Khalid Waqar Chamkani, Secretary General of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball Association, the Under-21 players will be selected based on their performance in the Junior Volleyball Championship for which the camp will be held and they will be trained by Brazilian coaches who will later represent Pakistan in the Asian Championship.

## Shadab Khan makes history with 300th T20 wicket

RAWALPINDI (INP): Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium witnessed a historic moment as Islamabad United's captain, Shadab Khan, etched his name in cricketing annals by claiming his 300th T20 wicket. The milestone came during the 20th match of the ongoing season, where Islamabad United clashed with Peshawar Zalmi in a high-octane encounter.

Shadab Khan's moment of glory arrived in the 17th over of the second innings when he dismissed leg-spinner Aamir Jamal, adding another feather to his illustrious cap. The seasoned spinner's achievement adds a unique dimension to his already impressive T20 career, underscoring his prowess in the shortest format of the game.

Amidst the backdrop of this monumental achievement, Shadab Khan showcased his leadership and cricketing prowess on the field. With a stunning performance, he claimed a total of 3 wickets for 41 runs in his spell, playing a pivotal role in his team's triumph over Peshawar Zalmi.

The match witnessed an exhilarating exchange between Shadab Khan and Peshawar Zalmi's Aamir Jamal, with both players displaying remarkable skill and determination. After Jamal's aggressive innings, including two sixes off Shadab Khan's bowling, the Islamabad United captain responded with a masterful display, ultimately dismissing the dangerous batsman.

Shadab Khan's stellar performance wasn't confined to his bowling exploits alone. With the bat, he delivered a brilliant innings of 80 runs off just 47 balls, further cementing his status as a match-winner.

## Simona Halep: 'Anti-diva' of tennis cleared for return from doping ban



PARIS (AFP): When Simona Halep stunned Serena Williams to win the 2019 Wimbledon title, the gutsy Romanian was one of the All England Club's more popular champions, cementing her standing as tennis's "anti-diva".

On Tuesday, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) reduced a potentially career-ending doping ban from four years to nine months, paving the way for Halep's possible immediate return to the court.

Before her suspension from the sport, Halep had already demonstrated incredible resolve to win the 2018 French Open having lost all three of her previous Slam finals.

She endeared herself by announcing on the eve of that Paris finale, where she saw off Sloane Stephens from a set down, that she "would be OK" if she lost again, as "no-one would have died".

Halep had lost the 2014 French Open final to Maria Sharapova and the 2017 championship match in Paris after leading Jelena Ostapenko by a set and 3-0.

Her third heartbreaker came in 2018 against Caroline Wozniacki in a marathon Australian Open final in sweltering heat in Melbourne.

Halep, who also became world number one in August 2017, is only the second Romanian woman to win a Grand Slam singles title, following in the footsteps of 1978 Roland Garros champion Virginia Ruzici.

She is a huge star in her home country -- she has appeared on the front cover of the Romanian edition of Elle magazine and opened a restaurant called SH in her Black Sea hometown of Constanta.

"The fact that I am able to win maybe will give an inspiration also to Romanians, the kids, that it's possible, even if you come from a little country, it's possible if you work and if you believe," she once said.

One of the main reasons why Halep had to wait so long to lift a major title was her relative lack of power when compared to the game's other big stars.

"Good and truth always prevail"

But she found compensation: "I'm fast, though, no?"

Halep has claimed 24 singles titles and banked more than \$40 million from her on-court performances.

But she was rarely seduced by the glitter of the sports world. Respected US magazine Sports Illustrated once described Halep as an "anti-diva".

At the time of her 2019 Wimbledon title victory, Halep was only following two people on Twitter, now X.

One was former coach Darren Cahill and the other, bizarrely, was four-time world snooker champion Mark Selby.

"I have no idea how you play snooker. But I appreciate him," said Halep.

"He's been in Romania a few times. I met him. Also I have a snooker ball signed from him. That's why I follow him."

Halep also has been questioned about her decision 15 years ago to undergo breast reduction surgery, with her saying they made her "uncomfortable" when she played.

For Halep, now 32, her character and famously good nature were tested to the limits when she was suspended in 2022 and then handed a four-year ban in September 2023.

She had protested her innocence, describing her absence from the sport as a "nightmare" and that she was waiting for the result of her appeal with her "head held high".

"Good and truth always prevail."





## In brief

### Robbery-murder suspect arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested suspect involved in robbery-murder case in the jurisdiction of Airport police station here on Tuesday. According to police spokesman, Obaid Amjad, a wanted criminal, along with his other accomplices, shot and killed citizen Abdul Ghafoor during a robbery. The case of the incident was registered in the airport police station on the complaint of the victim's brother. While, two accomplices of the advertised criminal have already been arrested and challaned. SP Potohar Nasir Nawaz commended police team and said that the arrested advertised criminal will be challaned with concrete evidence and will be punished. Arrest of accused criminals involved in heinous cases is important in providing justice to the family members, he added.

### 4 illegal arm holders arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested four illegal arm holders and recovered arms, ammunition from their possession during crackdown here on Tuesday. According to police spokesman, Rawat police held Mohsin, Yasir and recovered 2 Kalashnikov from their possession. Similarly, Saddar Barooni police nabbed Asif and recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from his custody. While, Kahuta police recovered 01 pistol 30 bore from Zakaria. Police have registered separate cases against the accused and further investigation was in progress. Divisional SPs appreciated the performance of police teams and said that action will be taken against those possessing illegal weapons. Meanwhile, Naseerabad police arrested motorcycle lifter and recovered stolen motorcycle from his possession.

### CDA for water shortage

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the direction of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), the Water Management Wing has expedited work on several projects to meet the water shortage in the city of Islamabad. In this regard, on the direction of the Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), the Water Management Wing has been completely resolved all the repair work and complaints like leakages, including replacement of old and rotten pipes in the Simli Water Filtration Plant and Main Condition Line. It should be noted that the timely action of the Water Supply Wing has not only saved 8 lakh gallons of water per day but also increased the water pressure in the pipelines. Similarly, complaints like leakages in water supply lines have been removed in Sector G-7. It should be noted that the water level in other dams including Khanpur dam has decreased due to lack of required rains in monsoon. Therefore, before the arrival of summer, the water supply department is busy around the clock to meet the shortage of water so that the citizens get adequate water supply. Additionally, the installation of 4 new tube wells in Sector F-10, F-11, G-10, G-11 will also be started soon by the Water Supply Department. So that in case the water reserves in Khanpur Dam decreases, the water shortage can be met with tube wells. In this regard, tenders have been published in newspapers so that water shortage can be controlled before the arrival of summer. Apart from this, work will be started soon to eliminate water leakages in other water networks including main condition lines at a cost of 60 crore rupees so that more water can be saved.



RAWALPINDI: Spectators making selfie during Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 cricket match playing between Peshawar Zalmi and Multan Sultans at Pindi Stadium. —APP Photo

## Malaysia education Fair brings opportunities for students

ISLAMABAD (APP): Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) is pleased to announce the much-anticipated Study in Malaysia Education Fair 2024, took place in Islamabad on Monday.

The event, organized by EMGS, aims to showcase the diverse educational opportunities available in Malaysia to students in Islamabad and its surrounding areas.

Malaysia has long been recognized as a modern Muslim Nation, offering high-quality education, a reasonable cost of living, and a multicultural learning environment. With its reputation for excellence in various fields, including engineering, medicine, business, and information technology, Malaysia attracts students from around the

world seeking a widely recognized education.

The Study in Malaysia Education Fair 2024 will bring together representatives from leading Malaysian universities, colleges, and educational institutions, providing Pakistani students with direct access to information about available programs, admission requirements, scholarships, and more. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with academic advisors and faculty members, gaining valuable insights into their chosen fields of study. The participating universities were Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Management and Science University, University of Cyberjaya, UNIRAZAK, AIMST UNIVERSITY, Tuanku Abdul

Rahman University of Management and Technology (TARUMT).

In addition to exploring academic opportunities, visitors to the fair can learn about the vibrant cultural landscape of Malaysia, including its rich heritage, diverse cuisine, and exciting recreational activities. Representatives from the Malaysian High Commission will be on hand to provide information about visa requirements, immigration procedures, and living in Malaysia, ensuring a smooth transition for prospective students.

The Chargé d' Affaires of Malaysia in Pakistan, Mohd Syafik Firdaus, has expressed his enthusiasm and support for this Study in Malaysia Education Fair 2024, organized by

Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS).

The Chargé d' Affaires commended Education Malaysia Global Services for their efforts in promoting Malaysia as a premier destination for international students and reiterated Malaysia's commitment to providing quality education to students from around the world.

"I encourage Pakistani students to take advantage of the Study in Malaysia Education Fair 2024 and explore the diverse academic programs and scholarships offered by the Malaysian government and universities either partially or fully scholarship. "Through education, we can build bridges of friendship and cooperation that will benefit our countries for generations to come."

## Racket involved in supplying drugs to students busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting an operation managed to bust a drug peddling racket involved in supplying drugs to the students of educational institutions and arrested two accused including a foreigner, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday.

He informed that the accused involved in selling drugs near educational

institutions were rounded up from E and F Sectors in Islamabad. Ice and cocaine were also seized from their possession during the operation. In the next few days, the scope of the operation would be expanded to other cities of the country, he said adding, cases would be registered against the accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act.

Collaboration with gov-

ernment and non-government stakeholders would be strengthened, the spokesman informed. ANF is making efforts to fight the menace of drugs, he said and requested the citizens to support ANF in this campaign against drugs and report the drug trafficking on the helpline 1415. Information could also be given on ANF's social media accounts, he added.

## RDA issues show cause notice to illegal housing scheme

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General (DG), Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa, has issued a show cause notice to Lake Vista for illegally marketing.

According to a RDA

spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate RDA issued show cause notice to Malik Usman, the owner of housing scheme namely Lake Vista located in mouza Dhok Abdullah, Tehsil Rawalpindi for illegal marketing through print and electronic media.

He said that the housing

scheme was fraudulently trying to sell the plots and deceiving the citizens on the name of RDA. The RDA spokesperson said that the DG had taken strict notice and advised the citizens not to invest in illegal housing schemes.

He said that the sponsors and developers of the housing scheme were illegally advertising their housing project and offering to sell plots without obtaining approval from RDA.

No housing society could advertise a project, sale the plots or housing units through print and electronic media in any manner, with-

out prior approval of the RDA, he added.

He said the MP&TE Directorate RDA had directed the owner of the housing scheme which was not approved from RDA to stop all kind of development works, advertisement for sale and purchase of the plots. In case of non-compliance, strict legal action would be initiated as per the rules, he added.

He informed that the DG had also directed the MP&TE Directorate to take strict action against illegal advertisements and marketing of illegal housing schemes.

## NUST Career Connect attracts over 100 leading employers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Around 2500 final-year students of the National University of Sciences and Technology availed NUST Career Connect 2024 to appear in on-spot interviews with leading national and multinational companies at the university's main campus. A total of 114 companies set up their stalls at the career fair, including P&G, L'Oréal, Food Panda, Total Parco, English Biscuits Manufactures, Packages, National Logistics Cell, Netsol Technologies, Pak Arab Refinery Limited, Jazz, Zong, Kohinoor Textile Mills, State Bank of Pakistan, and BoP to name a few. Speaking at the event, Dr Rizwan Riaz, NUST Pro-Rector Research, Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC) appreciated the industry for being present in an overwhelming number to interact with students from the country's premier university. He further said that it was imperative both for the academia and the industry to continue fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships.

The five NGOs that will implement the projects are (1) Association for Behavior & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT), (2) Fortified Services for Reforms & Transformation (FSRT), (3) Actions For Human Advancement (AHAT), (4) Lok Sudhar Association and (5) Safe Hands Foundation.

ABKT will receive a

USD 63,518 grant (equivalent to around Rs 17.7million) to reconstruct three flood-damaged suspension bridges in District Upper Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This project will

enhance the security of school children and local community members when natural disasters such as flood occur.

It will also provide a safe

## Pak-Saudi collaboration in IT, Telecom to further strengthen ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the realm of Information Technology and Telecom, the collaboration between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and strong presence of Pakistan at LEAP 2024, would further strengthen bilateral ties between the two nations.

This premier technology event brings together some of the brightest minds globally, offering a dynamic platform for tech innovators, industry leaders, and experts to collaborate, explore innovations, establish partnerships, and engage with influential mentors and investors, said a news release received here on Tuesday.

In the previous year, LEAP generated over \$9 billion in business, attracting over 172,000 individuals, including global tech leaders, IT professionals, speakers, tech gurus, and investors, establishing itself as the fastest-growing technology event worldwide. Pakistan contingent is one of the largest at this year's LEAP with 162 sqm pavilion 74 companies and over 800 delegates demonstrating a robust Pakistani business presence with promising prospects in the KSA market.

These companies are showcasing solutions in AI, IoT, blockchain, cyber security, cloud solutions, health tech, fintech, web and mobile app development, open source, e-commerce, data services and more. PSEB and P@SHA in collaboration with Pakistan Embassy in Riyadh and other stakeholders arranged "Saudi-Pak Tech Forum" on March 3, 2024 to set the tone for LEAP. Secretary General DCO Ms. Deemah Alyahya was the chief guest at the event.

A considerable number of prominent Saudi Government and private institutions attended the forum which provided a remarkable platform for Pakistani companies to network with Saudi counterparts, IT industry, government institutions, and IT associations ahead of LEAP to create an additional pool of prospects & valuable business leads. Speaking on the occasion, CEO PSEB Ms. Aisha Moriani reiterated the need for both the nations to collaborate

and build upon the success of Pakistani companies at LEAP 2023.

Pakistan views this as a timely opportunity to showcase its IT/ITeS companies on the international trade platform and expand business in the Middle East market, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which is undergoing transformation with its Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia, boasting the largest economy in the Middle East and ranking among the top twenty globally, holds a significant share in the technology industry.

Pakistan's IT industry has experienced remarkable growth, ranking among the country's top five export sectors. The industry benefits from a robust infrastructure, including 40+ Software Technology Parks and Special Technology Zones, while exporting IT services to over 170 countries across various domains.

The government through the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), actively supports the IT industry, offering 100% equity ownership, 100% repatriation of capital and dividends, and income tax credits for IT exports to foreign investors.

Pakistan's status as the fourth largest English-speaking nation and the second largest provider of online labor in software development positions it as an attractive Techdestination. Pakistan's strategic location positions it as a gateway to Central Asia, making it an optimal choice for establishing a digital corridor providing access to Middle Eastern, African, and Asian states.

With an impressive network of 6-8 marine cables ensuring advanced connectivity, coupled with a favorable time zone advantage, Pakistan enhances operational efficiency with nearly equal time differences to both London and Sydney. The abundant opportunities in Pakistan are undeniable, with approximately 75,000 IT graduates each year and a skilled workforce ready to contribute to the digital industry. Professionals in accounting, law, design, and marketing further augment the workforce, offering offshore services.

## Japan provides grant to for development projects in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Government of Japan has decided to provide grant assistance up to USD 300,800 (equivalent to around Rs 84 million) in total to five local NGOs for development projects in Pakistan. Three out of the five projects were flood rehabilitation projects in the areas affected by the 2022 Pakistan floods, said a news release.

The grant contracts were signed between Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, WADA Mitsuhiro and representatives of the five NGOs here at the Embassy of Japan.

The five NGOs that will implement the projects are (1) Association for Behavior & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT), (2) Fortified Services for Reforms & Transformation (FSRT), (3) Actions For Human Advancement (AHAT), (4) Lok Sudhar Association and (5) Safe Hands Foundation.

ABKT will receive a USD 63,518 grant (equivalent to around Rs 17.7million) to reconstruct three flood-damaged suspension bridges in District Upper Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This project will enhance the security of school children and local community members when natural disasters such as flood occur.

It will also provide a safe

passage to the school children as well as the local people to reach their school safely in this area.

FSRT will receive a USD 60,506 grant (equivalent to around Rs. 16.8 million) to reconstruct flood-affected school building for girls' primary course in Malakand Division, District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This project will provide school children with a safe place for learning, resulting in improving overall literacy rate of Swat, a city with one of the lowest literacy rates in Pakistan.

AHAT will receive a USD 57,684 grant (equivalent to around Rs 16million) to reconstruct a flood-affected primary and middle school in Tehsil Jampur, District Rajanpur, Punjab.

This project will enhance learning environment for the children in one of the most flood-affected areas during the 2022 floods in Pakistan.

Lok Sudhar Association will receive a USD 51,407 grant (equivalent to around Rs.14.3 million) to establish an ophthalmology operation theater to expand eye care facility in Havelian, District Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This facility will provide eye-related treatment to the patients in accessible and

affordable way.

In particular, the people will have the opportunity to access to cataract surgery for the first time in this locality.

This project will lead to the improvement of the health sector in the area.

Safe Hands Foundation will receive a USD 67,685 grant (equivalent to around PRs. 19million) to construct the primary-school building to promote child education in village Khaisata Gul Kalay, District Khyber in KP.

The project will provide, in one of the most deserving and vulnerable areas, the school building equipped with a solar system that can accommodate about 200 primary school children including those currently studying in an open-air classroom.

At the signing ceremony, WADA Mitsuhiro expressed his expectation that these development projects in cooperation with local communities would have a positive impact on uplifting the living standards of Pakistani people at the grassroots level.

The Government of Japan will provide further flexible and timely support to local NGOs through grant assistance to improve the social wellbeing of the people of Pakistan at the grassroots level.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers working construction of IJP Road with the help of heavy machineries during development work in the city. —APP Photo









QUETTA: A view of closed shops due to strike called by Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party.

# Gaza ceasefire talks end with no breakthrough

CAIRO/RAFAH (Reuters): Ceasefire talks between Hamas and mediators broke up on Tuesday in Cairo with no breakthrough, with just days left to halt fighting in time for the start of Ramadan. Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim told Reuters the militant group had presented its proposal for a ceasefire agreement to the mediators during two days of talks, and was now waiting for a response from the Israelis, who stayed away from this round.

“(Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu doesn’t want to reach an agreement and the ball now is in the Americans’ court” to press him for a deal, Naim said. Israel has declined to comment publicly on the talks in Cairo. A source told Reuters earlier that Israel was staying away because Hamas had rejected its demand to furnish a list of all hostages who are still alive. Naim said this was impossible without a ceasefire first as hostages were scattered across the war zone and held by separate groups.

The Cairo talks had been billed as a final hurdle to reach the war’s first extended ceasefire — a 40-day truce during which dozens of hostages would be freed and aid would be pumped into Gaza to stave off a man-made famine, ahead of Ramadan, which is due to begin at the start of next week. Egyptian security sources said on Monday they were still in touch with the Israelis to allow the negotiations to continue without an Israeli delegation present. Washington, which is both Israel’s closest ally and a sponsor of the ceasefire talks, has said an Israeli-approved deal is already on the table and it is up to Hamas to accept it. Hamas disputes this account as an attempt to deflect blame from Israel if the talks collapse with no deal.

The United States has also called on Israel to do more to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, where more than 30,000 people have

been killed by Israel’s assault, launched after Hamas attacks that killed 1,200 people in October.

Famine is now gripping the besieged Gaza Strip as aid supplies, already sharply curtailed since the start of the war, have dwindled to barely a trickle over the past month. Whole swathes of the territory are completely cut off from food. Gaza’s few functioning hospitals, already overwhelmed by the wounded, are now filling with children starving to death.

Ahmed Cannan, a toddler with sunken eyes and an emaciated face, lay on a bed at Al-Awda clinic in Rafah, wrapped in a yellow cardigan. He had lost half his weight since the start of the war and now weighs just 6 kg (13 pounds). “His situation worsens each day. God protect us from what is coming,” his aunt, Israa Kalakh, told Reuters.

Nurse Diaa Al-Shaer said such emaciated children were now pouring into the clinic in unprecedented numbers: “We will face a large number of patients who suffer from this, which is malnutrition,” she said. The situation is worst in the north of Gaza, beyond the reach of aid agencies or news cameras. Gaza health authorities say 15 children have died of malnutrition or dehydration at one hospital.

Israel says it is willing to allow in more aid to Gaza through the two checkpoints on the southern edge of the territory it has permitted to open, and blames UN and other aid agencies for failing to distribute it more widely. The aid agencies say this has become impossible with a breakdown of law and order, and it is up to Israel, whose troops have stormed Gaza’s towns and patrol them, to provide access and security for food distribution.

“The sense of helplessness and despair among parents and doctors in realizing that lifesaving aid, just a few kilometers away, is being kept out of reach, must be unbearable,”

said Adele Khodr, UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa. Hamas said 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.

## Election 2024 results PHC orders ECP to submit reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered Election Commission of Pakistan for submission attested documents regarding polling held on 8th Feb on plea of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed defeated candidates in general elections including Taimour Salim Jaghra, Kamran Bangash and Mahmood Jan along with others within two days March, on Tuesday.

The counsel Shumail Ahmad, Ali Gohar and Ali Azeem advocates argued that polling results were manipulated on one National and eight Provincial Assembly seats in Peshawar as well as the petitioners are also deprived from attested documents.

Are you demanding Form45? Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim enquired in the meantime. Certainly, we are demanding it but {PTI

backed candidates} are deprived, the petitioners’ lawyers answered.

But, he added, “What is being demanded is not being given. We need certified copies of the documents.”

Election Commission and Returning Officers are roaming us {petitioners} in the respective offices by shifting liability on each other, the lawyers argued. The petitioners include PTI leaders Taimur Saleem Jhagra, Kamran Bangash, Mehmood Jan and Ali Zaman, while Malik Shahab, Asim Khan, Hamidul Haq and Arbab Jahandad have also filed applications for provision of documents pertaining to election results. PHC’s divisional bench comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim and Justice Shakeel Ahmad issued notice to ECP for 7th March while adjourned further hearing.

Meanwhile, another PHC’s divisional bench comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice

Dr. Khursheed Iqbal ordered concerned authorities for submission of record of cases registered against PTI leader Senator Shibli Faraz till 13th March.

The counsel Ali Zaman, Nauman-ul-Haq Kakakhel and Inam Yousafzai advocates argued that the petitioner is seeking record of cases registered against him to contest before concerned court of law. Additional Advocate General informed that Senator Shibli Faraz is neither booked in Anti-corruption enquiry nor in any other criminal offense.

The petitioner isn’t booked in any National Accountability Bureau enquiry, Prosecutor General informed PHC. However, the counsel requested for provision of written reply from NAB. PHC’s divisional bench comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Shakeel Ahmad ordered respondents for submission of reply while adjourned further hearing till 13th March.

## Siraj says JI to hold Palestine solidarity march on 10th

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has announced that the JI would hold Palestine solidarity march in Islamabad on March 10 (Sunday).

Addressing a press conference following the meeting of JI Majlis-e Aamla at Mansoorah on Tuesday, he also called for observing Women’s Day in honor of Gaza women and children. Sirajul Haq said the JI working committee discussed prevailing political situation and war in Gaza. Emphasizing disappointment in the newly elected prime minister’s silence on Palestine, he said the government which formed on fake mandate would never dare to speak for Palestinians due to fear of the US.

He said that the Islamabad march would be held from Aabpara Chowk to the US Embassy and it aimed to put pressure on Washington to stop its support for Israeli atrocities in Gaza, where the Zionist forces have killed over 30,000 Palestinians, including 11,000 children. He criticized the OIC and Muslim world leaders for their silence on the Israeli forces’ brutalities in the occupied land, urging them to take concrete steps to aid Palestinians.

The JI leader demanded an election audit and the formation of a judicial commission to investigate rigging in the Feb 8 polls. He called for the resignation of the chief election commissioner, highlighting the JI’s stance against electoral fraud. The chief election commissioner, he said, failed to conduct free and transparent polls.

Siraj asserted that the JI’s mandate was stolen, vowing the party would actively oppose this infringement on people’s rights. He predicted challenges for the government elected on a false mandate, stating that the JI would persist in its struggle for the people’s rights amidst economic hardships and inflation. JI Secretary General Amirul Azim, JI spokesperson Qaiser Sharif and JI Deputy Secretary General Muhammad Ashgar were also present on occasion.

## ECP to hold Senate election on April 3

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided to hold Senate elections on April 3.

The ECP has finalized the schedule for the elections of the Senate. Polling for 48 seats of the Senate will be held on April 3 in the national and four provincial assemblies. On April 3, twelve senators will be elected each from Sindh and Punjab, while two senators will be elected from Islamabad. Eleven new senators will become part of upper house each from

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Fifty-two senators of the Senate will retire after completing their term on March 11.

Twelve senators each from Punjab and Sindh and four senators from former Fata will complete their term. Similarly, 11 senators each from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and two 2 from Islamabad will be retiring on March 11. The senators will bid farewell to the upper house at the end of their six-year term. Under the 25th constitutional amendment, there will be no re-election on the four Senate seats of

the former Fata.

The Punjab Assembly will elect 12 new members of the Senate. The provincial assembly will elect seven general, two women, two technocrats and one minority member of the Senate. Sources say the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with coalition partners (Peoples Party, Muslim League-Q and IPP) will contest the Senate elections. The Sunni Ittehad Council will also field its candidates in the Senate elections. On March 8, 2024, 11 senators from Punjab will complete their term and retire.

## Fowzia greets Shehbaz, seeks his role for Aafia release

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Global Aafia Movement leader and noted neurophysician of the country Dr Fowzia Siddiqui today congratulated Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on being elected as the Prime Minister for the second time and appealed him to play his due role securing an early release of the Pakistani mother, Dr Aafia Siddiqui.

In a statement, she prayed that may Allah, the Almighty give courage to our Prime Minister to truly follow the requirements of his oath, honor and dignity of his constitutional office, fight for the rights of the oppressed and weak Pakistani citizens like Dr Aafia Siddiqui and strive hard for the uphold of law and constitution.

She said that the American lawyer of Aafia, Clive Smith has made a resolve the year of 2024 be made the year of the Aafia release, She said; however, for this purpose he needs an active support of the government of Pakistan and its ministry of foreign affairs.

Dr Fowzia hoped that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif would give directives to the MoFA for taking steps for Aafia release like he had given such directives during his last tenure.

## Prima facie, social media being managed in Pakistan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh High Court (SHC) Chief Justice (CJ) Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi said Tuesday prima facie social media platforms were being managed — and the names of people causing the disruption would not remain hidden for too long.

The court’s remark came in response to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)’s reply submitted during the hearing of pleas against the suspension of internet and social media platform, X, formerly known as Twitter. The inaccessibility of social media platform X — which is an important source of information, started in the country before the February 8 general election, while the country also faced com-

plete internet suspension during the polling.

Since then, netizens have been facing sporadic disruptions and hindrances in accessing the social media platform despite SHC’s stay order directing the authorities to ensure uninterrupted internet access. A two-member bench headed by CJ Abbasi and comprising Justice Abdul Mubeen Lakho presided over the hearing.

The PTA informed the court in its response that it had no role in suspending or slowing down social media platforms. “The PTA does not have any tool to slow down or suspend the internet,” the authority’s lawyer apprised the court.

He said that the Ministry of Interior and other agencies had sus-

pending the cellular and internet services due to security concerns. “We emailed the mobile companies to suspend the services on February 8 and restore the services on February 9,” the PTA lawyer added. At this, the CJ expressed ire, saying that the X is still not accessible. “What action has been taken against any company that doesn’t comply with the PTA’s orders,” he asked. He remarked that the internet is being controlled in different ways.

“You said the internet was suspended in the light of the May 9 events. Some political parties weren’t allowed to campaign. You see the internet is not working properly till this day,” the justice added.

## Houthis threaten more attacks in Red Sea

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen’s Houthi militia vowed on Tuesday to launch more “painful” attacks against the US and the UK, as the US Central Command confirmed the destruction of the Iran-backed group’s missiles.

The announcement came as the Houthis asked international ships involved in repairing internet cables in the Red Sea to get authorization from them to avoid being targeted. Speaking to military officers in the Red Sea city of Hodeidah, Houthi Defense Minister Mohammed Nasser Al-Atefi said the group would launch fresh assaults on American and British ships as the two countries continued to bomb Yemen.

“Yemeni naval forces are closely monitoring all movements in the Red and Arabian Seas and our appropriate responses will make anybody found to be involved in such operations regret their allegiance to America and Britain,” Al-Atefi said. The warning came as the US Central Command announced that two anti-ship cruise missiles were destroyed on Monday night in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and that the

group had fired three ballistic missiles at commercial and navy ships in the Red Sea. One of the missiles, launched on Monday afternoon, hit and damaged the Liberian-flagged and Swiss-owned cargo vessel MSC SKY II. No one was hurt in the incident and the ship did not request assistance, the US military said in a statement.

The Houthis said the ship was owned by Israel and that it was targeted as a show of support for the people of Palestine and in response to US and UK strikes on Yemen. The group said the US and UK conducted three strikes on Monday in the Baqum region of the northern province of Saada.

Houthi Telecommunications Minister Misfer Al-Numair said his ministry had asked that international ships involved in repairing damaged undersea internet cables in the Red Sea obtain permission to do so from his government. He dismissed accusations that the Houthis had sabotaged the cables in order to put pressure on countries to comply with their demands, the group’s official news agency reported. — Arab News

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